

# Holly Oaks Park Plan and Standards Manual

## Appendix F. Property History

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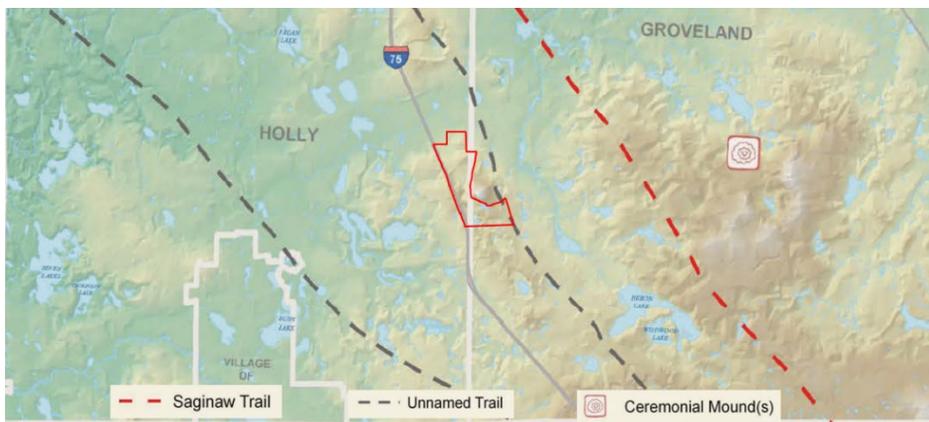
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### Native Americans

Both the 1931 Archaeological Atlas of Michigan and the Oakland County Native American Heritage map show an unnamed Native American trail passing just to the east of the Holly Oaks property. Dixie Highway roughly followed this trail in this part of Oakland County. Another trail passed to the west through Holly Township. Most importantly the Saginaw Trail, which Dixie Highway followed further to the south, was located to the east. This was one of the most significant Native American trails in Michigan and was used by various groups beginning at least five hundred years ago.

Considering the three trails there was likely a strong Native American presence in and around the area that would become Holly Oaks. Evidence of this includes the existence of a major group of Native American ceremonial mounds located near the center of Groveland Township. Although destroyed many years ago early records mention these. This was supposedly the largest and most significant group of mounds in Oakland County.

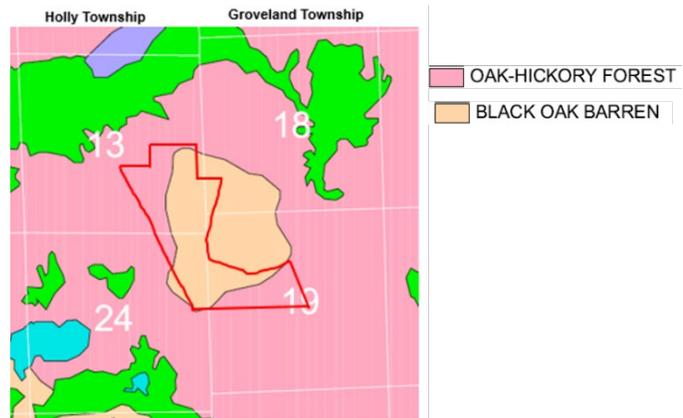
*Below: Excerpt from Oakland County Native Americans Map, Oakland County Heritage Map Series*



### The First Land Survey

The land that is now Holly Oaks was first surveyed in 1816 by Joseph Wampler as part of his survey of Holly Township and Groveland Township. His surveyor notes as summarized here describe the land and provide a glimpse into the pre-settlement landscape.

- Sections 13 and 24 of Holly Township: rolling land with white, black and red oak
- Sections 18 and 19 of Groveland Township: rolling land with white and black oak and hickory



*Above Right: Vegetation circa 1800 of Oakland County; an interpretation of GLO surveys by Comer and Albert, 1997*

The pre-settlement vegetation map based on the early land surveys of Oakland County provides a more detailed picture of the land before it was settled by people from eastern U.S. It was heavily timbered no doubt presenting a challenge to the early farmers who came to the area. In addition, oak barren land is often infertile and coarse-textured and therefore an additional challenge to farming.

