

## ABSTRACT

“For the Pleasure of the People”  
A Centennial History of William Cameron Park, Waco, Texas

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In this thesis I seek to trace the one hundred year history of William Cameron Park, Waco, Texas. The history of the park will be placed within the larger context of Waco and the United States. Special attention will be paid to how Cameron Park was shaped by events such as the “City Beautiful” movement, the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights Era as well as how Cameron Park shaped the lives of Wacoans during these periods of time. The initial development of the park, 1910-1930, the decline of the park in the 1970s and 1980s, and revitalization efforts from 1985 to the present, constitute the critical time periods in Cameron Park’s history. To piece together the relatively undocumented history of the park it was imperative to rely heavily on newspapers and oral and history interviews.

"For The Pleasure Of The People"  
A Centennial History Of William Cameron Park, Waco, Texas

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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## DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad

Thank you for believing in me. I love you both

To Liza

I cannot adequately express what you mean to me. Thank you for your support,  
patience, and understanding

To the family of William Cameron

This project would not have been possible without your magnanimity and dedication to  
the citizens and city of Waco, thank you

## CHAPTER ONE

### Proctor Springs and the Park Movement in Waco

When it comes to providing the public with recreational spaces, few cities rival Waco, Texas. How many cities can claim ownership of a 416-acre public park nestled within its limits? Even fewer cities can boast of having a park as topographically, recreationally, and culturally diverse as Waco's William Cameron Park. In 2010 Cameron Park will begin its 100<sup>th</sup> year as Waco's pleasure ground. Surprisingly, few people know how Cameron Park came to be the recreational heart of Waco. How did Cameron Park reach its current size? How has the appearance of the park changed? Who were the people behind the donation, construction, and maintenance of the park? How has the use of Cameron Park by the citizens of Waco evolved? Perhaps equally importantly, how has racial diversity in Cameron Park changed over the past century? What have been the highlights, dark times, controversies, and turning points in the park's history? Cameron Park is an outdoor escape within the city limits of Waco, comfortably tucked away from the hustle and bustle of city life. To understand how Cameron Park came to be, how it evolved, and what its future might hold can only help to foster an even deeper appreciation for Waco's most valuable public asset.

On May 21, 1910, the *Waco Times-Herald* reported the unexpected purchase of the coveted Proctor Springs property by William C. Lawson. Speculation as to whether the land would be converted into a large park was the conversation topic of the day all over Waco. Lawson, President of the Waco Cotton Exchange and Chairman of the

Young Men's Business League's Committee on Parks and Boulevards, advocated for parks and a river boulevard in Waco as fervently as anyone. With the \$25,000 purchase of eighty-five acres that included the entire Proctor Springs tract, the citizens of Waco waited anxiously to see if their dreams of a large park would come to fruition. Mr. Lawson, however, had no intention of divulging his plans for the Proctor Springs property.<sup>1</sup> To understand the fascination surrounding Lawson's purchase of Proctor Springs, it is necessary to trace the history of the land, and the way in which the importance of the land changed from generation to generation.

Proctor Springs and the surrounding land had long been considered one of the most beautiful nature spots in the American South. Fed by water rising through cracks created by the Balcones Fault, the ice-cold springs once flowed with tremendous force into the Brazos River. The fault line also helped to produce the diversity of the topography surrounding the springs as shown by the flood plain, deep ravines, and towering limestone cliffs. Just north of Proctor Springs, the Brazos and South Bosque rivers meet. In some native cultures, the confluence of two rivers is sacred territory, which might explain the absence of Native American settlements near the bluffs.<sup>2</sup>

In 1772 the Waco Indians, a sub-tribe of the Wichita Confederacy, established a village on the west bank of the Brazos River near the Waco Springs. The Waco Indians chose the land for its abundance of fresh water, fertile soil, and timber. Although they

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<sup>1</sup>"Proctor Springs Now Owned by W.C. Lawson," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 21, 1910. Estimates on the size of the Proctor Springs Property range from eighty-five to one hundred and twenty-five acres, with the former being closest to the actual size of the tract.

