

2008



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

Historic name: Abilene City Park Historic District

Other name/site number: Eisenhower Park

**2. Location**

4<sup>th</sup> Street @ Poplar Street & Pine Street  not for publication  
Abilene  vicinity  
state Kansas code KS county Dickinson code 041 zip code 67410

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Richard D. Parkutz  
Signature of certifying official

4-11-02  
Date

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property  entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall *et al*

[Signature]  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

Property Name Abilene City Park Historic District

County and State Dickinson County, Kansas

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>6</u>	<u>14</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>20</u>	<u>6</u> objects
		<u>35</u> Total	

Name of related multiple property listing:  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

New Deal-era Resources of Kansas

No. of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:

0

**6. Functions or Use**

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE:Outdoor Recreation  
RECREATION & CULTURE:Sports Facility  
RECREATION & CULTURE:Fair  
LANDSCAPE:Park  
LANDSCAPE:Street Furniture/Object

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE:Outdoor Recreation  
RECREATION & CULTURE:Sports Facility  
RECREATION & CULTURE:Fair  
LANDSCAPE:Park  
LANDSCAPE:Street Furniture/Object

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne  
LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> & EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:  
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation CONCRETE  
Walls STONE:Limestone  
WOOD:Weatherboard  
Roof WOOD:Shingle  
ASPHALT  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Property Name Abilene City Park Historic District

County and State Dickinson County, Kansas

**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1934-39

1935-39

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Paulette & Wilson Engineering (Salina)

Murray & Cayton Architects (Abilene)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Property Name Abilene City Park Historic District

County and State Dickinson County, Kansas

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Dickinson County Historical Society;  
Kansas State Historical Society

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 39

UTM References

1	<u>1/4</u>	<u>6/5/3/5/8/0</u>	<u>4/3/0/9/3/0/0</u>	3	<u>1/4</u>	<u>6/5/3/9/0/5</u>	<u>4/3/0/9/1/6/0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>1/4</u>	<u>6/5/3/6/1/5</u>	<u>4/3/0/9/3/0/0</u>	4	<u>1/4</u>	<u>6/5/3/9/1/5</u>	<u>4/3/0/8/9/9/0</u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Elizabeth Rosin, Partner with assistance from Cathy Ambler, Ph.D., Historian  
 organization Historic Preservation Services, LLC date September 25, 2001  
 street & number 818 Grand Boulevard, Suite 1150 telephone (816) 221-5133  
 city or town Kansas City state Missouri zip code 64106

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Parks and Recreation Dept., City of Abilene  
 street & number PO Box 519 telephone (785)263-2550  
 city or town Abilene state KS zip code 67410

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Dickinson County, Kansas

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**SUMMARY**

The Abilene City Park Historic District occupies approximately 40 acres on the west side of the City of Abilene. It is bordered on the south by 4<sup>th</sup> Street, on the east by Mud Creek, on the north by 7<sup>th</sup> Street and on the west by Eisenhower Park Road. Roughly the southern half of the existing park is being nominated to the National Register. This flat, irregularly shaped area includes the buildings constructed and landscape manipulated by a series of New Deal-funded projects in the mid- to late-1930s. Also present within the district are landscape elements that reflect the property's use since the turn of the century as the Dickinson County Fair Grounds. Abilene City Park Historic District is composed of six distinct sites unified by a network of curvilinear roads. Each of these sites contains a variety of contributing and non-contributing buildings, structures, and objects. When viewed as a whole, the district's 35 contributing resources include six sites (*the fairgrounds stadium, the bandshell, the formal garden, the picnic/play area, the swimming complex, and the fountain lobe*), three buildings (*the bathhouse, the fair stadium, and the restroom building*), six structures (*the park roadway system, the bandshell landscaping, the pergola, the formal garden paths, the pool deck with swimming pools, and the swimming complex paths*), and 20 objects (*17 picnic table/benches and 3 picnic ovens*). Three buildings (*the bandshell, the new park restroom building and the rodeo restrooms/concession stand*), 14 structures (*9 associated with the stadium/rodeo, the racetrack oval, three new picnic shelters, and the basketball courts*) and six objects (*the fountain, two sundials, the clock, the gazebo, and flagpole element by the bath house*) are non-contributing to the district due to age and association, although all 23 of these elements are compatible with and enhance the current recreational function of the park.

The resources that pre or post-date the New Deal-era efforts at the park do not impact its integrity of setting, feeling or association, and the park overwhelmingly reflects the design, workmanship, and materials of 1930s New Deal recreation philosophy and construction. Limestone and concrete are the predominant building materials; elements of Moderne styling define the larger structures; and the park incorporates formally designed areas for passive recreation with more natural landscapes intended for active recreational pursuits. Unifying elements include concrete sidewalks, low sloping concrete curbs with shallow gutters, and curvilinear roadways; as well as naturalistic groupings of mature trees in a variety of species, and geometric bands of shrubs. Overall, the park retains a very high degree of integrity. While not all of the original plantings remain intact, minor alterations have been made to several of the contributing buildings, and modern improvements have occurred, the park retains intact integrity in all seven area necessary for National Register eligibility and the buildings, structures and landscape clearly convey the park's Depression-era character.

Throughout, the Abilene City Park Historic District melds components of traditional and modern styling. The largest park features (the stadium and bathhouse) are compact limestone buildings with simple rectilinear forms and architectural ornament limited to integral stylized Moderne lettering. The smallest building at the park (the restrooms) features a gable roof with tight eaves, styling that is more

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traditional than modern. The use of limestone for those elements that are most purely recreational in function (the pergola, picnic tables, and picnic ovens) lends a rustic air to the park. Likewise, the landscape design incorporates formal and natural elements. The Formal Garden has geometric symmetry, while the remainder of the park south of the old racetrack, offers a less formal setting. The extensive use of limestone throughout the park unifies the elements and gives the park a distinct and identifiable New Deal character.

**DESCRIPTION**

The Abilene City Park Historic District includes roughly the southern half of the existing Eisenhower Park. To understand the arrangement of resources within the district it is helpful to view the district as six distinct sites unified by a system of curvilinear roads (Figure 1). The north half of the historic district contains a portion of the county fair grounds, including the WPA stadium and the remnants of the c. 1906 race track. The formal garden occupies the southwest corner of the park with its geometric paths, fountain and pergola oriented at a 45-degree angle to the axial street grid. Immediately east of the formal garden and south of the racetrack is the picnic/play area, which includes the picnic amenities, rest rooms, and modern playground equipment and basketball court. East of the picnic/play area, the swimming pool and bathhouse occupy an island flanked by opposing barrels of Poplar Street. Southeast of the bathhouse is a small grassy area that originally contained a fountain. The final features of the park are two landscaped islands that mark entrances to the park on the northeast and west. A description of each of these sites and the resources it contains follows.

General Park Configuration

One contributing structure, the roadway system, including curbs and gutters, defines the general park configuration. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, speculative development was expanding Abilene to the west into newly platted subdivisions containing axial grids of residential blocks. When the Dickinson County Free Fair Association purchased 30 acres of unplatted land for a permanent county fair ground in 1906, new subdivisions bordered the property on the south and west. The new fair ground property corresponded roughly to an area bound by 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, Pine Street on the west, and a point just west of Poplar Street on the east. A 1909 plat map shows animal stables arranged along the west and south edges of this property, a half-mile oval racetrack near the north property boundary, and an agricultural hall in the southeast corner (Figure 2). The 1912 Sanborn Map of Abilene shows a north-south oriented racetrack dominating the center of the property with a grandstand along its west side and the agricultural hall and animal barns in their previous locations. By this time Pine Street extended north of 4<sup>th</sup> Street, curving past the animal buildings and leading to the grandstand. After the City purchased the property from the Fair Association in 1916 this configuration of buildings and roads appears to have remained unchanged until the City contemplated improvements during the Depression (Figure 3).

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The initial park improvements included surveying the park property, identifying grading and utility needs, placing new buildings and structures on the site, and designing a network of roads and paths. The resulting plan extended Poplar Street to the north with parallel barrels that diverged around a new swimming complex; constructed two east-west connections between Poplar and Pine streets (4<sup>th</sup> Street and a road immediately south of the racetrack oval) that featured curving intersections with the north-south roads; and extended Pine Street north to 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The curvilinear pattern of streets enhanced the naturalistic qualities of the park and followed theories of urban planning popular at that time. Low sloping concrete curbs and gutters lined the roads through the park. Sidewalks were limited to paths extending from the edge of the road to a specific park building or feature. Each section of concrete sidewalk has a brushed surface framed by smooth edges. Records indicate that park improvements included some grading as well. Given the level nature of the land in this area, it does not appear that the project included any significant amount of earth moving activities. An aerial photograph taken c. 1946 shows the appearance of the park shortly after the completion of the public improvements (Figure 4).

The network of roads and paths laid out in 1935 remains largely intact. Only the east-west road between the racetrack and 4<sup>th</sup> Street has been vacated. A vestige of this alignment remains visible on the east side of Pine Street. Also intact are the curbs and gutters installed throughout the park. Some new sections of sidewalk have been poured to replace broken and heaved concrete. These match the design, materials, and location of the original, although color and texture often differentiate them from the original fabric.

Fair Ground

Resources associated with the historic district's fair ground site include one contributing building (the stadium), one non-contributing building (rodeo concessions/restrooms), and eight non-contributing structures (bleachers (3), rodeo chutes (2), crow's nest, racetrack oval, paddock animal shelter) associated with the county fair grounds.

By 1912 the county fair grounds had roughly the same configuration it had in the early 1930s when the City of Abilene pursued federal and state funds for park enhancements (Figure 3). While all of the fair buildings from this early period have been replaced, much of the character imparted by the initial fair ground development remains intact. Most noticeable is the distinctive race track oval that once dominated the property. Roughly half of the oval remains extant, defined at its perimeter by a ring of dense scrubby trees and a slight change in grade. The WPA stadium, described below, occupies the same location as the previous wood grandstand constructed earlier in the century. While the conglomeration of livestock shelters and other support buildings west of the stadium post-dates the historic district's period of significance, historic atlases show that these types of structures occupied this location at the western edge of the fair ground as early as 1909.

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*Stadium*

The 2,028-seat Tom Smith Abilene Stadium replaced an earlier wood grandstand and doubled its seating capacity. The rectangular limestone stadium rests on a concrete slab foundation. Limestone sheaths the building's north, south and west walls. The quarry-faced ashlar field stone is laid in a random range, while the stone trim details and parapet cap are dressed. Poured concrete forms the stepped bleachers on the east side. All of the building's openings are recessed the depth of the limestone blocks, and the surfaces of the blocks are smooth facing the openings.

The main elevation of the stadium faces west. It has nine bays, eight of which contain multi-light industrial-style metal windows with central hoppers and ribbed glazing. Dressed stone blocks form the window surrounds, and blind rifle slits are centered in the wall above each surround. Below six of the eight windows are entrances filled with pairs of cross-braced, tongue-and-groove wood doors. The two outermost bays have only dressed stone sills separating the upper windows from a second, lower window opening. At the north end of the building a window air conditioner fills the lower opening, and the lower window at the south end has been infilled with limestone matching the body of the building. Shallow pilasters with battered caps flank all of the window bays except those closest to the center.

The ninth bay, at the center of the south elevation, contains the stadium's main entrance. The entrance surround projects from the wall of the building in two shallow steps. At its center, large blocks of dressed stone frame the entrance. The surround is wider and taller than those in the flanking bays. A single tongue-and-groove, wood, rolling door fills this opening. Stylized Moderne lettering carved into the surround reads, "Abilene Stadium." A series of striations are also carved into the smooth stone at the top of the entryway. In the rough-faced stone above the dressed surround are three blind rifle slits, matching those above each window. Carved into one block toward the base of the surround is information about the civic officials, architects, and funding vehicle involved with constructing the stadium.

