

Douglas Park Activity Stirs Memories for Many Citizens

One of Okmulgee's best known land marks will soon come alive again where people will be meeting, but this time it will be at a shopping center instead of a park filled with recreational activities. Douglas Park, once the meeting spot for the elite has been acquired by Tulsa Realtors Noel Eden and Ben Weddington, who plan to begin construction on a shopping center within the next 90 days. The $1\frac{1}{2}$ acre site is located on the 600 block on east eighth.

The late Charles E. Douglas purchased the land between the Frisco Railroad Tracks and Greasy Creek on May 1, 1920 from Walter S. Richardson. The purchase is believed to have been in the neighborhood of \$10,000. Mr. Douglas owned and operated the park from the time he built it in 1924 and 1925 until it was closed in the 1930's, possibly 1938 or 1939.

Mrs. Althea Dent, a niece of the Douglasses presently resides in the spacious Douglas home on the hill overlooking the park and a large portion of that area.

The Douglas home has long been considered one of the most beautiful and best constructed homes in Okmulgee.

During the 20's and 30's Douglas Park was one of, if not the most, scenic in the County and in the State. It's well-kept huge trees and shrubbery furnished a perfect setting for the two large swimming pools, target shooting stands, concession stands, ferris wheel and skating rink. The shaded picnic area had ample tables, and the three-quarter mile lagoon played "cupid" for many lovers who could rent a boat for 40¢ per hour. The boat house held 20 boats which were in use most of the time.

One of the biggest attractions of the park was a large open-air dance pavillion where many danced to the music of such well-known artists, as Cab Calloway, Ernie Fields, Shep Fields and the ever-popular Bob Wills.

Fred Brown who resides at 809 east 9th on property adjoining the Douglas property, assisted Mr. Douglas at the park and served as life guard in the late 1920's and then returned in the same capacity in the early 1930's. He recalled some of the larger bands that played for some of those popular dances and said that his wife sometimes sold tickets to the hundreds who swarmed to the park to dance under the stars and enjoy the cool breeze from the

pools and lagoon. It was during the late 1930's that two Okmulgee High School Gym instructors and Coaches (Jeff Farris and Perry Norris) began operating the swimming pools.

The late James Benton handled the operations and served as life guard. His wife (Dorothy Müller Benton) still lives in Okmulgee and said Jim was serving in that capacity when they were married in 1937. She added that he continued working there until 1938 or 1939 when the pools were closed.

It was during the late 1930's that Everett Hutchinson served as Head Care-taker and overseer of the entire park. He and his bride (Shirley) lived in a 4 room log and stone home located just inside the entrance way.

All buildings in the park were constructed from logs and stone to enhance the park's beauty and to furnish the unique setting of the wooded area. After he assumed his duties Hutchinson added another "wonderland feature" when he built a fish pond complete with a fountain. The pool was lined with glass blocks and lights were installed to reflect the waterfall. This unusual attraction brought sight-seers from many miles around, some to admire the picturesque sight and some to try to copy it. Whether it was the depression or the growing expenses or a combination of both, the end result was the closing of this vast recreation area. Before the trees and the underbrush took over prior to world war II, the park was still the "In" place for citizens during the warm months of the year, even though the buildings had been abandoned.

Many Okmulgeans who have traveled east 8th street and have been residents for over 30 years are having their memories jogged as they pass by the area where the old Douglas Park was located. The area which has been obliterated from view by the dense growth of trees and underbrush for several years, is being cleared and levelled to make way for progress.

Memories and dreams can be beautiful and the once magnificent Douglas Park furnished many pleasant ones for thousands. This giant center for dreams fell over thirty years ago, leaving only the memories of yester-year, but it has paved the way for a product necessary for our existence----- PROGRESS. (Copied from Okmulgee Daily Times - Sunday July 23, 1972.)