### First Landowners

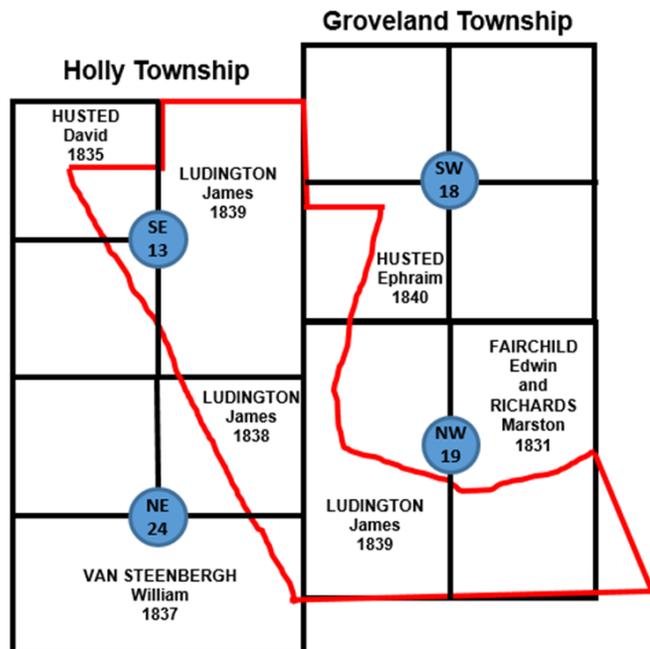
Despite its potential challenges people began to purchase land in Holly and Groveland Townships in the 1830s. In the area that would become Holly Oaks, Edwin Fairchild and Marston Richards of Monroe County, New York, made the first purchase in 1831. This land was in the southeastern region of Holly Oaks. They likely paid the federal government less than \$2.00 an acre for the 80 acres they purchased.

*Right: Property locations of first landowners*

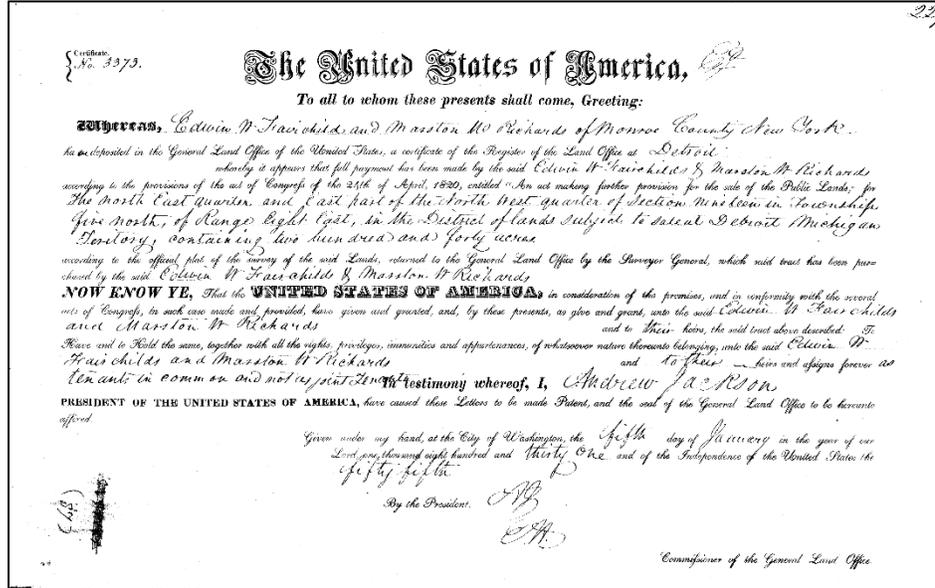
David Husted owned a small piece of land in the northwestern corner of Holly Oaks. He, his wife Maria and their thirteen children lived in Holly Township until the late 1850s when they moved to Gratiot County.

Ephraim Husted purchased land in Section 18 of Groveland Township in 1840. Sadly, he died just six years later. His was one of the first burials in Hadley Cemetery which is located along Dixie Highway just east of the park land.

It is likely that David and Ephraim Husted were related since they both came to Oakland County from Genesee County, New York. However, their exact relationship is unknown.