<sup>2</sup>Kenna Lang, "An Environmental History: William Cameron Park, Waco, Texas" (master's thesis, Baylor University, 2007), 22-23; "William Cameron Park is Waco: A Public History Study and Recommendations to the City of Waco, Texas" (History Seminar Paper, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1998), 12-13; John Philpott, interview by Mark Firmin, January 14, 2009, in Georgetown, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.



resided on the west bank of the Brazos, the Waco Indians did not fish. Instead, they thrived upon agriculture and hunting. With a heavy reliance on corn, the Waco Indian diet also consisted of squash, beans, watermelon, and peaches that were grown each spring. The Wacos hunted buffalo, turkey, bear, and deer. In *Waco: A Sesquicentennial History*, Waco historian Patricia Ward Wallace noted that the Waco Indians revered the Brazos and the springs that fed into it because they considered the springs to hold sacred powers. The Wacos referred to the Brazos as the “Great Tohomoho” and believed that a goddess named “Woman Having Powers in Water” resided there. By drinking the sacred water from the springs and river, the Wacos believed they would ensure their prosperity and security.<sup>3</sup> Vigilant against threats to their land from rival tribes and encroaching white settlers, the Waco Indians thrived under the protective powers of the Brazos.

With the arrival of the Cherokees—who had been driven west along the Trail of Tears by the Federal government—in Central Texas in the 1820s, the Waco Indians faced a challenge to their security. In 1829 the resurgent Cherokees attacked, scalping at least fifty Waco Indians. By 1830 the Cherokee Indians established a temporary village of their own on the east bank of the Brazos River across from the Wacos. The appearance of the Cherokees marked the beginning of the end for the Waco Village, and by 1837 the village was abandoned. The Wacos migrated northwest along the Brazos, eventually settling in Palo Pinto County, but the village at Waco was soon reoccupied.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Cherokees had ousted the Wacos, they did not occupy the Waco Village site. Instead, Anglo-Americans, having begun colonizing the Mexican province

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<sup>3</sup>Patricia Ward Wallace, *Waco: A Sesquicentennial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 1999), 13.

<sup>4</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 15; Lang, “An Environmental History,” 27; Frank H. Watt, “The Waco Indian Village and Its Peoples,” *Texana* 6, no. 3 (1968): 209.

of Texas under the guidance of Stephen F. Austin in the 1820s, slowly made their way west and into the Texas interior. In 1837 Texas Ranger Company A, under the command of Captain Thomas A. Barron, established Fort Fisher near the site of the abandoned Waco Village. The outpost was established to defend settlers from Native American attacks, but with no settlers to protect, the Rangers soon retreated to safer territory. Although the Rangers only briefly occupied land near the village, it was long enough to make an impact on a young Austrian native, Ranger Lieutenant George B. Erath. In his memoirs, Erath recalled that the fertile soil, the village's central location, and a huge spring gushing with ice-cold water contributed to his belief that the old village site marked an excellent location for a town.<sup>5</sup>

In 1844 George Barnard established the Torrey Brothers Trading Post No. 2 eight miles south of Waco. Located along Tehuacana Creek, Barnard's post was the first permanent white settlement in the area. A year later a Scottish pioneer, Neil McLennan, employed Erath to survey land along the South Bosque River. By October 1845 McLennan built a log cabin eight miles west of the Waco village site. That same year Sarah Ann Walker claimed 4,600 acres of land at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque rivers. Walker was given claim to the land by the Republic of Texas for services rendered by her husband, Jacob, who died fighting at the Alamo. With little money to pay the soldiers who fought to secure Texas's independence from Mexico in 1836, the Republic of Texas offered land. On May 14, 1846, the State of Texas—admitted into the Union the year before—gave 640 acres along the Brazos to Calvin B. Emmons, a veteran

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<sup>5</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 17; Watt, "The Waco Indian Village," 209. Primary accounts by Erath and other early McLennan County settlers can be found in the 1876 city directory by John Sleeper and J.C. Hutchins, *Waco and McLennan County, Texas. Containing a City Directory of Waco, Historical Sketches of the City and County; Biographical Sketches and Notices of a Few Prominent Citizens* (Reprint, Waco: Texian Press, 1966).

of the Battle of San Jacinto. The 640 acres in the Emmons survey included the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque rivers, apparently a portion of the same tract claimed by Sarah Walker. Both Emmons's and Walker's land claims lay on the east side of the Brazos River. Surveys on the west bank of the Brazos were conducted by John M. Stephens and Lee R. Davis in the 1850s. Much of the land surveyed by Stephens, Emmons, and Davis would eventually be included in Cameron Park.<sup>6</sup>

A short distance south of those surveys, a new village was being laid out by George Erath. Erath, employed as a surveyor for land agent Jacob De Cordova, laid out the first block on March 1, 1849. At the insistence of Erath, the village retained the name Waco.<sup>7</sup> Lots in Waco Village sold for five dollars, and among the first buyers was Captain Shapley P. Ross. In 1845 Ross, under orders from the Federal government, had set out to establish a Ranger base on the east side of the Brazos River. Eager to retain a military presence in the new Waco Village, De Cordova and Erath promised Ross four free lots and the option to purchase additional farm land for one dollar per acre.