A series of doorways pierce the end (north and south) walls of the stadium. Each end has a pair of large tongue-and-groove entry doors matching those in the front bays. These doors provide cross-ventilation to the interior of the stadium and provide ingress and egress at each end of the long central corridor. Smaller doors in the south end access rest rooms. A walkthrough door is also found in the north wall.

The east side of the stadium contains the bleachers. Modern metal seats attached to the poured concrete structure are arranged in sections separated by vertical aisles. Concrete ramps integrated at each end of the stadium lead to a concrete aisle at the base of the bleachers. The limestone facing the low wall below the aisle matches the body of the building. Square openings in this wall have been in-filled with brick. A metal pipe railing runs along the outside edge of the ramp and across the front of the aisle.

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The interior of the stadium has a concrete slab floor and concrete block walls spanning the width (east-west) of the stadium that align with each of the external pilasters. The poured concrete ceiling is the exposed underside of the external bleachers. Large openings in the concrete block walls create a north-south corridor through the length of the stadium. Massive poured concrete headers top each doorway. Wood frame partitions between some of the interior bays define concession and ticket areas.

*Landscape and Non-contributing Resources*

The use of the land east of the stadium has changed over time. A 1946 c. aerial photograph of the park shows that at that time the stadium provided grandstand seating for a lighted baseball field (Figure 4). Home plate was on the west, and a ring of tall pole lights extended over half the width of the old racetrack. That ring of light poles remains extant, although the City in recent years moved the ball field to a new complex north of the stadium, erasing all traces of the north end of the racetrack oval.

In place of the 1940s ball field are new rodeo facilities. Two banks of metal bleachers face the stadium, and another faces the field on the north. Metal pipe chutes enclose the north and south ends of the dirt infield. The southern chutes contain an upper level judging/announcing booth, and a freestanding metal pipe crow's nest stands next to the chutes on the north. A series of fences encloses the entire rodeo complex. Metal pipe fence with wire insets encloses the infield. Those surrounding the perimeter of rodeo complex include vertical, standing seam metal panels attached to wood posts and rails on the north, chain link along the east and sections of open, horizontal metal pipe fencing on the south. A very tall and very wide entryway at the north end of the complex is constructed of peeled logs in a post-and-lintel configuration. Bolts and iron straps attach the horizontal member to the vertical members. Banks of stadium lights are attached to tall log poles that ring the rodeo field. All of these structures are considered non-contributing to the historic district because they post-date the period of significance and were not constructed using New Deal relief funding.

A dirt and gravel drive enters the former racetrack from Pine Street just north of the stadium. The drive cuts almost straight across the old racetrack to exit onto Poplar Street, primarily providing access to the baseball complex. The road also wraps around the east side of the rodeo complex.

Along this road on the exterior of the rodeo complex is a new structure containing restroom facilities and concession stands. The concrete block building has a north-south orientation. The end gable roof has wide flat eaves and is clad with composition shingles. The bathroom entrances are recessed in the north end wall. A passageway towards the south end separates the concession stands from the restrooms. This modern building is a non-contributing element to the historic district.

South of the rodeo complex, occupying the south end of the old racetrack oval is a grassy paddock enclosed by sections of horizontal metal pipe fencing. Forming the southern edge of this area, the perimeter of the racetrack is lined with fencing composed of log posts connected by metal cables and

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pipes and reinforced with wood and wire snowdrift fencing. Within the paddock is an open-sided animal shelter with a metal gable roof supported on log posts. This modern structure is also non-contributing to the historic district.

Bandshell

This site, located immediately west of the stadium and north of the formal garden, includes one non-contributing building (the 1992 bandshell) and one contributing structure (the associated New Deal-era landscaping). The existing bandshell was constructed in 1992 to replace an earlier building constructed in 1934. The City received CWA funds to construct the original bandshell adjacent to the stadium in the fairgrounds park. It burned in 1992 and was replaced by the existing concrete block building in 1998.

The contributing landscaping consists of the grassy lawn in front of the stage and dense linear segments of deciduous shrubs that follows the curve of the road between Eisenhower Park Road and Pine Street. It is unclear whether this landscaping was part of the CWA project that funded construction of the bandshell or if it was part of the general park landscaping completed with KERK and WPA funds a few years later.

Formal Garden

The formal garden, which includes two contributing structures and five non-contributing objects, occupies a roughly rectangular area at the southeast corner of the park, immediately south of the bandshell. Its boundaries are Pine Street on the east, 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, and the Park Road on the west and north. Mature deciduous trees dot the area south of the garden hardscape in the c. 1946 aerial photograph, suggesting that a portion of the fairground land was cleared to create the existing garden. The significant garden structures include a pergola and the system of paths and landscaping. This site also contains five non-contributing objects: a modern gazebo, a street clock, two sundials, and a fountain.

*Hardscape*

The garden's system of concrete paths orients the plan at a 45-degree angle to the axial street grid. The formal geometric plan includes oval and circular paths laid end to end. A pergola anchors the northwest end of the oval. Encompassing the outer edges of both geometric elements is an elongated horseshoe-shaped path. The open ends of the horseshoe terminate at the pergola, while the curved end of the horseshoe aligns with the circular path at the center of this site.

Additional paths draw the visitor into the garden. One straight path leads from the southeast corner of the park (the northwest corner of Pine and 4<sup>th</sup> streets) to the central circle. A second straight path leads from the southwest corner of the park (the northwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Eisenhower Park Road) to roughly the northeast corner of the garden, bisecting the circular element and fountain. Along this second path, equidistant from the central circular element are two smaller concrete circles each

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containing a sundial. Secondary paths bisect the sundials, crossing the primary southwest-northeast path at a perpendicular angle parallel to the path from the southeast corner of the garden. These paths extend from 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Eisenhower Park Road, respectively, making a 45-degree turn to parallel the main geometric element. These secondary paths terminate just north of the sundials.

*Pergola*

The pergola at the northwest end of the formal garden is a symmetrical structure. Random range, quarry-faced ashlar limestone faces the square posts. At the center of the structure, spaced pairs of posts support the four corners of the hip roof. The wood shingle roof has exposed wood rafter tails and a tongue-and-groove wood ceiling. Flanking the central section of the pergola are two open structures with spaced pairs of posts at each end that match those at the center of the structure. Wood plank headers connect opposing pairs of posts across the width of the structure, and four longer headers rest on top of the posts as they extend from the hip roof to each end of the structure. Smaller wood planks span the width of the structure on top of and perpendicular to the long headers. Chicken wire attached to the outside of the structure at each outer pair of posts supports climbing flowering vines. A concrete path bisects the length of the pergola and provides access to the garden through the southeast end of the hip section. Below the hip roof are a concrete bench and a terrazzo drinking fountain. Low flowering shrubs and beds of multicolor annual flowers grow in front (southeast) of the pergola.

*Landscape*

Grass is the primary ground surface material of the formal garden. Multiple varieties of mature deciduous trees are distributed throughout this site. Semi-circular arcs of dense shrubs ring the sundials and outer fountain paths, enhancing the geometric qualities of the hardscape design. Flanking the length of the oval path are additional rows of dense shrubs with banks of perennial and annual flowers planted in continuous beds lining the paths. Mature clusters of tall flowering bushes connect the sections of shorter shrubs. The path that traverses the length of the pergola diverges at either end a short distance from the structure. At these junctures are raised planting beds surrounded by low limestone walls and containing a variety of rosebushes. Sections of split rail fence are also found in this general vicinity slightly beyond either end of the pergola structure.

*Non-contributing Structures*

A variety of other resources found in this area of the park do not contribute to the significance of the historic district due to their age and/or association. At the center of the main circle is a round concrete fountain, funded by the James R. Cutler Post of the American Legion.<sup>1</sup> The fountain originally included a battery of colored searchlights at the base of the water flow. By switching on the various colored lights it was possible to create seven color combinations. This feature remains operable, although only clear light shines today. While the fountain is contemporary with the park improvements and its construction falls within the period of significance, its construction was funded by an private rather than

<sup>1</sup> "Legionnaires to Install Colored Water Fountain," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1938.

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public entity rendering it non-contributing to the context of this historic district. Likewise, the stone sundials that occupy the circles east and west of the fountain were donated to the City in 1941 by the Daughters of the Civil War. These elements are non-contributing because they post-date the district's period of significance and lack association with a public funding mechanism.

To the west of the primary path is a gazebo erected during the past five years. The multi-sided black wrought iron structure has a domed copper roof. The patterned wrought iron that fills the lower portion of the walls gives the structure a light, airy feeling. Benches line the sidewalls. Because this element was constructed after the period of significance for this historic district it is considered a non-contributing element.

South of the gazebo on the east side of the primary path is a tall black metal street clock. Originally located in front of Goodell's jewelry store on Broadway, the clock was donated to the City and installed in the park in 1981. While the clock appears to be over 50 years of age, its date of erection in the park post-dates the period of significance for the historic district, making it a non-contributing element.

Picnic/Play Area

The core of the park, bound by Pine Street on the west, Poplar Street on the east, 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south and the racetrack oval on the north, is the park's active recreation picnic and play area. This flat area is generally grassy and dotted with mature trees. The western three-quarters were part of the turn-of-the-century fairground, as is evidenced by the mature trees shown in the c. 1946 aerial photograph. The old agricultural hall that stood near 4<sup>th</sup> Street was replaced in the late 1930s by tennis courts. The park's tennis courts moved to a new area east of the fountain lobe in the early 1980s, at which time basketball courts were constructed on the level area that once held the agricultural hall. A road originally bisected this area near the southern end of the racetrack. Closed in the 1980s, only a remnant of the road remains visible off Pine Street. In addition to some grading (the extent of which is unknown), historic construction in this part of the park has been limited. The contributing features include a restroom building, picnic amenities (17 picnic tables and 3 picnic ovens), and possibly some landscaping. Only the trees in the eastern one-quarter of the picnic/play area can be specifically associated with the Depression-era improvements. Non-contributing elements include a second modern restroom building, three modern picnic shelters, and the basketball courts. Playground equipment that post-dates the original construction of the park is also found in this area. Due to its small size and scale, lack of artistic design and impermanent construction, the playground equipment was included in the resource count.

*Restroom Building (WPA -- contributing)*

The WPA restroom building is a small rectangular structure oriented east-west near the northwest corner of Poplar and 4<sup>th</sup> streets. Like the other WPA park buildings, random range quarry-faced ashlar limestone clads the walls of this building. Wood shingles cover the gable roof. A small metal vent pipe

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rises from the center of the north roof slope. The flat narrow eaves are tight to the gabled end walls and overhang the sidewalls by only a few inches.

The single doorways that pierce each end wall (east and west) are offset within their façade (one to the north and one to the south). Within each stone doorway the wood doorframe and solid wood door are recessed the depth of the limestone blocks. Two square window openings with smooth limestone sills pierce the south wall of the building. Wood louvers fill the west opening, and a three-light sash fills the east opening.

The otherwise simple building has two decorative elements centered in each gable end wall above the doorways. The first element is a metal sign bracket (missing its sign) which has scrolled design. Above the sign bracket is a shorter metal hook in the gable peak. On the building's west end the upper bracket retains its original metal cage, lantern light.

Limestone wing walls originally extended the sidewalls closest to the doorways in each end wall. The Abilene Park Department removed those walls within recent years to discourage illegal activities in the park. The building currently is vacant.

*Restroom Building (Non-contributing)*

A split-face, concrete block, restroom building was constructed c. 1995. The distinctive modern roofline of the rectangular building has a long, steep shed roof slanting toward the rear (north) and an opposing, lower, shed roof sloping toward the front (south) above the entrance and front wall. Wood shingles clad both roof slopes, and each has a flat wood fascia. A large opening centered in the south elevation provides access to a corridor leading to the men's and women's facilities. Two sets of 16 glass blocks, arranged in 8x2 groupings, pierce the upper wall above the front shed roof to illuminate the interior.

