

THIEME DRIVE - SAFE FOR NOW

Posted by Charlotte A. Weybright on January 23, 2008

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Around 1907, the citizens of Fort Wayne combined their effort with the local government to implement plans to beautify their city. The first plan was submitted by Charles Mulford Robinson of New York in 1909. This plan was followed by a park and boulevard plan by noted landscape architect George Kessler in 1911. The Plan highlighted and capitalized on the city's most important and significant asset - its three rivers and the opportunity they presented.

After the Flood of 1913, the River Improvement Association was formed to review options for control and prevention of floods. The existing River Front Commission hired Kessler to supervise the work of revising the park system and beautifying the river banks. Kessler's plan called for connecting the nine miles of rivers running through the city via parkways and boulevards.

The 1912 Kessler Park and Boulevard System for Fort Wayne included Present Parks and Parkway, Proposed Parks and Parkway, and Proposed Boulevards. A parkway includes the river, its bank, public green space along the bank, the vehicular drive along the landside of the green space. At the time of the Plan, the city had only two lengths of existing parkway:

- one running along the east bank of the St. Joseph River south from the Tennessee Boulevard to link to the Maumee River at its confluence, and
- one associated with Thieme Drive, along the east bank of the St. Marys River extending south from Main Street to Swinney Park.

The river drive along St. Joe Boulevard is encased on the river side by a cement wall over which no one can see from the street. Thieme Drive is the only river drive left of the original Kessler Plan. It is also one of the few drives left in Fort Wayne where motorists can actually drive right along the river - a rare sight indeed in today's Fort Wayne landscape of berms, levees, and concrete walls hiding our rivers from view.

But Thieme Drive is neglected. Its river side is overgrown with unsightly brush and weeds and Trees of Heaven, which grow quickly and overtake almost any area they invade. The Drive is need of upkeep and care - it needs cleaned and weeded. The River Greenway runs alongside the river, but no formal path exists - I don't know why because one could surely be established. This would require turning Thieme Drive into a one-way running from Washington Boulevard to Main Street, but that could be accomplished.