On June 10, 1850, Waco was selected as the county seat for the newly formed McLennan County. Waco Village was incorporated as the Town of Waco by the Texas State Legislature in 1857. By 1859, Waco boasted a courthouse, a newspaper known as the *Era*, several churches and schools, and 949 citizens. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Waco's rapid growth and prosperity came to a halt. Like most agricultural communities in the South, Waco's economy depended on cotton and slave labor. Waco

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<sup>6</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 18-19; City of Waco, Records and Archives, Cameron Park File, Microfilm Reel 3, blip 0175, McLennan County Abstract Company, March 27, 1912 "Abstract of Parts of the C.B. Emmons and J.M. Stephens Surveys."

<sup>7</sup>Roger N. Conger, s.v. "Waco, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WWhdw1.html> (accessed October 23, 2008); Wallace, *Waco*, 19-20.

and McLennan County raised seventeen companies composed of a total of 2,200 soldiers (more than half of the county's total white population) for the Confederate military. Union victory and the emancipation of slaves would bring changes to Waco during the years of Reconstruction.<sup>8</sup>

After the Civil War, Wacoans resumed the "task of making Waco the Queen City of Central Texas." In 1868 the Chisholm Trail brought cattle, cowboys, and cash back to the streets of Waco. To insure the economic boost, the Waco Bridge Company worked to construct a massive suspension bridge across the Brazos. Opened on January 6, 1870, the Waco Suspension Bridge helped to provide the impetus for Waco to reincorporate itself as the "City of Waco." At the time, Waco's suspension bridge was the only bridge in Texas spanning the Brazos River, helping to funnel cattle, cotton, railroads, and people into the small Central Texas town. The impact of the bridge was almost immediate. Waco's 1870 population of 3,008 doubled by 1880, and doubled again to 14,445 by 1890. Largely due to surging cattle and cotton markets, the population booms established Waco as a transportation hub. Multiple railroads built lines into Waco, helping to attract woolen factories, grain elevators, lumber yards, and flour mills.<sup>9</sup>

As the economic and population explosion fueled the expansion of the city limits of Waco, several businessmen recognized the opportunity to purchase land cheaply and then develop it for commercial or residential purposes. On February 15, 1885, the Proctor Springs Company was chartered. Prominent Waco citizens Sam Sanger, Eugene Williams, J.B. Baker, and C.C McCulloch founded the company in hopes of developing a

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<sup>8</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 19-23, 34-37.

<sup>9</sup>George Robinson, "History of Waco" in *The Encyclopedia of Texas*, ed. by Ellis Arthur Davis and Edwin H. Grobe (Dallas, TX: Texas Development Bureau, 1922), 99 (quote 1); Conger, "Waco, TX," (quote 2); Wallace, *Waco*, 45.

residential community in the vicinity of Proctor Springs, northwest of the city limits of Waco. For several years Proctor Springs had served as a popular recreational and meeting spot. Celebrating emancipation day, African Americans held Juneteenth festivities at Proctor Springs. More than 6,000 Confederate and Union veterans from across the United States camped on the beautiful one hundred acres for a reunion in 1896. Although the Proctor Springs Addition—as the planned residential area was known—offered one of the most picturesque settings in the South, development proved slow, largely due to the emergence of an economic depression in the 1890s that crippled Waco’s real estate market for a fifteen year period, 1895-1910.<sup>10</sup>