*Picnic Tables/Benches (contributing)*

Seventeen (17) sets of concrete and limestone picnic tables and benches are scattered throughout the picnic/play area of the park. While it is likely that each set (picnic table and two flanking benches) was constructed on a concrete pad, the accumulation of soil over time has eliminated the visibility of the concrete bases. The concrete table tops rest on tall rectangular bases that measure roughly eighteen inches wide, six feet in length, and two and a half feet high. Quarry faced, random range ashlar limestone blocks clad the bases. Slabs of concrete with slightly tooled edges, measuring roughly three feet by six feet, form the tabletops. Flanking the long sides of each table are two benches approximately two feet tall, two feet wide, and six feet long. Like the tables, quarry-faced random range ashlar limestone blocks clad the base of each bench and a slab of concrete with slightly tooled edges forms the seat. The picnic tables and benches are all in good condition.

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*Picnic Ovens (contributing)*

Scattered around the west end of the picnic/play area near Pine Street are three, L-shaped rubblework limestone picnic ovens. Concrete pads, measuring approximately five feet by six feet, form an apron around the base of each oven. The rectangular base of each oven, inset from the front and sides edges of the concrete pad, rises to a height of approximately three feet. At the rear of each oven, the limestone structure rises into a chimney approximately seven feet in height. The sides of the chimneys taper slightly inward and have a concrete cap. Quarry-faced, irregularly shaped, uncoursed limestone blocks clad the exterior of each fireplace structure. The manner in which the limestone integrates with the base and chimney of the ovens suggests that these are concrete structures with limestone veneer. Between the two lower limestone walls the base of each oven contains a two-level firebox constructed of blond bricks. A metal grate rests on top of the bricks flush with the top of the limestone sidewalls. The condition of the ovens varies. All are missing some of their masonry, especially in the area of the fireboxes. Some of the limestone cladding is failing from the top and sides of the individual structures. However, the form, function and original design of all three ovens remains unimpaired. Newspaper reports during the construction of the park indicate that the park originally contained nine of these structures.

*Picnic Shelters (non-contributing)*

Just south of the racetrack oval toward Pine Street are three modern picnic shelters. Square wood posts rise from concrete pads to support end gable roofs. The shelters were constructed before 1991, and therefore, are non-contributing to the historic district.

Swimming Complex

Anchoring the east side of the park is an island in the middle of Poplar Street that contains the swimming complex. The complex includes one building (the limestone bathhouse) and two structures (the pool deck with swimming and wading pools; landscaping and paths south of the bathhouse) that contribute to the significance of the historic district, and one non-contributing object (raised planting bed with flagpole).

*Bath house (contributing)*

Described in contemporary news reports as "of simple but attractive lines," the bathhouse expresses the Moderne architecture typical of Depression-era public construction. Measuring 110 feet by 32 feet, the rectangular building projects at the central front entrance and slightly at the rear entrance, giving it a truncated T-shaped plan. Between the concrete foundation and battered dressed stone parapet, quarry-faced ashlar limestone laid in a random range covers the exterior of the building. A dressed stone beltcourse encircles the building above its openings. All four facades of the bathhouse are symmetrically arranged.

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The entrance bay projects from the center of the front (south) elevation. Dressed stone surrounds the wide opening at the center of this bay. The smooth surface of the stone surround is painted cream with dark green highlights. Flutes, incised into the surround, flank the entrance and hang down roughly three-quarters of the building height from the roofline. Carved above the doorway are the words "Swimming Pool" in large letters below which are the words "Ladies" and "Men" in a smaller point size. All of the lettering is a stylized Moderne font characteristic of the 1930s. The entrance to the building is recessed within this bay at the front wall of the main block. Concrete block infill has reduced the width of this opening to a double door centered in the original entrance.

Flanking the entry bay on the front facade each wing has five window openings with battered, dressed stone sills. The nearly square openings are placed high on the building wall roughly equal to the top of the entrance. Wood louvers fill the window openings on the south elevation. A pair of limestone pilasters flanks the openings at the outer ends of each wing, and the remnants of additional pilasters are visible adjacent to the openings closest to the center bay. The dressed stone cap of the pilasters integrates into the beltcourse that encircles the building above the openings. Single louvered openings also pierce the east and west walls of the projecting entrance bay. A carved stone plaque in the easternmost pilaster on the south (front) elevation is inscribed with the building's date of construction, names of the architects, and civic officials.

Pairs of windows pierce the east and west end walls of the bathhouse. These openings are identical to those on the front of the building except that each is filled with an eight-light hopper window. Pilasters, matching those on the front of the building, flank the windows at the corners of the end walls.

The poolside entrance projects just slightly from the north building wall. This projection contains three single doorways with the words "Men," "Ladies," and "In" carved above them in the same stylized font seen on the front of the building. The dressed stone entry surround is painted in the same manner as the front entry and features incised flutes flanking each doorway. Five bays of eight-light hopper windows pierce each wall flanking the central entrance bay. On the west side of the building a concession stand covers the middle three windows of the north wall.

The concession stand is a rectangular shed-roof wood frame structure with board and batten siding. Large openings in the upper portion of each wall have narrow wood counters. Doors adjacent to the main building wall in the east and west ends of the concession stand provide allow passage through the structure.

The bathhouse originally had a rooftop deck with a concession stand, which was accessed by flights of stairs flanking the front entrance. The ghosts of these stairs remain visible on the front elevation. The deck was intended for watching bathers or "playing cards." The current concession stand was built in the 1960s when the roof deck was closed due to safety concerns.

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The interior of the bathhouse has three primary spaces. All three have smooth concrete walls and floors and concrete ceilings with exposed structural beams.

At the center of the building is the checkroom. Wide openings with laminate counters dominate the north and south walls of this space. Wood racks that hold metal bins line all remaining wall area. The light fixtures in this space are white schoolhouse globes that hang from short metal bases.

Changing rooms occupy the east and west ends of the building. At the far end of each space a concrete wall separates the shower room from the changing area. Wood partitions define toilet and changing stalls that line the remaining perimeter walls. Wood benches supported at each end on round metal feet are bolted to the floor in each room. In addition to the natural lighting provided by the many windows, flat metal light fixtures with exposed bulbs hang from the ceiling in each changing room.

The basement houses the pool filtration system. Accessed by a stairway on the pool deck, the basement has concrete walls, floor, and exposed concrete beam ceiling. The three original filtration tanks remain in use, although some of the original piping has been replaced by PVC. Overhead light fixtures have flat metal shades with exposed bulbs.

*Swimming Pools and Deck (contributing)*

North of the bathhouse is the concrete pool deck, which contains the swimming and wading pools. The deck is roughly rectangular in shape with rounded corners at the north end. Dominating the space is the swimming pool surrounded by a wide walkway. The concrete pool measures 75x150 feet and ranges from three to nine-and-a-half feet in depth. The rim and interior of the pool are painted. Twenty-four underwater lights in the sidewalls and ten wood poles with banks of stadium lights illuminate the pool. Metal pipe ladders are scattered around the perimeter, and metal pipe lifeguard chairs are anchored to the deck in three locations. Additional amenities include two diving boards centered at the north end of the pool and plastic tube slides at the northwest corner and east side. These latter features are of recent vintage.

At its southeast corner the pool deck widens slightly to accommodate a small oval wading pool. A low chain link fence with a gate encloses the wading pool and the twenty by thirty-foot concrete deck that surrounds it. The rim and interior of the concrete wading pool are painted.

A tall chain link fence surrounds the entire pool deck. Similar fencing is visible in the c. 1946 aerial photograph of the park.

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*Landscape*

In front (south) of the bathhouse is a triangular, grassy area. One concrete path bisects the triangle from the point to the entry. A second path traverses the property east-west in front of the building. Several mature deciduous and evergreen trees dot this parcel. This configuration of space and paths is visible in the c.1946 aerial of the park. The aerial shows evergreen shrubs lining the foundation of the bath house, arcs of shrubs extending from the southern corners to the road and a few new trees planted in the grassy lawn. Today this area in front of the bathhouse has been extended to create a more distinct point. Occupying the point is a low planting bed formed by a low limestone wall. Flat evergreen shrubs and day lilies grow in the bed and a flagpole rises from its center. An inscribed concrete plaque at the point reads "Presented by Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post No. 3279." It is unclear from the historical record when the flagpole was installed. The raised bed and flag pole are not visible in the c. 1946 photograph (Figure 4). Therefore, they post-date the period of significance and lack association with the historic context for this district and are considered non-contributing elements.

Fountain Lobe

The southeast corner of the park is a roughly rectangular lobe bound on the east by the property line, on the north and west by Poplar Street and on the south by the alley that bisects the block between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets. This grassy parcel is dotted with mature deciduous and evergreen trees and has a line of shrubs near its eastern edge. The circular fountain shown at the heart of this lobe in a mid-1940s aerial photograph was removed in the 1970s (Figure 4). A straight concrete path led from the center of the west side of the lobe to the fountain, which was located near its center. Some of the remaining trees may be original plantings that created a ring behind (east of) the fountain. The aerial also shows low shrubs lining the east frontage along Poplar Street and the path to and around the fountain. Neither the fountain nor the shrubs are extant. In the 1980s the park expanded further to the east with the construction of tennis courts on a rectangular parcel immediately east of the fountain lobe. The alley forming the southern edge of the lobe was widened and an extension of Poplar Street constructed around the east side of the lobe. The new street extension connects to the main east barrel of Poplar Street at a point parallel to the bathhouse. While a number of the features that composed this area of the park are no longer extant (fountain, path, shrubs), it is considered a contributing element to the historic district because the shape of the lobe, as defined by Poplar Street is unchanged from the original park layout, it remains a grassy area with limited plantings, and it continues to convey the original design of the Depression Era park.

Traffic Islands (2 sites)

Two triangular traffic islands were constructed as part of the New Deal-era improvements in the park. One was located at the then northern terminus of Poplar Street. The second was located in the middle of Pine Street on the park's west side between the formal garden and bandshell. Both retain their original curbing, although the original plantings have been compromised. Because they continue to convey the original design and layout of the park, both are included as contributing sites to this nomination.

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*Pine Street Island*

The west traffic island is located directly north of the formal garden, roughly at the juncture of Eisenhower Park Road and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. A low concrete curb defines the shape of the small island. A single cedar tree growing at its center may be an original planting.

*Poplar Street Island*

The east traffic island is located north of the swimming pool. To its south Poplar Street diverges into two barrels of traffic flanking the swimming complex. North of the island, Poplar Street converges into a single barrel of two-way traffic. The c. 1946 aerial shows that this island was the northern terminus of the park on the east side (Figure 4). The land to the north is undeveloped and appears to be under cultivation. At this time Poplar Street made a U-turn south of the island; only later was it extended to the north. The aerial shows bushy shrubs at each corner of the island. Currently, the island contains a few shrubs at the southeast and north corners as well as two small flowering trees near its center.

**INTEGRITY**

Contributing elements to this nomination include those features effected by or constructed using Federal and Kansas New Deal-era funds between 1935 and 1939. These include the curvilinear configuration of roads and resulting configuration of uses; the original concrete curbs and gutters lining the road system; the network of sidewalks/paths that define the formal gardens and the area in front (south) of the bath house; the two triangular traffic islands; the county fair stadium; the swimming complex (bath house, pools, and deck); the pergola and landscaping of the formal garden; and the 1930s restroom building and picnic amenities. While alterations have had a negligible impact on the overall design and feeling of the historic district, they have effected the integrity of individual resources to a greater or lesser degree. For instance the removal of the fountain from the southeast lobe altered the function and design of this section of the park. Likewise, the removal of the rooftop deck, concession stand and stairs from the bathhouse affected its appearance and function, and removing the wingwalls from the restroom building was an alteration to its original design. Less significant changes have included replacing sections of sidewalk with new concrete, loss of vegetation planted as part of the park improvements (in particular shrubs that lined the west side of Poplar Street), vacation of the road between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and the racetrack, relocation of the tennis courts, and construction of one new buildings and a series of structures throughout the park. All of these changes are reversible, and the extant individual historic elements retain integrity of design, setting, feeling, workmanship, materials, location, and association.