The majority of what became park land was purchased by James Ludington beginning in 1838. He had come as a single man from Wayne County, New York and purchased land in both Holly and Groveland Township. In 1843 he married Hannah Jackson who was 23 years younger than him. Her family had owned a small farm of forty acres in section 21 of Groveland Township about two miles to the east of Ludington's land. They had one son, James Ludington, Jr. James Sr. died in 1854 and was buried in Hadley Cemetery.



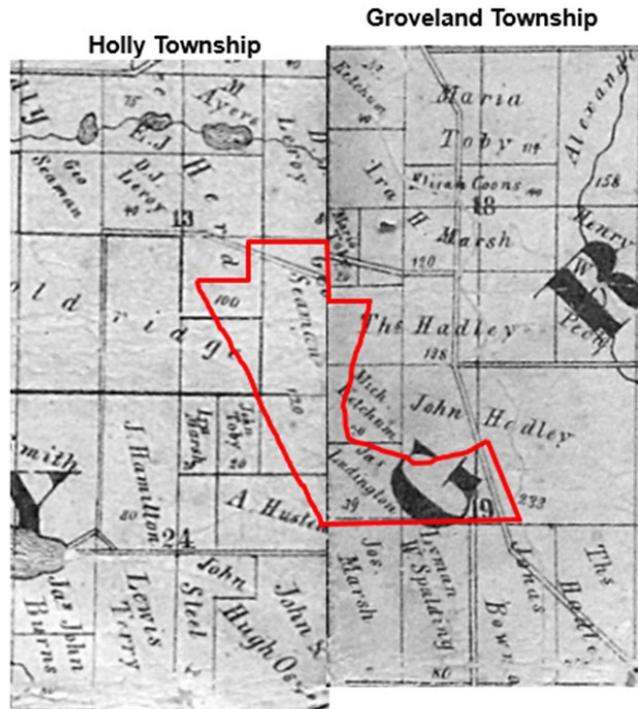
Above Right: Land Patent of Edwin Fairchild and Marston Richards

### Mid-1800s

After the death of her husband, Hannah Ludington and her son James took over the farm. By 1857 they had sold the land in Holly Township to George Seaman but had kept the farmland in Groveland Township. Census records from 1860 list Hannah's occupation as 'spinster' and her son's as 'farm laborer.'

George Seaman had come from New York to Macomb County, Michigan in the 1840s. In 1844 he married Almira Crawford in that county. By 1850 they had relocated to Holly Township and by 1857 had purchased the Ludington farm there. They had eleven children, two of whom died in 1854 at ages 3 and 5 and were buried in Hadley Cemetery. By 1870 they had returned to Macomb County.

Above Right: "Map of Oakland County, Michigan, 1857". Published by S.H. Burhans; Surveyor F. Hess



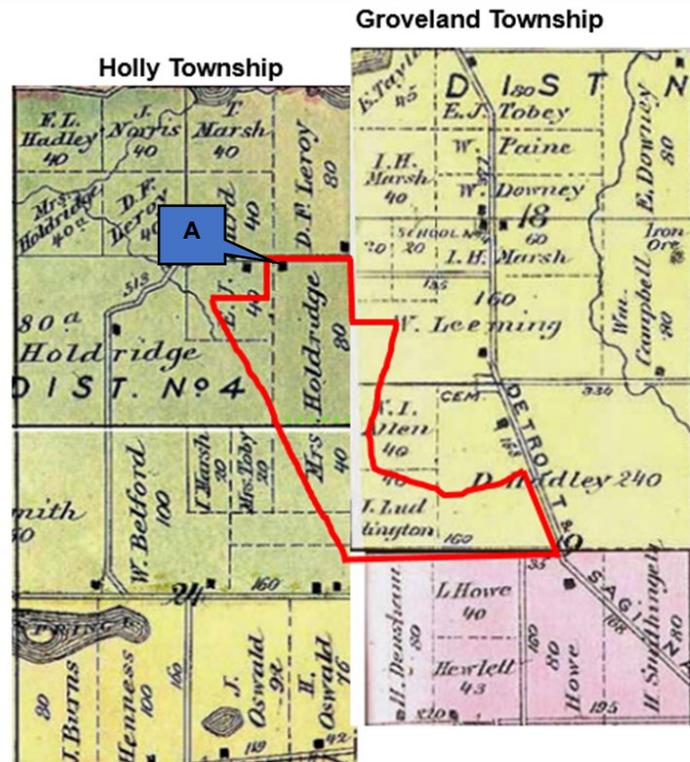
By 1857 John Hadley had purchased the land in the southeastern corner of the park land, east of the Ludington farm. John Hadley and his wife Margery had been born in Northumberland, England. They came to the United States around 1820 and settled in New York. Sometime around 1840 they relocated to Groveland Township.