Surpassing the various cold water springs in and around Waco was the discovery of a supply of warm artesian water. The first artesian well was drilled in Waco in 1889. By 1892 more than eighteen artesian wells were in use in Waco. In contrast to the Waco Indians who believed in the sacred powers of the cold springs, Wacoans at the end of the nineteenth century believed the warm artesian water possessed healing power. Billing itself as “Geyser City,” Waco enticed ailing people from all over the country to visit the lavishly constructed natatoriums and sanatoriums in the hopes that the waters would cure their infirmities. In 1909 Wacoans exhibited their progressive attitude when “the city arose en masse and threw off the antiquated system of aldermanic government and adopted the commissioner form.” The four elected commissioners placed politics aside as they adopted an agenda dedicated toward civic and economic improvement projects. The completion of Waco’s and Texas’s first skyscraper, the twenty-two story Amicable

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<sup>10</sup>“William Cameron Park is Waco,” 18-19; “Emancipation Celebration,” *Waco Daily Examiner*, June 17, 1896; “The Waco Reunion,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 5, 1896; Edward Rotan, “Reminiscences of Edward Rotan,” edited by Ellen Kuniyuki Brown, *Waco Heritage and History* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 21.

Life Insurance Building, in 1911 exemplified Waco's increasing prosperity and Wacoans commitment to advancing their city.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the optimistic attitude brought by prosperity, Wacoans slowly became aware of a growing need for recreation spaces in and around the city. The city directory of 1900-1901 listed a paltry forty-five acres of public park property. An agitation for parks and playgrounds grew, spearheaded by the Federation of Women's Clubs. Affluent Waco citizens also began to show a desire to purchase private recreational grounds. In 1902 the Waco Country Club purchased grounds near the Proctor Springs Addition and slightly north of E.A. Sturgis's country home. With the completion of a two-story Southern style clubhouse, members and guests of the Country Club enjoyed spectacular views from the outdoor deck overlooking the Brazos. One observer described the view of the surrounding Brazos and Bosque landscape as "Rembrandtesque."<sup>12</sup>

In an effort to remedy the park problem in Waco, a bond issue was put before the voters in February 1910. Prior to the vote, the pages of the *Times-Herald* were filled with voices urging passage of the bonds. No voice was stronger than that of Kate Friend, President of the City Federation of Women's Clubs. "Miss Kate" was a strong advocate for animals, children, and women. A noted Shakespeare scholar, Friend formed the Waco Shakespeare Club in 1899, served as the society editor for the *Times-Herald*, and was a board member of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs from 1904 to 1936. Her

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<sup>11</sup>Robinson, "History of Waco," 100 (quote 1); Wallace, *Waco*, 67 and 69.

<sup>12</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy's Waco City Directory, 1900-1901* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1900), 4; *Morrison and Fourmy's Waco City Directory, 1906-1907* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1906), 3; *Morrison and Fourmy's Waco City Directory, 1902-1903* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1902), 4 (quote 1).

staunch support of women and children led Friend to rally the women of Waco to address the shortage of parkland.<sup>13</sup>

She laid out five reasons why voters—who at the time did not include women or African-Americans—should support the park and school bond issue. First, Friend urged that a small park should be placed in every city ward. She argued that small parks were preferable to one large park because they would allow for equality and easy access for the poor, who might not be able to afford transportation to a park far away from home. The second reason appealed to businessmen. Drawing on the example of Brackenridge Park in San Antonio, Friend asserted that the presence of beautiful pleasure grounds could only serve to draw people into the city. Thus the more people that visited parks, the more businesses would be able to attract customers. Third, the women argued that parks were a moral asset. With a park nearby, workers would be less apt to go to a saloon after work and more likely to spend time picnicking with their families. By providing recreation spots, the voters would also give children safe playgrounds, helping to keep them off city streets and out of trouble. To support this argument, she recalled a conversation with a police officer in Denver who had remarked that once recreation grounds had been constructed the number of troublemakers had decreased from a “caboose full of bad boys every night” to a much smaller number. Fourth, she argued that open spaces would help to improve the health of Wacoans by providing areas of fresh air to combat the dreaded disease of tuberculosis. Finally, Friend insisted on behalf of the women of Waco that more parks would beautify an otherwise unattractive city. “Put parks in every ward of Waco and you will at once see the improvement of city yards and streets,” she wrote.

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<sup>13</sup>Dayton Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County, Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1972), 107.