Non-contributing elements to the historic district include features constructed outside the period of significance. Among these are the turn-of-the-century racetrack oval, modern rodeo enhancements (fencing, chutes, and bleachers), the modern restroom building, playground equipment, picnic shelters,

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and the flagpole element in front of the bathhouse, and the gazebo, clock and sundials in the formal garden. Also non-contributing is the fountain in the formal garden, which was constructed within the historic period of significance but using funds from a private organizations rather than a federal or state relief program.

Overwhelmingly, the park continues to continue to convey its historic character as a Depression-era public recreation facility. Comparison of aerial photographs taken c. 1946 (figure 3) and 1991 (figure 4) show that the property boundary, the configuration of park components, the circulation pattern, the topography and character of vegetation, and the appearance of architectural features remain sufficiently intact to convey the historic park design. Overall the park retains integrity in all seven areas required for National Register listing.

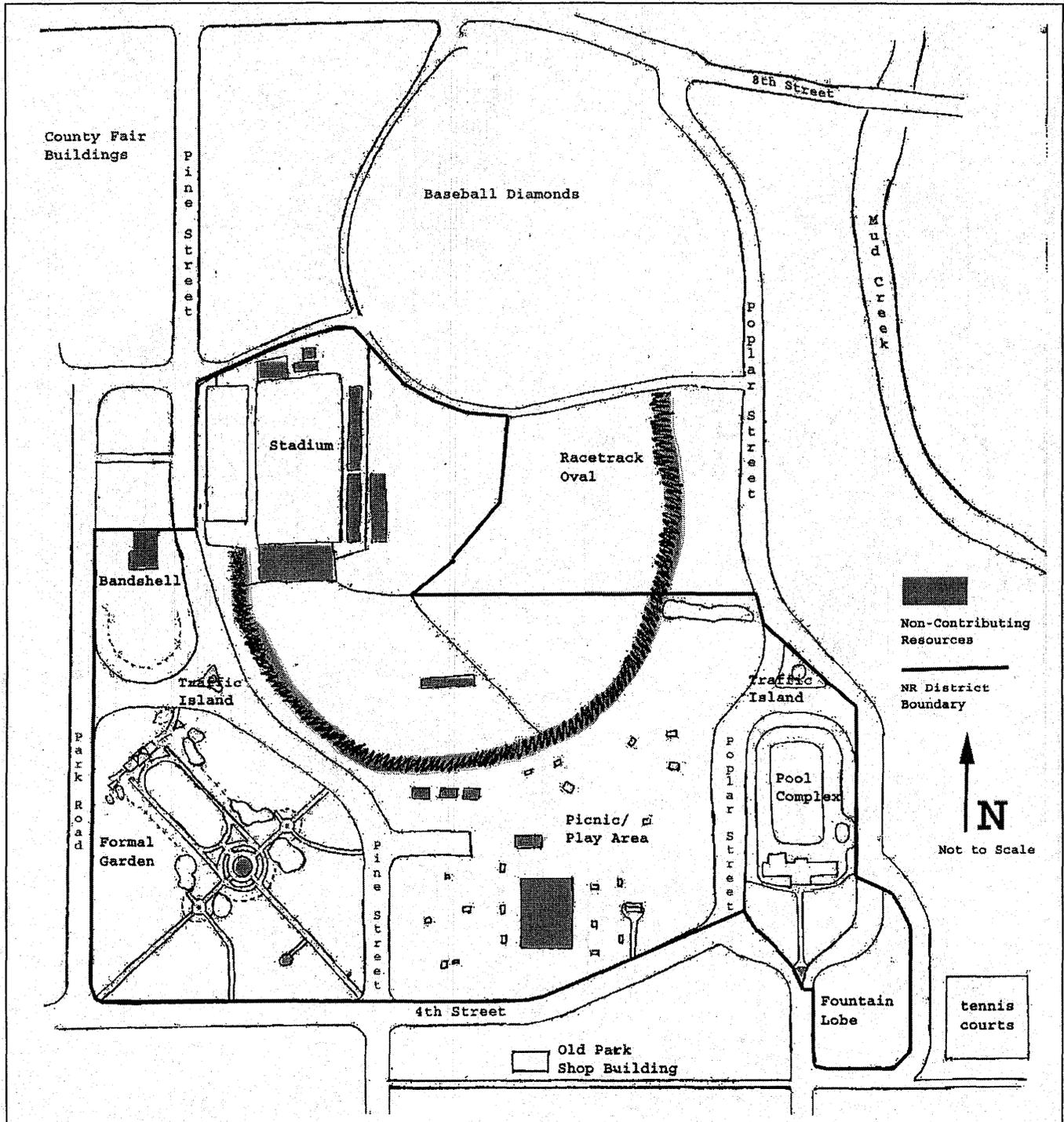
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**Figure 1 – Abilene City Park Historic District**





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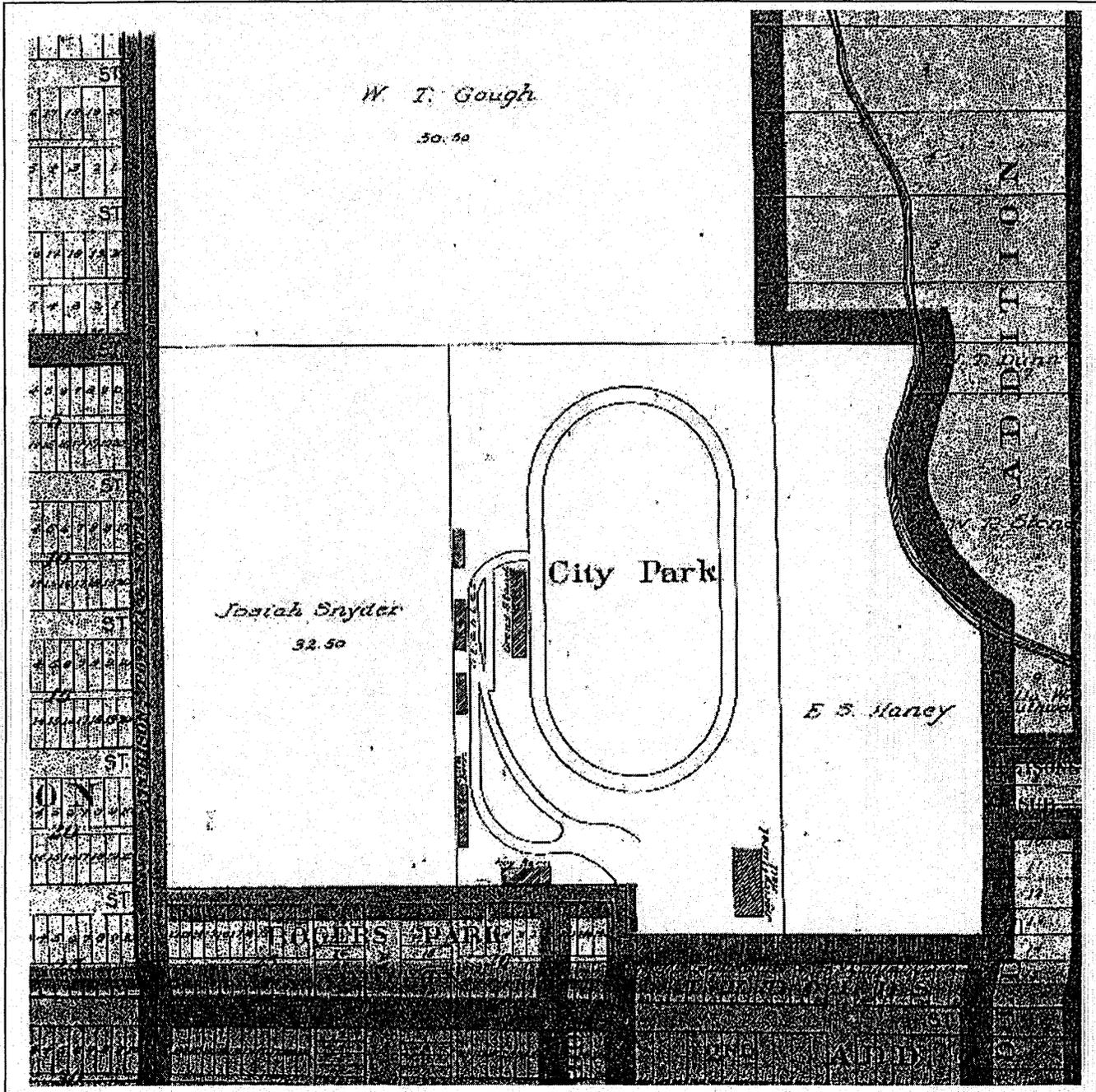
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**Figure 3** – From *Standard Atlas of Dickinson County, Kansas, 1921* (Geo. A. Ogle & Co.)



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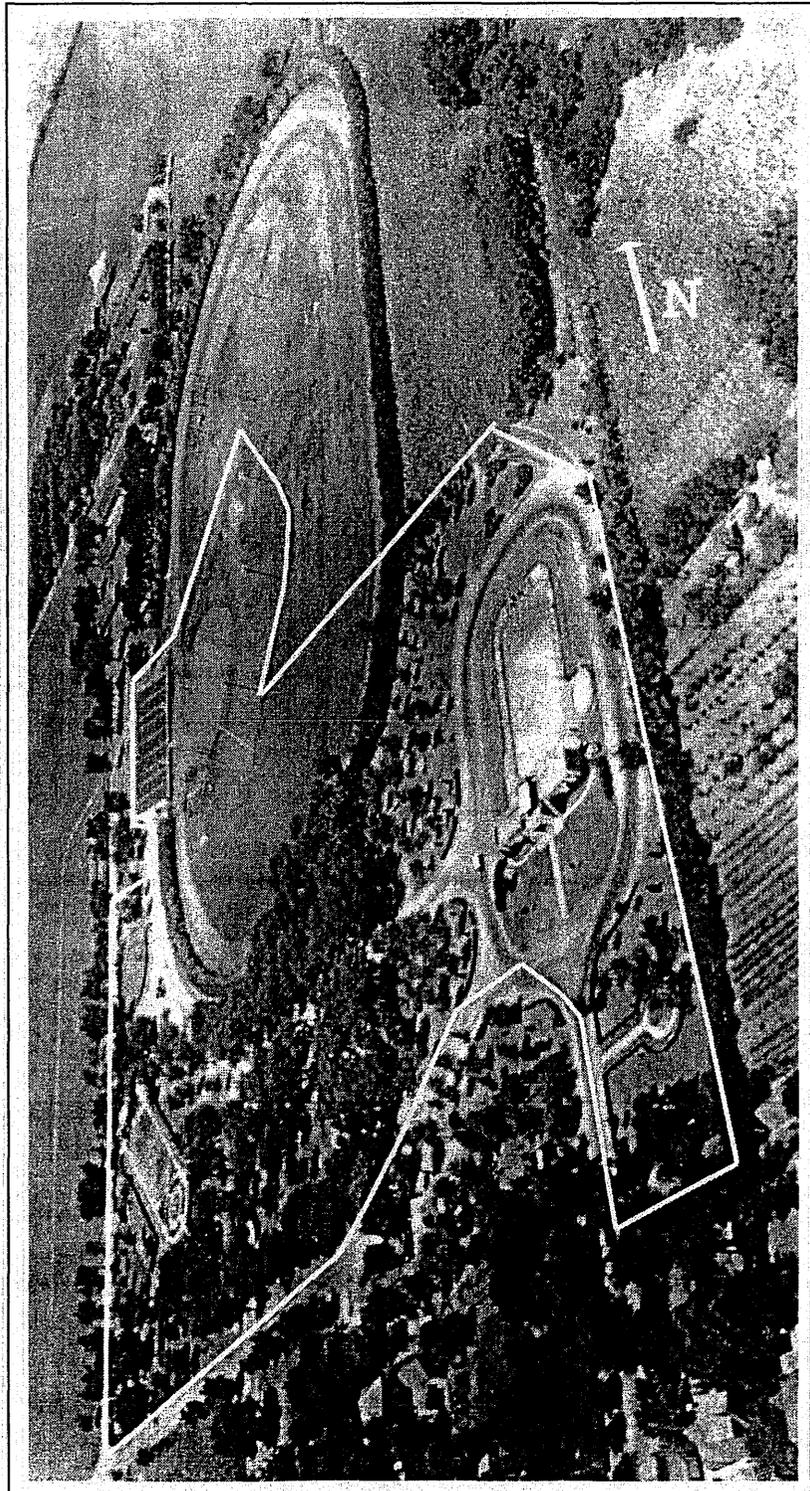
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**Figure 4** -- c. 1946 Aerial Photograph of Park Showing Historic District Boundaries