Historical records suggest they had ten children but two died very young. It was John Hadley who gave the land for Hadley Cemetery previously mentioned. By 1860 John and Margery had moved into Holly Village. Their son Thomas was a merchant in Holly and later became president of the Merchant's National Bank. Their son David took over the farm in Groveland Township.

*Right: F.W. Beers and Co. (1872). Oakland County*

### The Late 1800s

Unlike the 1857 township maps, the 1872 maps show the location of residences. This gives a more accurate picture of who was living on the land that would become Holly Oaks. Although the Ludingtons still owned the land in Groveland Township no house is shown on the map. It is quite possible there had been an early house built by the family and it was gone by this time. Census records suggest that James Ludington, Jr. and his wife Mary were living in the southern part of Groveland Township near the village of Austin Corners. They were perhaps renting a farm there.



David Hadley still owned the land to the east of the Ludington's. His residence was located just south of Hadley Cemetery on the Saginaw Turnpike which later became Dixie Highway.

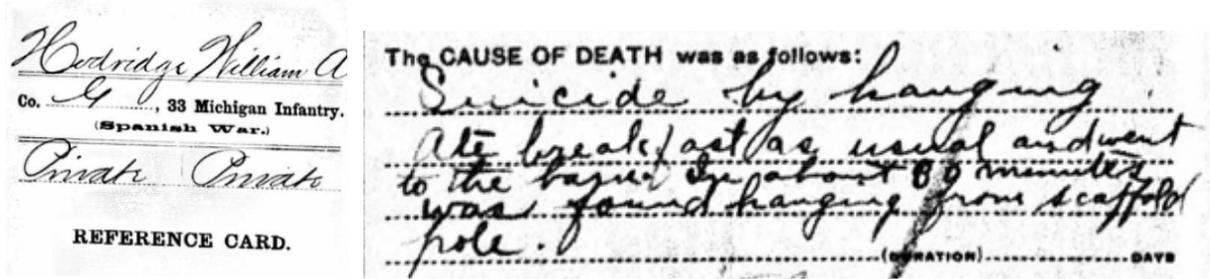
The only house that was on land that became the park was located along the northern boundary in Holly Township (A on map). This land had been purchased by the Holdridge family by 1872. Austin Holdridge of Herkimer County, New York had originally purchased 160 acres in Holly Township in 1837. He added to that land eventually owning 420 acres. Upon his death his widow Betsy and his son William P. Holdridge took over the land. William added to it by purchasing 120 acres to the east in Section 13. That land had previously been owned by George Seaman.

William had served from 1861 to 1866 as a Civil War soldier in Michigan's 3rd Cavalry Regiment. As a result of his injuries he was awarded an invalid pension many years after the war in 1890. Upon returning home he married Henrietta Lahring who had grown up on a farm bordering the Holdridge farm on the north. William and Henrietta had six children including Elijah who died in infancy. It appears they had a very successful farm but like all farming families had their share of challenges. A news article in the Pontiac Gazette from 1888 describes how a 'young cyclone demoralized the windmill of Wm. P. Holdridge' on May 28 of that year. It also uprooted several of his apple trees and blew down his fences.

Their son, William Austin Holdridge, took over the farmland in section 13 in 1896 when he was just 17. Soon after that he enlisted in the 33rd Michigan Volunteer Regiment and fought in the Spanish American War. Sadly, he contracted tuberculosis during his term of duty and died of the disease in 1900 after returning home. His father resumed farming on the section 13 land.