“The park itself with its beautiful walks, flower beds, and perhaps pieces of statuary and as above all its weekly band concerts will lead unconsciously to a more refined taste.”<sup>14</sup>

City Commissioners John Wright, P.A. Gorman, and J.H. Mackey also voiced support for the park and school bonds. The commissioners urged that it was imperative for the City of Waco to purchase land for park purposes while it was still cheap and available. Small parks in each ward were also favored by the city commissioners. On February 17, 1910, the \$35,000 park bond issue passed at an astonishing 511 votes in favor to 147 votes against, a ratio of nearly four to one. The ease with which the park bond issue passed clearly revealed strong public support. How many parks, what size, and where they should be located were yet to be decided. Opinions on these questions proved forthcoming and abundant.

Seizing on the momentum achieved by the bond issue election, an editorial in the *Times-Herald* renewed the idea of a riverside boulevard that would extend from downtown Waco along the west bank of the Brazos through Proctor Springs and all the way to the Country Club. The editor reminded Wacoans that the idea had been considered but rejected in previous years. With the Federal government intent on establishing a lock and dam system to stabilize water levels on the Brazos River, the editor suggested the time had finally come for Waco to act. The first lock and dam was to be placed seven miles south of Waco, and it was believed that the depth of the Brazos could be stabilized up to nine feet. With navigability on the Brazos assured, aquatic activities would surely grow in popularity. A riverside drive similar to the one in New York City would only enhance the beauty and reputation of Waco. To complement

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<sup>14</sup>Kate Friend, “The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters: The City Federation Urges the Passage of the Park and School Bonds,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 11, 1910.



activity on the Brazos River, the editor also urged that Proctor Springs should be transformed into a public park.<sup>15</sup>

In 1910 Proctor Springs, while unsurpassed in natural beauty, was not a developed area. The city directory for 1904-1905 mentioned a park located at Proctor Springs, yet the city did not own the land. The Proctor Springs Company, having made little headway in developing the area, apparently allowed Mrs. Victoria Worsham to operate a small private park in the vicinity. Visitors to the park often came on Sunday to enjoy picnics and the beautiful scenery. To avoid the small entrance fee, little boys often sneaked under the barbed wire fence that enclosed the park area. Anticipating their rascally actions, Mrs. Worsham, wielding a switch, often chased the young intruders away.

Recently elected Mayor H.B. Mistrot joined the city commissioners and Federation of Women's Clubs in advocating a small park in each city ward. Mayor-elect Mistrot also supported the idea of a riverside boulevard that would travel through Proctor Springs en route to the Clubhouse. A Louisiana native, Mistrot also sought to draw attention to the adoption by Dallas of a city planning program, a growing trend in which a system of parks connected by a boulevard was a key element.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>"Small Parks are Favored: Breathing Spots in the Wards Proposed Rather than a Big Outside Park—A Statement," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 13, 1910; "The Bonds All Carried: School Bonds Successful over Four to One, Parks Nearly as Much," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 17, 1910; "River Boulevard Again Stressed: What Its Construction Would Mean for the Citizens of this Community," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 20, 1910.

<sup>16</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy's Waco City Directory, 1904-1905* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1904), iii; William H. Curry, *A History of Early Waco with Allusions to Six Shooter Junction* (Waco: Texan Press, 1968): 134; "City Planning is Commended: Mayor-Elect H.B. Mistrot Thinks Waco Should Lay Good Foundation. Parks Opening Street, Etc.," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 27, 1910.

On March 6, 1910, another editorial stressing a riverside boulevard and the conversion of Proctor Springs into a public park graced the pages of the *Times-Herald*. The author noted that in response to a previous spasm of enthusiasm for parks, the City of Waco had purchased five acres of land from Sol Rice. Mr. Rice's property backed into Proctor Springs, but several years had passed without any action taken by the City of Waco to improve the parkland. Although generations of past Wacoans had "plighted their troth at Proctor Springs," it took a growing concern for parkland for many Wacoans to become acquainted with the area. The author suggested that Proctor Springs recalled the "the stories of Merlin, the enchanter and the dances of the fauns and the satyrs; where crystal springs gurgle and where blossoms come earliest and linger longest, forming a place where love finds its most delightful abode and trysting place." Over the years a legend had developed that the Waco Indians revered the springs as a sacred spot where no one could travel because it was the dwelling place of their goddess of love. There is no documented evidence to support the legend, but it seems to fit with the Waco Indian belief in the sacred powers of the Brazos. Since visiting the springs was forbidden, the legend might also serve to explain why the Waco Indians did not make use of Proctor Springs.