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**SUMMARY**

The Abilene City Park/Eisenhower Park is eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for the areas of RECREATION & CULTURE and COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT. Like many communities nationwide, the City of Abilene made extensive use of New Deal funds between 1934 and 1939 to improve the existing fairgrounds and to develop the remainder of the property as a municipal park. As described in the Multiple Property Documentation Form for *New Deal-era Resources of Kansas*, in the spirit of the New Deal, the project was undertaken as a labor-intensive project that would employ a large number of individuals currently receiving public relief. Following its construction the park would subsequently provide the community with an enduring public amenity. During a presentation to the Abilene Rotary Club on June 4, 1938, Dr. Bruce Thayer, now a member of the City Park Board, urged the community to take advantage of available public funding to make the desired park improvements. He noted that the proposed improvements could be maintained using existing city equipment. This was not a project that would drain future resources from the already stretched City budget, and it would provide an on-going source of pride to the community.<sup>1</sup> The park represented the ideals of park planning and design during this period, offering both active and passive recreation opportunities. It is the most cohesive example of intact New Deal-era park design in Dickinson County.<sup>2</sup> The Abilene park was singular in the quantity and quality of New Deal construction it originally received and in its retention of the vast majority of those elements, including landscape, buildings, and cultural landscape features.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The following elaboration describes the history and significance of the New Deal-era improvements to the Abilene City Park in context with the county fair in Dickinson County, with municipal recreation in Abilene, and with Abilene and Dickinson County during the Depression.

The County Fair in Dickinson County<sup>3</sup>

The history of county fairs in Dickinson County dates back to October 1870 when the first event was held in a meadow south of the old Abilene city dump. In 1879, the Dickinson County Agriculture Society established the county's first permanent fairground with the purchase of 40 acres of land just north of the dump. The facility included a stock shed and a track for horse racing, although the majority of events were conducted in tents or out in the open. During these early years, the fair included contests

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<sup>1</sup> "Park a Bargain," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 4 June 1938.

<sup>2</sup> The other Dickinson County communities that used New Deal funds to make park improvements include Chapman, Herington, and Solomon.

<sup>3</sup> The history of fairs in Dickinson County is derived from Earl F. Mills, "History of the Fair," (Vertical File, Dickinson County Historical Society and Museum, Abilene, Kansas) n.d.

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judging animals, agricultural products, sewing, flowers, and manufacturing, as well as horse, bicycle and foot races. Unfortunately, economic conditions cut short use of the first fairground, and only a few events were held before the property was sold in 1886. The City of Hope subsequently hosted smaller fairs in 1887 and 1890, but Dickinson County had no more county fairs until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1906, the newly established Dickinson County Fair Association purchased 30 acres of land from Josiah Snyder to house the county fairgrounds. The Abilene Town Site Company had deeded this property at the center of the Southeast  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 17, Township 13, Range 2 to prominent civic and business leader George Rogers in 1899. In 1904, Rogers sold the property to Josiah Snyder, who sold the parcel to the Dickinson County Fair Association two years later.<sup>4</sup>

The Fair Association promptly made a variety of improvements to the property. The 1909 county plat map shows a half-mile racetrack with an east-west orientation at the north end of the property. Animal stables line the property's west side and southwest corner.<sup>5</sup> (See Figure 2, Section 7, Page 16.) An estimated 20,000 fair-goers attended the county fair at the new fairgrounds held in October 1906. Dickinson County's first fair in 15 years featured trotting ostrich, horse racing, balloon ascensions and a livestock sale. A milking machine was also on display.

By 1912, the configuration of the racetrack had changed. The oval race track dominating the site now had a north-south orientation with a 1,500-seat stadium centered on its west side. This suggests that the arrangement shown on the earlier map may have been a speculative illustration of proposed facilities or an earlier temporary track may have been built when the fair moved to this location. A rectangular, 2- $\frac{1}{2}$  Story, wood frame agricultural exhibition hall with three-story towers at each corner was constructed at the southeast corner of this parcel (the current site of the park's basketball courts). A balcony circled the interior of the hall at the second story. The complex also included three horse stables, cattle and hog barns lining the west and south perimeter, a ticket office and a "rest house."<sup>6</sup> With a new permanent fair complex, the Dickinson County Fair quickly returned as a major annual event. Additional highlights from the fair during this period included baby contests, weddings, horse and auto racing, a diving horse in 1910, and an air show in 1915 that featured a Mr. Longren from Topeka who flew his airplane three times a day.

The Fair Association sold the property to the City of Abilene in 1916, and by 1921 the City had constructed an extension of Pine Street that formed a loop road leading to the grandstand and other fair buildings.<sup>7</sup> (See Figure 3, Section 7, Page 17.) The fairground retained this appearance until the

<sup>4</sup> Dickinson County Deed Records, Dickinson County Courthouse, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Capper, *1909 Dickinson County, Kansas Plat Book and Complete Survey* (Des Moines: Kenyon Company, 1909): 55.

<sup>6</sup> Sanborn Map Company, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Geo. A. Ogle and Company, *Standard Atlas of Dickinson County, Kansas* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Company, 1921): 8.

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improvements made in the 1930s. The annual fair itself continued to thrive. In addition to the traditional events, auto shows became increasingly popular. In 1919, an auto show drew 10,000 visitors and 2,000 vehicles on the final day. In 1925, the fair expanded to include a three-day livestock show and events related to the county's newly organized 4H clubs.

The Central Kansas Free Fair Association (CKFFA) organized in 1924 and conducted its first fair on the property in 1928. Over the past 75 years, the CKFFA has overseen a variety of improvements, including the construction of additional livestock facilities, the existing WPA grandstand in 1938, Sterl Hall in 1950, and rodeo facilities, beginning in 1946. The fair remains one of the largest in Kansas and in 1995 ranked as one of the top five small rodeos nationwide.

Public Recreation in Abilene

It is unclear from available information when the City of Abilene expanded the function of the fairground property to include additional recreational uses. Prior to the Depression, there had been only two public parks in Abilene. The first, a City-owned park constructed before 1884, was located between Spruce and Buckeye just south of the United Pacific railroad tracks on A Street.<sup>8</sup> Similar to a downtown square, the park had paths lined with grass, flowers and benches, a gazebo and a goldfish pond with a fountain.<sup>9</sup> This park remained in existence as late as 1933.<sup>10</sup> Currently a parking lot, it may have been replaced when the City began improvements to the park adjacent to the fairgrounds.

Abilene's second park was located outside of town just south of the Smokey Hill River. Privately owned, maintained and endowed, Brown's Park was constructed prior to 1932. C.L. Brown, son of early area residents Jacob and Mary Brown, developed the 250-acre park. Begun as a gristmill, Jacob Brown's venture on the Smokey Hill River evolved to produce electricity for Abilene and other communities in the surrounding area. Ultimately, Brown's enterprise grew into the United Power and Light Corporation and the United Telephone Company. The younger Brown established the park as a memorial to his parents and included an endowment for its perpetual maintenance. It featured a lake with a beach and rowboats, riding horses, a golf course, camping and picnic facilities, all provided free of charge. At one corner of the park, Brown erected the Brown Memorial Home for the Aged, a nursing home providing free care to eligible area residents.<sup>11</sup> In a 1936 article about city park improvements, *The Abilene Daily Chronicle* mentions that Brown's park had closed.<sup>12</sup> It is unknown when or for how long the park was closed, but it is currently back in operation.

<sup>8</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Abilene, Dickinson County, Kansas* (New York, Sanborn Map Company, 1884).

<sup>9</sup> Henry B. Jameson, "History of Abilene, Kansas 1857-1976," *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, 10 June 1976, special supplement; Abilene Commercial Club, *Abilene, Kansas Illustrated*, 1915.

<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Abilene, Dickinson County, Kansas*. (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1933).

<sup>11</sup> "A Cow Town Grows Up," *Kansas City Star*, 28 July 1932.

<sup>12</sup> "Big Majority Is Given for Bond Issue of \$40,000," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 26 August 1936.

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A third public recreation facility in Abilene during this period was a natatorium located on Cottage Avenue, between Olive and Fisher streets. It first appears on the 1917 Sanborn Map.<sup>13</sup> The facility began as an enclosed pool without any additional park amenities. After it assumed control of the facility in the spring of 1935, the City partially razed the old facility and redeveloped it as an open-air pool. The work, which received some public funding, included repairs to the old pool and construction of new dressing rooms, a new office building, and a fence enclosing the pool.<sup>14</sup>

Abilene and Dickinson County during the Great Depression<sup>15</sup>

Abilene, the judicial seat of Dickinson County, was also the heart of its agricultural trade. Settlement in the county had been sparse until after the Civil War, when homesteaders discovered the rich farming offered by the prairie lands and the arrival of the railroads facilitated the shipment of crops to distant market centers.<sup>16</sup>

By 1930, the city's population stood at 5,405. As agricultural conditions worsened along with the economic depression and county residents moved in to Abilene in search of work, the city's population rose to 5,885 in 1933. By the end of the decade, the city's population dropped slightly to 5,638 as farming conditions improved. In 1938, 2,565 farms occupied over 84 percent of the county land area. A 1940 WPA planning report described the Abilene vicinity as a "cash-grain, livestock, and general farming area." Crops included wheat, corn, oats, alfalfa, sorghum, and livestock.<sup>17</sup>

Like counties nationwide, Dickinson County grappled with the effects of the Depression and how to provide relief for the growing number of struggling citizens. Prior to the Depression, assistance to the poor in Kansas came from an inefficient system managed by the counties that relied on a combination of county and private funding sources.<sup>18</sup> The decrease in the tax base that accompanied the Depression hindered the ability of the county to provide relief services. In 1932, property valuation in Dickinson County dropped by 30 percent, forcing the county to eliminate its health department and to reduce funding to the Farm Bureau by half. Nearly \$30,000, including the expenses for the county poor farm, or roughly 18 percent of the remaining 1932 county budget helped the indigent.

<sup>13</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Abilene, Dickinson County, Kansas*. (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917).

<sup>14</sup> "Raze Natatorium," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 15 May 1935.

<sup>15</sup> Except as noted the facts and figures describing the history of Abilene during the Depression comes from Stewart Verkcler, "Notes 1870-1935" vol. 7 (compiled clippings on file at the Dickinson County Historical Society, Abilene Kansas).

<sup>16</sup> William G. Cutler, "Abilene, Dickinson County," *History of the State of Kansas*, [book on-line]; available from <http://www.ukans.edu/carrie/kancoll/books/cutler/dickinson/dickinson-co-p5.html#ABILENE>.

<sup>17</sup> Work Projects Administration, *Basic Studies for Local Planning, Abilene, Kansas*, (Abilene: 1940): 8, 13, 37. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

<sup>18</sup> Additional information about the Kansas poor relief system can be found in the context for *the KERC and the New Deal* in the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form *New Deal-era Resources in Kansas*.

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The Abilene Chamber of Commerce lead private efforts to help those in need. In 1932, the Chamber asked all of the community's employed residents to donate one percent of their earnings to support work relief efforts for unemployed men on the "woodpile." During the previous winter (1931-32), the Chamber had spent nearly \$5,000 in wages for 350 unemployed men, at an average hourly wage of twenty cents.