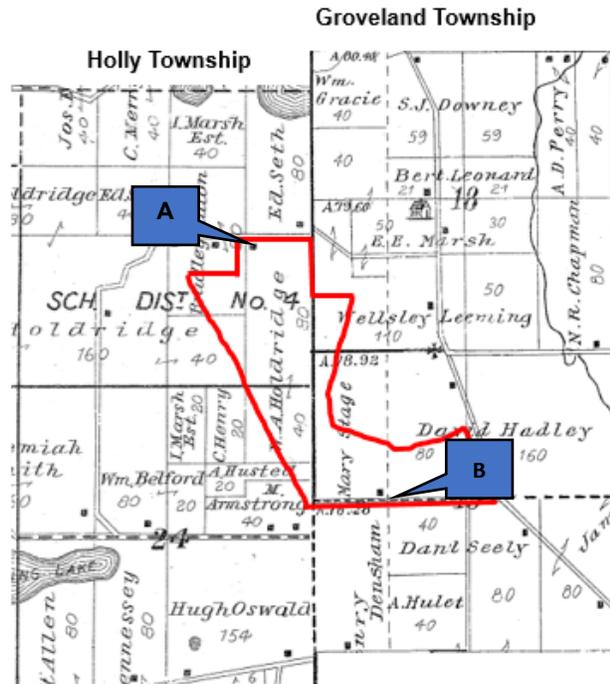
William Holdridge appeared to be not only wealthy but content. That is why people were shocked when he committed suicide in 1905. His death certificate stated the cause of death in this manner: “Suicide by hanging – ate breakfast as usual and went to the barn. In about 30 minutes was found hanging from scaffold pole.” A newspaper article reporting his death stated: “He was fairly well off, had a happy family and no cause is known why he should have taken his life, although he recently had some slight spells of melancholia.” After William’s death, his widow Henrietta moved into Holly to live with two of her daughters

*Below: Excerpt from William Holdridge’s service record (left); Excerpt from William Holdridge’s death certificate (right)*



Sometime between 1872 and 1896 another house was built on the property that became the park (B on map). It was on the land that had been owned by James Ludington. This land appears to have had several different owners in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1896 it was owned by Mary Stage.

Mary, her husband Silas and their daughter Sarah had come to Holly Township from Wayne County, New York after the Civil War. Silas had served with the 96th New York Infantry Regiment during the war. In 1870 they were living in the village of Holly where Silas was a grocer and Sarah was a milliner. Silas died in 1871 and Sarah in 1881. Sometime during this time period Mary Stage purchased 80 acres in Groveland Township, forty of which had been owned by James Ludington. It appears she continued to live in Holly and most likely used this land as a rental farm. Historical records indicate that James Ludington, Jr. may have actually been renting and farming the land. Mary Stage died in June of 1896.



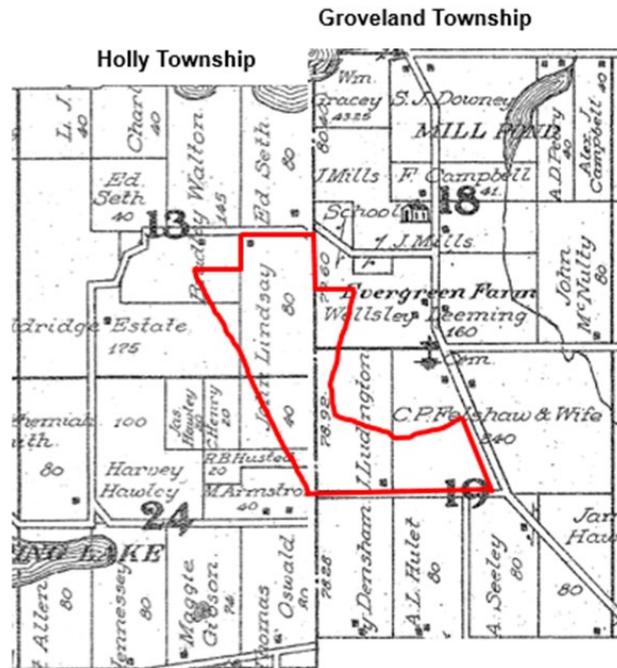
*Above Right: Illustrated Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan, Kace Publishing Company. Racine, Wis., 1896.*

Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

After the death of William Holderidge in 1905, his widow Henrietta moved into Holly to live with two of her daughters. The farm in section 13 of Holly Township was then purchased by John Lindsay who was a streetcar motorman in Detroit. Before that he had been a farmer in Manitoba, Canada. He apparently wanted to return to farming.