Of the tract of land originally purchased by the Proctor Springs Company, approximately fifty-five acres were still for sale. Herring Avenue split the property into northern and southern halves, with the Brazos River serving as a natural boundary. The northern section included the famous springs, extended from the Brazos towards North Fourth Street and Lindsey Hollow, and abutted the unimproved park property the city had purchased from Sol Rice. The southern portion of the Proctor Springs tract extended

from the Brazos to Third Street, receding back toward Second Street as a person walked toward downtown. Both the northern and southern portions were touted as excellent areas for a park. Wacoans were urged by park enthusiasts to visit Proctor Springs and recommend to the city commissioners that at least a portion of the tract be purchased with money from the bond issue. Drawing upon the Waco Indian legend, one Wacoan claimed that Proctor Springs was the “divine heritage of the people of Waco and the city should set about to possess it just now, while the atmosphere is pulsating from the touch of the genius of betterment.” Many Wacoans were rapidly coming to the conclusion that no one person or company should own Proctor Springs. Rather, the only owners should be the people of Waco.<sup>17</sup>

Standing at the forefront of the movement to obtain Proctor Springs and build a riverside drive was William C. Lawson. A traveling cotton broker, Lawson had settled in Waco in 1884. He mentioned the idea of a riverside boulevard in 1901, but he admitted that the idea lacked practicality because of Waco’s small size. By 1910 Waco had grown and prospered considerably, making the movement for a riverside drive and parkland much more attractive. Lawson’s reputation as a civic-minded businessman had also increased in Waco and around the state during the decade of 1901-1910. Appointed as the Chairman of the Parks and Boulevard committee in Waco, Lawson would also serve terms as president of the Waco Cotton Exchange, the Texas Cotton Association, the Exporters & Trade Compress & Warehouse Company, and the Waco Country Club.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>“River Boulevard a Brilliant Conception,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 6, 1910 (quotes 1, 2, 3).

<sup>18</sup>“Waco Mourns Death of William C. Lawson,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 12, 1919; *Morrison and Fourmy’s Waco City Directory, 1911-1912* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1911), 207; “To Await Cotton Palace Site,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 20, 1910.

Responding to a request from the *Times-Herald*, Lawson issued his proposal for a river boulevard and public park at Proctor Springs on March 27, 1910. In Lawson's plan, the riverside drive would extend roughly two miles from the new Washington Street Bridge to the Clubhouse. It was Lawson's intention to construct the road on high ground to afford passengers scenic views and avoid the potential pitfalls caused by floods on the Brazos. Lawson was confident that a riverside boulevard would prove to be an economic boon for Waco and would be as beautiful as any such drive he encountered on his travels across the country and throughout Europe. Lawson also recommended that the fifty-two acres that made up the Proctor Springs property should be purchased by the City of Waco for two purposes. First, the city should convert several acres of the Proctor Springs tract into a public park. Second, Lawson proposed that several acres lying on the east side of Herring Avenue should be leased by the city to the Cotton Palace Association for construction of a new exposition ground. The street rail line, already running to North Fifth Street, should be extended only one block to North Fourth Street to reach the Cotton Palace site Lawson proposed.<sup>19</sup>

Having opened in 1894, the Texas Cotton Palace celebrated Texas cotton production and Waco's claim as the state's "Cotton Capital." The gala event was intended to occur annually, but the grounds had burned in 1895. It was in the midst of the agitation for parks and a riverside boulevard that the movement to reestablish the Texas Cotton Palace had gained considerable momentum. Hoping to christen new grounds for the exposition in November 1910, the Cotton Palace Association wanted to

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<sup>19</sup>W.C. Lawson, "Riverside Boulevard and Proctor Springs: With Purchase of Springs Property only a Small Tract Additional would be Necessary—Ideal Cotton Palace Site," *Waco Times-Herald*, March 27, 1910.

secure a venue as quickly as possible. Lawson's recommendation that the Cotton Palace be located in the vicinity of Proctor Springs was met with both resounding approval and fervent opposition. By April 10, six locations for the Cotton Palace were recommended by the Location Committee. A decisive vote by Cotton Palace stockholders was scheduled for April 22.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the site at Proctor Springs, the Location Committee recommended that sites at Padgitt's Park, Gurley Grove Park, the Linkenhoger location, the Falkner site in East Waco, and the Clifton property be evaluated by the voters. A massive two week propaganda campaign flooded the *Times-Herald* with Cotton Palace stockholders stressing the advantages and disadvantages of each site.