Although the Emergency Relief and Construction Act supported by President Hoover passed in July 1932, the state of Kansas did not receive any benefits until October. The \$58,000 it received was dispersed among 55 counties in the state. The dire economic straits in Dickinson County were reflected in the allocation of nearly \$10,000 of this money to the county. Earmarked for labor, this money could not be spent on materials. In Abilene the funds were used to clean the channel of Mud Creek and trim trees along Buckeye.<sup>19</sup>

In 1933, the personal property valuation in Dickinson County dropped again, this time by \$850,000, while county aid to the poor rose to over \$39,000. County Engineer, Carl Nicolay, was named Poor Commissioner and Civil Works Administrator. Nicolay was selected for this position because the majority of work relief projects required engineering skills. Projects that year included cleaning and straightening Mud Creek, improving roads, and repairing and painting public buildings. In order to employ the maximum number of individuals, men were limited to 30 hours of work per week. During Christmas week, the 370 individuals on the work relief rolls shared wages of nearly \$10,000, or approximately \$27 each. To help local citizens cope with the worsening conditions, county, city and school board taxes in Abilene were cut. As the community continued to grapple with ways to help its population, the library embarked on a building expansion project that would employ more local residents. By the end of December 1933, the federal government had contributed \$43,740 to county relief efforts.<sup>20</sup>

The Civil Works Administration (CWA) jump-started Roosevelt's New Deal efforts. Active only between November 1933 and March 1934, this ambitious program funded a number of projects in Abilene. During its first six weeks, the CWA contributed \$35,535 to Dickinson County's relief efforts.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the library expansion, CWA projects in Abilene included repairs to the fire station and construction of a bandshell just west of the fairground stadium.

The year 1934 was difficult for Dickinson County. During the period between the end of the CWA in March and the start of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in May 1935, the amount of available relief funds dropped while the number of individuals requesting aid increased. To address this shortfall, the county's budget for the poor fund increased 33% over 1933. By October 1934, nearly 2,500

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<sup>20</sup> "Relief Survey Tabulated," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 26 January 1935.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

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individuals shared \$21,801 in relief aid, half of which was provided by the federal government. There was some public confusion and concern as the CWA was phased out and replaced by the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC). As the local newspaper reported, "...it [the KERC] was basically the same as the other [CWA] but more persons were needed to administer it, as usual." During the interim, the KERC established a mattress factory in Abilene that employed 12 to 14 women, working 24 hours per week for 30 cents an hour. County aid also included the distribution of surplus food and garden seeds. Private organizations continued to provide assistance as well. At Christmas, the Odd Fellows distributed 120 baskets of food to the needy, and the Legion Auxiliary held a party and gave toys to 175 children. The effect of the Depression on the county economy was felt by the Red Cross, whose fund drive netted donations of only \$2,701 county wide.

In 1935, severe dust storms further weakened the already struggling economy in Dickinson County driving up relief needs. The cost of relief in Dickinson County that year was \$740 per day. This expenditure included \$174,220 in federal aid, \$44,715 in private funds, \$45,974 in county funds and \$1,454 in state funds. Additional aid came in the form of surplus food. Street and sidewalk improvements were the typical relief projects that year. The county also reduced property taxes in 1935 to help families make ends meet. The *Abilene Daily Reflector* reported in August that despite a decrease in property values the county commissioners chose to lower the county tax levy by roughly seven-percent.<sup>22</sup>

The effect of the WPA on county relief efforts was dramatic. In August, the *Abilene Daily Reflector* reported that since its inception the WPA district office in Salina had approved 146 projects with an estimated value of \$1,495,000. On one day alone, the office approved 12 projects involving 2,858 man-months of labor with a total duration of 51 months.<sup>23</sup> Individuals on the relief were required to take any job offered to them. If they refused, their name was removed from the rolls. By December, the majority of individuals on the relief rolls had been transferred to work projects, including 43 women working on a sewing project. Only 101 people in the county continued to receive direct relief. Unfortunately, for those still receiving assistance, the outlook remained bleak. At the end of November the county relief administration received only \$1,550 to cover the final two weeks of the dole before it ended on December 1. Families previously receiving \$7 per week were reduced to \$2.25.<sup>24</sup>

The year 1935 also brought a series of changes to the office of the County Relief Administrator. By this time the staff of the Relief Administration had grown. Commissioner Nicolay was assisted by a caseworker, Miss Amber Waddell, along with five assistants, two clerks, and two stenographers, with administration costs for the public works programs exceeding \$2,000 per month. In March, Nicolay resigned and was replaced by William F. Miller of Geary County. In September, the staff was reduced

<sup>22</sup> "County Levy," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 20 August 1935.

<sup>23</sup> "WPA Approvals," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 28 August 1935.

<sup>24</sup> "Dole is Slashed," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 22 November 1935.

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by nearly 50 percent. When the WPA became the lead employer in the work relief efforts that month, the federal agency paid workers on county relief projects directly, reducing KERC administration costs. Two stenographers, an assignment officer, two clerks and two caseworkers were removed from the state payroll.<sup>25</sup> Further changes were ahead. The new WPA rules, enacted in November, required that County Relief Administrators hold a college degree in social work. Not having such a degree W.F. Miller was replaced as County Relief Administrator by caseworker Amber Wadell.

Between 1936 and 1940 Abilene sought and received funding from the WPA for a series of projects. In addition to the multiple projects at the park, the WPA funded construction of a new athletic stadium for the high school and a new elementary school. WPA funds also hired three recreation leaders and two individuals to repair books at the Abilene library.

However, the work completed at the city park was the most extensive, planned use of new deal funding accomplished in the county. As described by Dr. Bruce V. Thayer, a member of the city park board, the plan to improve the park was developed not only to reduce unemployment in Abilene, but also to "meet the unemployment load of the community."<sup>26</sup>

The New Deal and Abilene City Park

The City of Abilene did not make many improvements to the Fair Grounds after purchasing the property in 1916. Some new roads, described above, were added between 1912 and 1921, and the caretaker's house and park shop on 4<sup>th</sup> Street between Poplar and Pine may have been built during this period as well. However, during the Depression, when funding became available for public improvement projects and a national emphasis was placed on outdoor recreation, the City began contemplating improvements to the city park.

Recreation and access to unspoiled natural environments had long been associated with enhancing personal character.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the 1930s, the national trend in recreational development focused on providing city dwellers with access to bucolic country settings replete with carriage trails and wooded paths, such as Brown Park. However, by the Depression Americans had more leisure time. Jobs were becoming increasingly mechanized and less physical, creating a need for more active recreational resources.<sup>28</sup> The New Deal funded a plethora of recreational venues in large and small communities nationwide. By 1939, when improvements were complete, the Abilene City Park represented the ideals of park planning and design during this period, offering both active and passive recreation opportunities.<sup>29</sup> There was a new modern swimming pool and bathhouse, tennis courts and playgrounds.

<sup>25</sup> "Will Cut Relief Force here 50% on September 5," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 24 August 1935.

<sup>26</sup> "Park a Bargain," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 4 June 1938. Emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Phoebe Cutler, 19

<sup>28</sup> Phoebe Cutler, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Phoebe Cutler, 46

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It also featured picnic facilities, a formal garden, and a bandshell, in addition to the improved fair ground stadium facilities.<sup>30</sup>

On May 20, 1934 the debut concert was played at the new CWA-funded bandshell on the western edge of the park. Designed by local architects Murray and Cayton, the bandshell was touted as "one of the newest types." The concentric semi-circles sheltering the stage were patterned after a bandshell from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Members of the city band expected the new structure to "carry the sound clearly and well" at the all music debut event, which featured the Abilene and Salina bands playing a combined concert.<sup>31</sup>

In December of that year, the City Commission hired the Paulette and Wilson Engineering Company of Salina to survey the park property. The *Abilene Daily Reflector* commented that this was "the first official step toward turning Abilene's city park into a real beauty spot..."<sup>32</sup> Paulette and Wilson provided the City with the engineering plans necessary to complete an application for federal funds to make the desired park improvements. The survey identified the locations and elevations of "all buildings, trees, shrubbery, fences, roads, and other features" existing on the site, including underground water and sewer pipes. Their \$400 contract also included stormwater runoff plans, a new road alignment that would enter the park from West Seventh Street on the north, as well as any other new roads, drives, walks, curbs and gutters, and extensions of water, sewer, and lighting systems.<sup>33</sup> The City hoped that in the coming year the park improvements designed by Paulette and Wilson would employ many men currently on relief.

Early in February 1935, the City submitted a \$282,000 request to the Public Works Administration (PWA) to fund a variety of projects. Among the projects were the park improvements based on Paulette and Wilson's plans, including sewer and water extensions, drainage improvements, and grading (\$4,000); a new north park entrance (\$16,000); landscaping (\$5,000); sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and road paving (\$24,000); new buildings (\$77,000); and a swimming pool (\$40,000).<sup>34</sup> The improvements were scheduled to occur over a ten-year period, although Mayor B.L. Callahan expressed hope that "a vast amount of the work [would] be done during the coming spring and summer."<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the request also included an amount for improvements to the existing natatorium.<sup>36</sup>

The guidelines of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which administered PWA funding, encouraged projects "of a public character and of economic and social benefit to the general

<sup>30</sup> The bandshell burned in 1992 as was replaced in the late 1990s.

<sup>31</sup> "Play Opening Concert Here Next Sunday," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 15 May 1934.

<sup>32</sup> "Survey Park," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 26 December 1934.

<sup>33</sup> "Survey Park," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 26 December 1934.

<sup>34</sup> "City Has a Huge Program," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 6 February 1935.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Abilene City Submits Ten Year Program," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 9 February 1935.

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public....” and the Abilene proposal fit the bill. At the end of March 1935, the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) engineering department approved Abilene’s park improvements and awarded the City \$15,784 to begin work. Project funds included a \$1,200 cash match provided by the city. The bulk of the funding paid for labor; only \$2,047 was allocated for the purchase of materials. While this amount did not approach the original PWA request, it employed 100 men from April through the summer.<sup>37</sup> Supplementing this amount, the City floated \$4,000 in one-year bonds to cover the cost of supervising the work at the park.<sup>38</sup>

The construction supervisor was Abilene contractor Ed Reddy. Under his direction, the work crew completed an extensive series of tasks. They graded the entire park “to provide for proper surface drainage;” and laid out and built new park drives, 918 feet of water main, and 2,645 lineal feet of curbs and gutters along the drives, and 655 lineal feet of valley gutter at intersections to enhance drainage. Concurrent with the relief work was some reconfiguration of the fairgrounds. The existing livestock buildings were moved to their current location at the northwest corner of the property. Likewise, a portion of the new water line provided fire protection for the fairgrounds livestock buildings.<sup>39</sup>

The City anticipated submitting an additional monetary request for the remaining work outlined in the original application. As reported by *the Abilene Daily Reflector*, this work might include moving existing or constructing new buildings, constructing a swimming pool, improving picnic facilities, constructing parking lots, building sidewalks, and “general beautification.” The paper editorialized, “The park work is well designed and planned and if the work is completed as planned, it should be a park of [sic] which the citizens of Abilene may look with pride.”<sup>40</sup>

In August 1935, the Chamber of Commerce and City commissioners met with WPA officials to discuss submitting a request to the WPA for funds to complete additional park improvements. The primary items discussed were purchasing 22 acres east of the existing park for a new “sanitary” swimming pool, constructing a bridge over Mud Creek at 8<sup>th</sup> Street to provide a second park entrance, and general “beautification” of the park. Architect Frank Cayton presented a sketch of the proposed pool at the meeting, and Dr. Bruce Thayer, president of the Chamber of Commerce noted that if nothing else, the park needed additional land for parking. “Other cities are taking advantage of the federal offers,” he continued, “and I believe that now is the time to act. Abilene can get permanent benefits now much cheaper than it will ever be able to again.” He also noted that the new pool would pay for itself within a few years. The local WPA representative urged the city to submit a proposal while the WPA program was gearing up, so that funding could be issued as soon as the program was up and running.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “\$15,748 For City Park,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 28 March 1935.