By 1908 what had been the David Hadley farm was owned by Dr. C.P. Felshaw and his wife Alice who was a daughter of David Hadley. Alice was Dr. Felshaw's second wife and was 22 years younger than him. The Felshaws lived in the village of Holly where he practiced medicine for forty-six years. It is unclear who was living on their Groveland Township farm during this time.

Above Right: Geo A. Ogle and Co. (1908). Standard Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan. Geo A. Ogle and Co.

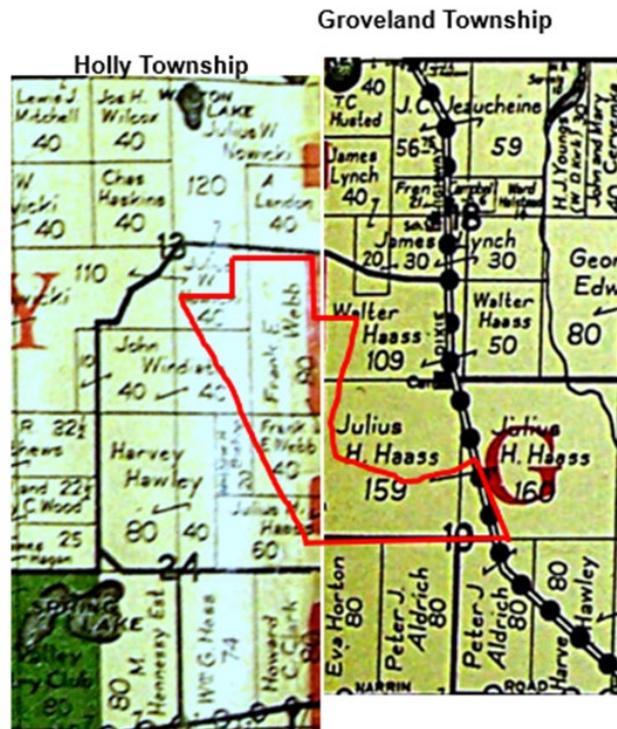


Interestingly, James Ludington, Jr. and his wife Mary purchased the land of Mary Stage in Groveland Township after she died in 1896. The south forty acres of this land had been the original land purchase of James' father in 1839. James Jr, who in his later years was going by the name of "Jackson" his middle name, died in 1918 and Mary in 1936. Both are buried in Hadley Cemetery. They had no children.

Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century

By 1920 many of the former farms in Oakland County were being purchased by wealthy Detroiters. Some people like Lawrence Buhl who purchased the land that became Addison Oaks County Park wanted to build country estates. Some like Franklin Bushman who purchased the land that became Independence Oaks County Park wanted to obtain recreational land. Some were speculators who hoped to eventually turn land purchases into housing subdivisions. This changing pattern of land use can be seen at Holly Oaks

Right: W.S. McAlpine Map Company. (1930). Oakland County. W.S. McAlpine Map Co



Sometime around 1925 Julius H. Haass, a wealthy banker from Detroit, purchased the former land of the Ludington and Hadley families in Groveland Township. His brother Walter had taken additional land to the north. Julius Haass had been president of the Detroit Bankers Company and a prominent financier and patron of the arts. He served as president or chairman of the board for several

financial institutions. Later in his life he developed an interest in wildlife protection. That is perhaps why he purchased the land in Groveland Township.

