

Delphi

Riley Park: A community's gift

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Beautifully arranged on either side of the new Gateway Trail is one of Delphi's true gems, which is and has been a labor of love for the Delphi Community as well as Carroll County in general.

Although the Hoosier Poet probably never played a game of football, nor trod the wooden boardwalk there, Riley Park was named in his honor due to his very well-known and emotion-inspiring poem "On the Banks of Deer Creek."

Formerly just a field belonging to notables such as Mrs. Reed Case, the area was donated by the Bowen family in 1930.

Edward and Della Bowen were the more altruistic couple of an already well-known dynasty whose patriarch was Abner the banker. Edward, whose passing was marked in the June 6 issue of the Delphi Journal, was born in August 24, 1864, and was a noted banker, Republican party leader on the local and state level, and graduate of Ann Arbor, Michigan High School and attended Michigan University.

His wife, Della, to whom he was married at Rockfield on June 8, 1887, was his equal in community spirit and was born near Rockfield on February 5, 1867. Della was a noted member of the Business and Professional Women's Club, DAR, and as was her husband a member of the Delphi Presbyterian Church. Her passing was noted on December 12, 1950.

Both were recognized as benefactors of the park in a City Council meeting on the 23rd day of November, 1943. The notice of this consumed an entire column in the Delphi Journal and was signed

by Mayor Charles A. Wood.

In May of 1930 a motion was passed to build a dam for a swimming pool and to purchase the necessary property on the south side of the creek for a large park and athletic grounds.

The swimming pool area was completed on Tuesday, August 11, 1925, and dedicated on Sunday, August 16, 1925.

Unfortunately, the dam which was known as the Van Pelt Dam because it was constructed by Sutton Van Pelt of the Oakdale Dam construction team, washed out was so terribly damaged that the aforementioned swimming pool dam was constructed, again by Mr. Van Pelt. A bath house was constructed adjacent to the dam, and in a short time the attraction was drawing crowds from Logansport, Rossville, Pittsburg, and Flora.

On May 20, Clyner Coble drowned in Deer Creek, and with this tragedy and others of the same nature in addition to issues raised by citizens of the Camden area concerning fishing, the dam was dynamited in early September of 1950. This information was gleaned from a very-well written booklet entitled *The Mystique of Deer Creek* by Charles E. Gerard, pp. 10-12. This is available in the Opera House Art Gallery.

Part of the land which was purchased was that of the Cartwright family, and it fell to a Cartwright descendant Charles A. Wood to devote much of his mayoral energies in developing this gem of both recreation and family reunions, which at one time numbered in the thousands of attendees.

The crowning jewel is the DAR flag pole which is at the terminus of a very unique floral garden which at one time contained a fish pool. The current marker was purchased in June of 1940 to denote the DAR's role in its donation with Mrs. W.H. Bradshaw at the helm.

Current attractions of Riley Park include a commemorative brick walk with accompanying floral arrangements, benches, and swings, and a board walk parallel



A view of the outskirts of Riley Park in Delphi. | HJ photo by MARK SMITH

to Deer Creek. The Scout Cabin which is nestled in the corner of the park has also been the site of many meaningful community meetings as well as family reunions.

A scenic view of Deer Creek is available from a unique vantage point on the suspension bridge. This is the third of three bridges, this one having been totally reconstructed following the disastrous flooding which occurred in July of 2003 which fatally damaged the bath house which was slated to be converted into a nature center, the

board walk itself, and the caretaker's home which was located at the entrance to the park. The caretaker's home was at one time the home of Cesar Margowski who according to the late Dora Thomas Mayhill was paid a dollar to light the lanterns in the old covered bridge across the Deer Creek. Many fulfilling meals both have been and are still consumed at the shelter sponsored by the local Lions Club.

There is an annex of the park which is situated across the highway. Both the annex and the main

park are used for some really meaningful and well-received baseball games. Transportation enthusiasts will note that there is a vestige of the early Lafayette State Road now covered by the paved drive in the annex.

I have fond memories of an outing taken there when in elementary school which was followed by an equally meaningful audience with Mrs. Mayhill in the Historical Society Museum which was then on the third floor of the Courthouse.