To entice Cotton Palace stockholders to select the thirty acres at Gurley Park Grove, W.J. Mitchell—a member of the original Location Committee—listed twelve advantages that the property offered over the proposed site at Proctor Springs. To dissuade voters from selecting Proctor Springs, Mitchell noted that the proposed twelve acre site, although excellent for park purposes, contained no level land or room for future expansion, and therefore, at least in Mitchell's estimation, not conducive for exposition purposes.<sup>21</sup>

To counter Mitchell's claims, advocates for Proctor Springs touted the site as possessing access to fresh water, a sufficient amount of level land, an unrivaled view of the Brazos landscape, "NO MUD, NO DUST, NO MOSQUITOES," the North 5<sup>th</sup> street car line, and "the strong probability of the City owning the 50 acres park surrounding,

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<sup>20</sup>Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County*, 263; "Cotton Palace Location Committee Further Announcement," *Waco Times-Herald*, April 10, 1910.

<sup>21</sup>"Cotton Palace Location: Official Ballot, *Waco Times-Herald*, April 20, 1910; W.J. Mitchell, "A Cotton Palace Site, *Waco Times-Herald*, April 20, 1910.

and the construction of a boulevard through the same.” The site would cost the Cotton Palace Association \$8,200, three hundred dollars less than Gurley Grove Park, and almost half of the \$15,500 the owners of Padgitt Park were asking. Numerous ads supporting Padgitt’s Park (the site of the original Cotton Palace), the sixteen acre Linkenhoger location, the Falkner site located in East Waco, and the sixty-three acre Clifton property also appeared in the *Times-Herald*, but it was the Proctor Springs site that received 481 of the 1,094 votes cast on April 22, 1910.<sup>22</sup>

Despite receiving over 250 votes more than second place Gurley Park, the Proctor Springs site fell sixty-six votes shy of the majority needed to secure it as the next site for the Texas Cotton Palace. A runoff between the Proctor Springs and Gurley Park locations was scheduled for Monday, April 26, 1910, with the location receiving the most votes to be declared the winner. The impending vote was cast by the *Times-Herald* as a “battle royal.” The advertising war that ensued over the weekend certainly lived up to the billing. A victory for Proctor Springs, supporters claimed, would signal to the world that Waco’s “village school days are over and it is now a full fledged graduate on the carpet ready to be courted and won by any eligible industry or citizen appreciating its charm.”<sup>23</sup>

To combat support for Proctor Springs, advocates for Gurley Park asserted the name “Proctor Springs” was a ruse that had succeeded in deceiving voters. Ads taken out by Gurley Park supporters urged voters to visit the Proctor Springs site and take notice that the actual location of the Cotton Palace would be one block east of the springs that

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<sup>22</sup>“The Popular Site for the Cotton Palace,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 21, 1910 (the use of all caps reflects the articles appearance in the paper); “Proctor Springs and Gurley Park Get Most Votes,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 23, 1910.

<sup>23</sup>“Proctor Springs and Gurley Park Get Most Votes,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 23, 1910 (quote 1) “Results of Friday’s Vote,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 24, 1910 (quote 2).

Wacoans had grown to cherish. The tactic worked. On April 26, 1910, the *Times-Herald* reported that Gurley Park had defeated Proctor Springs by a count of 662 votes to 482. Lawson himself conceded the inability of many voters to “disconnect from the Cotton Palace location the movement to secure Proctor Springs for a city park.” The confusion had delayed Lawson from entering a petition for the city to secure the Proctor Springs property for park purposes until after the vote for Cotton Palace. Ultimately, the Directors of Cotton Palace bypassed the outcome of the vote and decided in late May to build the Cotton Palace at its original location, Padgitt’s Park.<sup>24</sup>

Although the location of the Cotton Palace appeared to be settled in late April, the question of how to allocate the money from the park bonds was yet to be decided. A meeting of the South Waco Park Association in early May revealed that enthusiasm for parks was growing. At the largest attended meeting in the brief history of the organization, lectures were given by Dr. H.K. Aynesworth, Professor. J.L. Kesler, and Mrs. J.H. Powell. Dr. Aynesworth and Professor Kesler stressed the moral and hygienic values of parks, while Mrs. Powell addressed children’s needs for playgrounds. Prior to the meeting, the South Waco Park Association had released a statement that resounded with the growing chorus of Wacoans who supported the spending of bond money for small parks.<sup>25</sup>

Several citizens voiced concern over the push for the City of Waco to purchase the Proctor Springs property. In an editorial in the *Times-Herald*, E.W. Blinn stressed

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<sup>24</sup>“Attention Cotton Palace Voters,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 24, 1910 (quote 1); “Gurley Park Site Won Out Yesterday,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 24, 1910; “To Await Selection Cotton Palace Site,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 20, 1910 (quote 2); “Cotton Palace Located at Padgitt Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910.