<sup>38</sup> “City Issues Bonds,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 3 April 1935.

<sup>39</sup> “\$15,748 For City Park,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 28 March 1935.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> “Plan New Work,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 17 August 1935.

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A bond issue was necessary to raise the required \$30,000 – \$35,000 local match. The Chamber of Commerce was put in charge of circulating petitions requesting the bond issue, and obtained 200 signatures in less than a week.<sup>42</sup> In an extensive statement published in the *Abilene Daily Reflector* less than a week before the election, the Chamber urged,

It is necessary for the local community to approve either WPA...or PWA... projects immediately in order to continue receiving Federal funds for the relief of local unemployment. If we fail to do this, Federal assistance will be withdrawn and our local relief problems will be left to us to handle as best we can.

The park project, the Chamber continued,

...is a well-balanced project that fits the government program giving maximum of labor and providing Abilene with something of permanent business and social value. It will bring us a greater proportionate gift from the government in comparison to the amount we put up than most other projects.

Arguing that the money was “practically an outright gift from the government,” the Chamber explained that the cost of the project to the City was roughly equivalent to the cost of building the pool alone. Since the pool would be income generating, it would pay for itself within a few years and provide additional revenue for other city services. The statement concluded, “in view of the fact that we can provide regular employment for our unemployed and receive a \$75,000 or \$80,000 development for our city, Abilene’s share of the cost seems slight considering the benefits to be gained.”<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, the reports about the project in the *Abilene Daily Chronicle* were less optimistic. While the *Reflector* emphasized that the project would fund “great quantities of labor over quite a period of time,” the *Chronicle* reported, “The commissioners, although they do not like to go into debt, feel that Abilene must sponsor a project to furnish employment under the WPA, and that as long as the federal money will be spent anyway, that the city might as well get some permanent benefits from it.”<sup>44</sup> The day before the election, the *Chronicle* dourly reiterated, “If Abilene does not vote in favor of this project, the entire burden of supporting the unemployed of the community will fall back on the city and county unless other projects are provided. Federal taxes will be levied but Abilene will receive no federal funds....”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> “Sign Petition,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 20 August 1935.

<sup>43</sup> “\$35,000 Bond Election Monday,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 11 September 1935.

<sup>44</sup> “Sign Petition,” *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 20 August 1935; “May Ask Voters to Vote \$35,000 Bonds For Park,” *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 17 August 1935.

<sup>45</sup> “To Vote Bonds at City Election Here Tomorrow,” *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 15 September 1935.

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Despite the Chamber's efforts to rally support, the measure was defeated by 13 votes. Of 899 votes cast, 442 supported the proposal and 457 opposed it. This surprised to city officials who anticipated victory.<sup>46</sup>

That November, Abilene received WPA funding for a variety of relief efforts. Among these projects were construction of a new water tower, a variety of road projects, and sidewalk improvements. The park also received funding to install curbs and gutters in several locations, to gravel the drives, and to install some landscaping. Among the streets improved were Pine Street from Third Street to the park entrance; 4<sup>th</sup> Street from the park entrance to Rogers; and around the circle at the Agricultural Hall. This round of park improvements cost \$8,728, of which \$7,016 was provided by the WPA.<sup>47</sup>

The following year, the City again approached the public to approve park improvement bonds to match federal appropriations. The *Chronicle* presented a more positive spin this time writing, "On [August 25] one of the most important city measures of the city's history will be put before the voting public to get their opinion of the project." It continued,

Last summer and this summer Abilene has seen small and large picnic parties and swimming parties packing up their baggage and driving to a neighboring city for their recreation period. ...People know that upon their arrival [in Salina, Clay Center or Manhattan] an inviting green park with tiny streams and bright flowers will greet them.<sup>48</sup>

The proposal included a new pool, a new stadium, three new tennis courts, and new roads around the pool. The city had by this time acquired an option to purchase the 22 acres east of the park for the swimming pool. Speaking in favor of the bond issue, the Mayor and the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce emphasized the positive impact the project would have on the community. One notable difference from the prior year was the retirement of several of the city's large bonds. Approval of the new bonds would not appreciably raise taxes for Abilene's financially struggling population. After the difficulties faced by the relief programs in 1935, the officials also pointed out that the project would employ 180 men for six months and that similar opportunities to capitalize on federal matching funds may not be available in the future.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, on August 25, 1936, city voters overwhelmingly approved \$40,000 in bonds for park improvements to match \$60,000 in WPA funds. The project included the pool and stadium, four clay tennis courts surrounded by netting, nine picnic ovens, a "comfort station," one mile of new gravel

<sup>46</sup> "City Votes No," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 17 September 1935.

<sup>47</sup> "Work Provided Many in Local WPA Activities," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 22 November 1935; "Get Two Jobs," *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 14 November 1935.

<sup>48</sup> "Date of Special Park Bond Vote Two Weeks Off," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 9 August 1936.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

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drives, and formal gardens.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the 1935 measure had lost by 13 votes, the results in 1936 favored the bond issue by a 653-vote majority.

In early October, the WPA office in Washington approved the park improvement project supported by Abilene voters, validating the contracts for the sale of city bonds. Pending the completion of plans by architects Murray and Cayton, work was to begin immediately on the pool and stadium. City officials estimated that construction would be underway by the end of the month.<sup>51</sup>

In November 1936, the City completed its purchase of the 22 acres immediately east of the original park/fairgrounds property from William Klamm. The ownership of this property can be traced to 1893 when M. Nicolay purchased it from John Johntz (assignee). The designation "assignee" is interpreted to imply that Johntz, an early Abilene settler and prominent businessman, represented the Abilene Town Site Company in this transaction. No previous deed record was located that shows the transfer of this parcel from the Town Site Company to any other party. In 1904, Nicolay sold the property to Edward Rose. Rose's estate sold the property to Edward Haney in 1912, and in 1932 Haney sold the property to William Klamm.

As work on the park began in October, the *Abilene Daily Chronicle* reported, "Included in the park will be a modern new swimming pool, nearly twice the size of the old pool in Abilene, a new stadium with a seating capacity of 2,028. Both will be built of native stone and will be made on simple attractive lines."<sup>52</sup> The contractors in charge were architects Murray and Cayton. Materials for the pool were provided by the Topeka Foundry and Iron Works Company, Jno. W. Asling Lumber Company, the Kansas Lumber Company, the Badger Lumber Company, and the Central Lumber Company.<sup>53</sup> The cornerstone for the pool was laid on July 23, 1937. The WPA made two allocations of funds for this project. The first payment of \$56,475 was paid on September 15, 1936, at the start of construction. The second payment of \$35,378 came on February 1, 1938, shortly before the pool opened.

The City originally hoped to open the pool on Memorial Day, but inclement weather delayed the completion of final painting and plumbing, and the opening was postponed until June 5. However, on May 28, the public was invited to tour the facility. The pool equipment included three chlorine tanks that would treat water run through on a continuous circulation system. Three hundred clothes baskets (painted green to contrast with the silver walls) were housed in the "office." White lights illuminated the pool deck and underwater. A highly touted feature of the pool was the rooftop observation platform

<sup>50</sup> "Big Majority is Given for Bond Issue of \$40,000," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 26 August 1936.

<sup>51</sup> "Local Park Project Meets Approval At Washington," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 9 October 1936.

<sup>52</sup> "Local Park Project Meets Approval At Washington," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 9 October 1936.

<sup>53</sup> "It's Easy to Keep Cool This Summer!" *Abilene Daily Reflector*, 4 June 1938.

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from which "visitors may ... watch the swimmers." Pool manager, Floyd Currier, also held a contest for local children to come up with a four-word slogan for the pool.<sup>54</sup>

The formal opening of the pool on June 22, 1938 was a grand event. A temporary 35-foot diving tower was installed for a performance by a professional diving team from Salina. At 7 p.m., a parade left city hall. Following the Abilene Band were members of the American Legion, Boy Scouts from Brown's Camp, the high school band, and members of the VFW. The dedication ceremony, chaired by Park Board member Dr. Bruce Thayer, was broadcast over radio station KFBI. The program included music by the City Band, reports on the park WPA project, presentation of the pool and American Legion fountain to the city, a diving exhibition, and a bathing beauty contest. In addition to Mr. Thayer, Mayor B.L. Callahan, WPA field supervisor Alton Register, and WPA state director Clarence Nevins participated in the ceremony.<sup>55</sup>

While construction of the pool was wrapping up, work was getting underway on the new formal garden at the southwest corner of the park, immediately south of the bandshell. Inspired by the Italian Renaissance and Beaux-Arts landscapes popular in the 1930s, the garden features a highly formal geometric plan, with a circular fountain anchoring the south end and a rustic pergola anchoring the north end.<sup>56</sup> Rose bushes, shrubs and perennial flowers flank the grassy area between these two elements. Other plantings included rice grass and lilies. The latter were placed in the lily pond at the center of the garden.<sup>57</sup> The members of the James R. Cutler Post of the American Legion, Abilene, donated an illuminated fountain. "Lighted by a battery of colored searchlights placed at the base of the flow," the fountain was similar to those shown at an international exposition in Paris in 1937. As planned, the fountain could project light in seven different color combinations.<sup>58</sup> The American Legion post also donated the flagpole subsequently installed south of the swimming pool near the Poplar Street entrance to the park.

Construction of the new fairground stadium, also designed and supervised by Murray and Cayton, began concurrently with construction of the swimming pool. The stadium was dedicated on September 26, 1939, in conjunction with Old Pioneer Days and the 70th anniversary of the incorporation of Abilene. At the ceremony, Clarence Nevis, state WPA director presented the stadium to the city and the six-year-old fair queen, assisted by her ten princesses, christened the new facility "Tom Smith Stadium," in honor of Abilene's first Sheriff, whom Mayor L.C. Long described as "willful, courageous and a clean living gentleman." The program also featured a concert by the town band, jugglers, and an elaborate fireworks

<sup>54</sup> "Weather Causes Setback in New Swimming Pool," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 25 May 1938.

<sup>55</sup> "Plans Complete for Ceremonies at Pool Tonight," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 22 June 1938.

<sup>56</sup> Phoebe Cutler, 34.

<sup>57</sup> "Weather Causes Setback in New Swimming Pool," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 25 May 1938.

<sup>58</sup> "Legionnaires to Install Colored Water Fountain," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1938.

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display. For the program, 500 seats in the grandstand were outfitted with cushioned seats and backrests for the comfort of patrons who paid 25 cents for the reserved seats.<sup>59</sup>

In 1944, the City Park was named Eisenhower Park in honor of native son, then General Dwight D. Eisenhower. In 1952, Eisenhower announced his run for the presidency from the stadium.<sup>60</sup>

Changes to the park since the completion of the WPA work have been relatively minor. The rooftop deck was removed from the bathhouse and the mechanical systems were updated. The stadium facilities were improved with the addition of bleachers, rodeo chutes, and judging boxes to the south and west of the historic building. A new restroom building replaced the New Deal-era facility, which now stands vacant. The WPA clay tennis courts were removed, and new tennis courts were constructed at the far southeast corner of the park. Basketball courts occupy the site of the old tennis courts. Some new playground equipment and picnic facilities have been added as well. Although the segment between Poplar and Pine streets north of and parallel to 4<sup>th</sup> Street was vacated, the park circulation system, the curbs and gutters and the use of spaces within the park remain essentially unchanged.

Park Designers

The names of one engineering firm and three local architects were associated with the improvements to Abilene's city park. Paulette and Wilson Engineering Company, Salina, surveyed and designed the layout of the park. Joe Murray and Frank Cayton designed and supervised construction of the band shell, bathhouse and stadium, while C.L. Brainard prepared the plan for the formal garden.<sup>61</sup>

*Paulette and Wilson*

Partners Murray Wilson and Robert J. Paulette established their practice in 1932. Unemployed at the time, they sought to take advantage of the many government contracts then available.<sup>62</sup> The firm designed many dams and lakes for the Kansas Fish and Game Commission as well as public improvements for Kansas municipalities. Among their other New Deal projects was the design for the dam at Crawford County Park near Farlington. In 1940 the firm was hired to identify the geographical center of the United States, which it identified near Lebanon, Kansas.