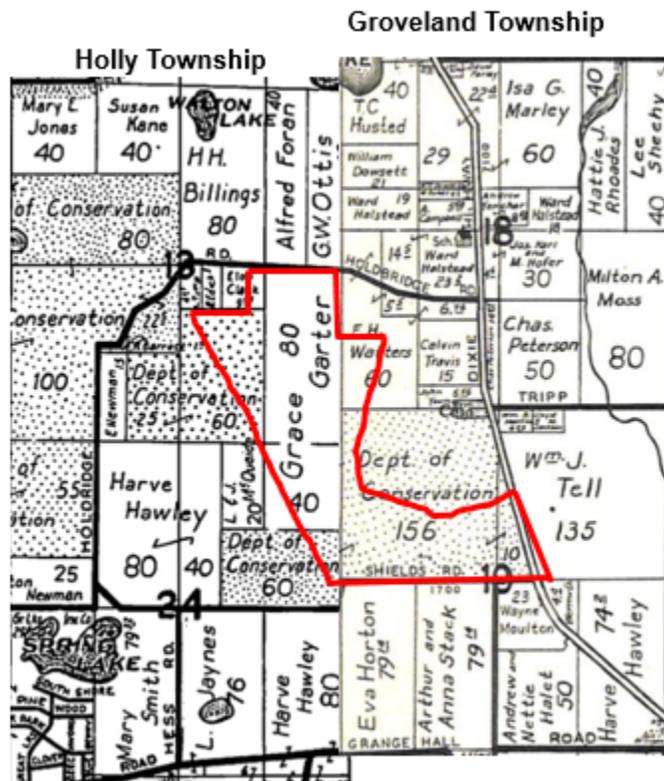
Interestingly in 1914 he had purchased the land known as Waterford Hill in Independence Township. This hill which rises about 1200 feet above sea level and about 200 feet above the surrounding land was a well-known Oakland County landmark. He had hoped to build a wildlife sanctuary and estate on the hill but there is little evidence that this occurred in any detail. It is important to note that the property he purchased in Groveland Township included the hill that would become the Mount Holly Ski Resort. Therefore, he owned two of the highest hills in that part of Oakland County. Julius Haass died unexpectedly in April of 1931 following an operation for peritonitis.

John Lindsay’s farm in Holly Township was purchased by Frank E. Webb sometime around 1925. Mr. Webb was president of the Webb-Lee Company, a well-known brokerage firm of Detroit and Jackson. He was a member of the Detroit Stock Exchange and the Chicago Board of Trade. Around 1920 he purchased land in Springfield Township to the southeast of Holly Oaks where he had ‘an attractive country home and a well-developed farm property.’ In 1924 he divorced his wife Leonilda. She then married Mr. Webb’s business partner, Herbert Lavigne and the couple took over the Springfield property. Frank Webb soon remarried and likely purchased the Holly Township property soon after. There is no indication that the Webbs ever developed the property.

Right: W.S. McAlpine Map Company. (1947).  
Oakland County. W.S. McAlpine Map Co

The land in Holly Township previously owned by Frank Webb was owned by Grace Garter in 1947. Grace Garter was the second wife of Henry Garter, a successful hardware merchant in Clarkston, Michigan. The large block building he built for his business in 1910 remains on Main Street in that community. Land records show the land going from the Orion State Bank to Grace in 1947. It is unclear what happened to the land after it was owned by Frank Webb. Grace did not appear to own the land for long because records show T.M. Hitchcock owning it by late 1947.

The rest of the land that would become Holly Oaks had been purchased by the Michigan Department of Conservation by 1947. In the early 1940s that department decided that southeastern Michigan had lands that might be good for recreational areas and developed a plan to provide for 100,000 acres of recreation land. Under Public Act 50 appropriations were made to establish 11 state recreation areas. Holly State Recreation Area was one of them. The preliminary boundaries for it were established in 1944. It officially opened in 1948.



*Right: The Garter Building, downtown Clarkston*

In the 1950s came the first wave of development in the park as picnic areas and campgrounds were established. In 1956 Mt. Holly Ski Area was constructed and operated under a lease for almost 10 years until a land exchange occurred between the state and a private company. Land purchases were made by the state over the years expanding the park.

In 1962 the section of Interstate 75 between Pontiac and Flint was completed. It cut right through the park. It ran parallel to and west of Dixie Highway. It was determined these major crossings could be an issue. Therefore, in 1970 the Natural Resources Commission sold the land between the two roads. This created two sides of the recreation area and provided funding for the purchase of additional park land. It also ushered in a new era of land use in what would eventually become Holly Oaks.