Bob Paulette died in 1941, and the firm changed its name to Wilson and Company, Engineers and Architects. By the start of World War II, the firm held contracts for the design of military air bases and

<sup>59</sup> "Stadium Opens Free Fair," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 26 September 1939. Smith brought order to the wild west town by enforcing an ordinance that prohibited carrying weapons in town. He met an untimely death just five months after arriving in Abilene when ambushed during an effort to arrest two wanted murderers.

<sup>60</sup> Cecilia Harris, "Abilene Stadium Has a Wealth of History," *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, 22 August 1983.

<sup>61</sup> "Park a Bargain," *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, 4 June 1938.

<sup>62</sup> Grove, Jack, Jr., "Tribute to an Outstanding Graduate," *Kansas State Engineer* vol. 43, no. 2 (November 1961): 8-9.

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for projects with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wilson and Company remains a leading national engineering firm, with 400 employees in 14 offices nationwide and an affiliate office in Mexico.<sup>63</sup>

*Murray and Cayton*

The partnership of Murray and Cayton was established between 1928 and 1934. In 1934 and for many years thereafter, Murray and Cayton were the only architectural practice advertised in the Abilene city directory. The firm completed many New Deal-funded design projects in Dickinson County, and is the only named architect associated with the county's public building construction during this period. Their public projects began with the expansion of the Abilene Library and bandshell funded by the CWA in 1934 and included new schools in Chapman, park improvements (including a swimming pool and bathhouse) in Herington, and Garfield School in Abilene, in addition to the Abilene City Park. At Garfield School, Murray and Cayton assisted former state architect Joseph Radotinsky on the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired design.

William Joseph (Joe) Murray was probably born in Abilene to a family that emigrated from Iowa shortly before the turn of the century. It appears that he was the youngest child in this large Catholic family, which included four sisters and four brothers.<sup>64</sup> After serving in World War I, Murray returned to Abilene and found employment at the United Telephone Company. His occupation is first listed as "engineer" and subsequently as "architect."<sup>65</sup> On Sept. 20, 1921, Joe Murray married Estella Vansickel, with whom he raised three children.<sup>66</sup>

Frank Cayton was born in 1906 in Gower, Missouri. He was educated in St. Louis and at Kansas State University before moving to Abilene in 1927, probably upon completion of his schooling. Unfortunately, Cayton is not listed in the 1928 Abilene city directory, so it is not known with whom he worked when he first arrived in town. According to his obituary, he served in the Navy during World War II. Cayton married twice and had two daughters. His first wife, LaVivian Peterson, died on January 1, 1960. Cayton was survived by his second wife, Rema Rasher.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Wilson & Company, Engineers & Architects*, [corporate home page on-line]; available from: <http://www.wilsonco.com/history.asp>; Internet; accessed 10 September 2001.

<sup>64</sup> Obituary for Charles Francis Murray, *Chapman Adv.*, 23 July 1942, and Obituary for Julia Murray, *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, 2 May 1970. Both on file at the Dickinson County Historical Society, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>65</sup> Prewitt Directory Company, *Prewitt's Abilene, Kansas City Directory* (Springfield, Missouri: Prewitt Directory Company, 1920-21 and 1923).

<sup>66</sup> Obituary for Estella Murray, *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, 9 January 1973, Dickinson County Historical Society, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>67</sup> Obituary for Francis H. Cayton, 9 March 1978, Dickinson County Historical Society, Abilene, Kansas.

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In 1948, the office of architects Murray and Cayton was housed in the Abilene National Bank Building.<sup>68</sup> By 1964, as the partners were approaching retirement, Wayne Englehardt became a partner and the firm was renamed Murray, Cayton and Englehardt.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that Englehardt had been an employee in the Murray and Cayton firm for some time.

It appears that Joe Murray died between 1965 and 1967. Only his widow's name is listed in the city directory for 1967-68 and the architectural firm had been renamed Cayton, Jones, Englehardt & Gillman.<sup>70</sup> Frank Cayton retired in 1976, two years prior to his death, at which time the firm moved to Salina.<sup>71</sup>

*Charles Brainard*

Born in 1903 in Greeley, Colorado, Charles Brainard came to Kansas in 1926 to study architecture at Kansas State University. In 1930 he received his bachelor's degree and married Donna Duckwall. Following graduation, the Brainards moved to Minnesota where Charles taught technical drawing at the University of Minnesota, and worked as a draftsman and designer for the Pine Beach Development Company in Gull Lake, Minnesota. He returned to Manhattan a few years later, earning his Master's degree in Architecture in 1937. The next year, Brainard became architect for his wife's family's business, the Duckwall chain of dime stores, and was named a trustee in the A.L. Duckwall Trust Estate. In 1942, he became director of the Duckwall firm, as well as director and vice president of the Western Merchandise Company and the United Trust Company, all in Abilene. In addition to his formal duties, Brainard continued to teach engineering, drafting, science, management, and war training. He was also active in civic affairs, serving on the school board and City Planning Commission during the 1940s. An interesting sidenote, Brainard, who designed the formal gardens at the park, was the next door neighbor of architect Frank Cayton. A 1948 profile of Brainard describes "rose gardens" as one of his hobbies.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mullin-Kille Co., *The Mullin-Kille Abilene, Kansas ConSurvey City Directory* (Columbus, Ohio: Mullin-Kille Company, 1948).

<sup>69</sup> Rocky Mountain Directory Company, *Abilene, Kansas City Directory* (Loveland, Colorado: Rocky Mountain Directory Company, 1964). No city directories are available for Abilene between 1948 and 1964.

<sup>70</sup> Rocky Mountain Directory Company, *Abilene, Kansas City Directory* (Loveland, Colorado: Rocky Mountain Directory Company, 1967-68).

<sup>71</sup> Obituary for Frank Cayton.

<sup>72</sup> "Know Your Kansans... Architect... Brainard," *Kansas Construction Magazine* vol. 1, no. 7 (October 1948): 16.

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**UTM REFERENCES (continued)**

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundaries for the Abilene City Park Historic District are 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, Eisenhower Park Road and Pine Street on the West, and Poplar Street on the east. The north boundary begins at Pine Street just north of the stadium. It follows the dirt drive to the first light pole at approximately the midpoint of the old racetrack oval, and then follows the light poles south curving back slightly to the west to the corner of the paddock fencing. The north boundary then runs due east to Poplar Street passing immediately north of the tree line that marks the developed limits of the New Deal-era park. These boundaries are shown in detail on the accompanying sketch map.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary of the Abilene City Park Historic District has been drawn to include the contiguous, contributing resources associated with the park improvements made during the mid- to late-1930s using federal and state public relief funds. Excluded from the district are portions of the park north, south, west and east of these resources that pre or post-date the Depression-era improvements, that have no association with state or federal Depression-era relief programs, and/or that have lost their historic significance. The south and west boundaries along 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Eisenhower Park Road roughly correspond to the south and west edges of the park property. On the west side of the park, immediately north of the bandshell, are administrative and husbandry buildings for the fair that postdate the period of significance and the context for this district. To the north of the stadium are a series of baseball diamonds and associated amenities constructed within the past decade. The northeast boundary was drawn to include the extant light poles visible on the c. 1946 aerial of the park but to exclude additional portions of the racetrack oval that pre-date the district's period of significance. From the corner of the paddock, the boundary extends due east to Poplar Street at a point immediately north of the tree line, visible on the c. 1946 photograph. The boundary is then follows the far eastern barrel of Poplar street. The tennis courts at the southeastern corner of the park are excluded because this parcel was not part of the park when the improvements were made in the late 1930s. In addition to the residential lots that border the district's southern boundary is the old Park shop building. While this building continues to provide support facilities for the Park it is excluded from the historic district because it pre-dates the period of significance.

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**PHOTO LOG**

Name of Resource: Abilene City Park Historic District  
County and State: Dickinson County, Kansas  
Photographer: Elizabeth Rosin, Historic Preservation Services  
Date of Photographs: March and July, 2001  
Location of Negatives: Cultural Resources Division, Kansas State Historical Society

**Photo # & View**

1. Fountain lobe. View looking NW.
2. Bathhouse, south elevation. Non-contributing flag pole in foreground. View looking N.
3. Bathhouse, south and east elevations. View looking NW.
4. Bathhouse, south elevation and entry. View looking NE.
5. Bathhouse, south elevation and entry, showing ghost of stairs to rooftop deck. View looking NW.
6. Bathhouse, north elevation. View looking SW.
7. Bathhouse checkroom. View looking SE.
8. Ladies dressing room, bathhouse. View looking W.
9. Men's dressing room, bathhouse. View looking E.
10. Bathhouse pump room. View looking E.
11. Pool deck. View looking NW.
12. Wading pool. View looking NE.
13. North elevation of bathhouse and pool deck. View looking S.
14. Poplar Street traffic island. View looking SE.
15. Picnic/play area along Poplar looking at the north tree line. View looking SW.
16. East side of picnic/play area. Poplar is on right; racetrack is on left. View looking NE.
17. East side of picnic/play area. View looking NE.
18. Picnic/play area with old and new restroom buildings. View looking W.
19. Basketball courts in picnic/play area. View looking SW.
20. Picnic/play area. View looking NE from corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Pine streets.
21. Picnic/play area. View looking E.
22. Vacated road on the west side of the picnic/play area. View looking E.
23. Racetrack oval and picnic/play area. View looking E.
24. Typical curb and gutter.
25. Historic restroom building, north and east elevations. View looking SW.
26. Historic restroom building, south and west elevations. View looking NE.
27. Typical picnic table/benches. View looking NE.
28. Typical picnic oven. View looking NE.
29. New restroom building. View looking NW.
30. Pine Street north of picnic/play area. View looking N.

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31. Pine Street looking S from Stadium.
32. Stadium, west and south elevations. View looking NE
33. Stadium, west and north elevations. View looking SE.
34. Stadium, main entrance, west elevation. View looking E.
35. Stadium, typical bay, west elevation. View looking E.
36. Stadium bleachers (east elevation) and south elevation. View looking N.
37. Stadium bleachers (east elevation) and north elevation. View looking S.
38. Stadium, interior corridor. View looking N.
39. Stadium, interior corridor. View looking NW.
40. Gravel drive north of stadium. View looking E.
41. Entrance to stadium rodeo field. View looking SW.
42. Stadium bleachers (east elevation), north rodeo chutes, north bleachers and crow's nest. View looking W.
43. Rodeo field. View looking SE.
44. East and south sides of rodeo field with west bleachers and judging/announcing booth. Stadium bleachers on right. View looking S.
45. Judging/announcing booth and south rodeo chutes. View looking NE.
46. Entrance to paddock. View looking S.
47. Outside of east rodeo stands with view of restrooms/concession building and paddock. View looking S.
48. Restroom/concession building and paddock. View looking SW.
49. Pine Street traffic island with band shell in background. View looking NW.
50. Bandshell landscaping and Pine Street traffic island. View looking S.
51. Pine Street traffic island. View looking SW.
52. Eisenhower Park Road, west edge of park. View looking S.
53. Formal garden. View looking SE from intersection of Pine Street and Eisenhower Park Road.
54. Formal garden. View looking SW toward pergola from NE entrance.
55. Pergola in formal garden. View looking W.
56. Formal garden. View looking SE.
57. Fountain and pergola in formal garden. View looking NW.
58. East sundial in formal garden. View looking E.
59. West sundial in formal garden. View looking NE.
60. Garden path and gazebo in formal garden. View looking SE.
61. Garden path, gazebo and clock in formal garden. View looking NW.

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**Photo Angles**