<sup>25</sup>“South Waco Park Association Special Meeting,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 8, 1910; “Recent Meeting of the South Waco Park Association,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 15, 1910.

that his vote to pass the bond issue was contingent upon the use of the money going toward a park in each ward, not a single large park located at Proctor Springs. Blinn reminded Wacoans that the movement to procure Proctor Springs had not commenced until after the passage of the bond issue. To deny each ward a park of its own, argued Blinn, was to ignore the will of the voters. Furthermore, Blinn stressed that by denying each ward a park of its own, the poor citizens of Waco would be the ones most likely to suffer. “Poor people,” Blinn asserted, “who have no autos or carriages cannot afford street car fares for three or four members of a family to reach a park, and after all, it is the poor who need and will enjoy parks most.” Despite favoring the use of the bond money for small parks, Blinn also favored the idea of a park at Proctor Springs. To resolve the controversy over whether the city should acquire Proctor Springs, Blinn contended that a separate election unrelated to the park bond money would offer the only fair way to decide the matter.<sup>26</sup>

For its part, the *Times-Herald* suggested that a Park Commission of three unsalaried members either appointed by the City Council or elected by the people should be formed and invested with authority to preside over all matters related to park issues. The same day the *Times-Herald* suggestion appeared, a weekly feature dedicated to civic issues was introduced to readers. The “Civic Department,” edited by Miss Mary Ross, was designed to help and encourage “those who would lend their aid and talents to still further beautifying our city, and giving an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and practical suggestions” on how to accomplish the shared vision of a better Waco. The first installment of the “Civic Department” detailed the efforts of each branch of the Civic

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<sup>26</sup>E.W. Blinn, “Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 15, 1910.



League—a branch of the league was active in each of the five wards of Waco—had recently undertaken to secure new park lands or improve existing park property. During May 1910 Miss Mary Ross noted that it was difficult to find a “man or woman in Waco who is not interested in some park or proposed park which is of vital interest to his or her community.” In concluding the first run of the “Civic Department” Miss Ross quoted the president of the American Civic Association, J. Horace McFarland, who answered the question “Are parks worth while?” McFarland’s experience had taught him that it was crucial for a city to buy land for park purposes before the land disappeared or became too expensive. On May 21, 1910, the coveted Proctor Springs property was sold to W.C. Lawson for \$25,000.<sup>27</sup>

Anxiety over the future of Proctor Springs immediately turned into nearly uncontrollable jubilation, when news was revealed on May 24, 1910, that the Proctor Springs property had been given to the City of Waco. Although W.C. Lawson presented the deed of the nearly one hundred acre tract to the city commissioner, Lawson was not the person behind the gift. In an emotionally charged atmosphere that brought grown men to tears, Wacoans learned that Mrs. Flora B. Cameron and her three children, Mr. William Waldo Cameron, Mrs. Flora Cameron Baird, and Mrs. Cameron Bolton were responsible for the generous gift. In addition to the Proctor Springs property, the Cameron family presented the City of Waco with a check for \$5,000 to improve the park property. The only stipulation that accompanied the deed was that the area known as Proctor Springs would henceforth be known as William Cameron Park, in honor of Mrs.

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<sup>27</sup>“Civic Improvement of Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 8, 1910 (quote 1); “Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 15, 1910 (quotes 2 and 3); “Proctor Springs Now Owned by W.C. Lawson: Speculation as to What New Owner Will Do with Beautiful Tract. Cost \$25,000,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 21, 1910.

Cameron's late husband and father of her children. The Camerons suggested that W.C. Lawson, Ben G. Kendall, and W.J. Neale be appointed by the city council to serve as the first Cameron Park Board of Commissioners. During the presentation of the gift, W.C. Lawson proclaimed:

This act, gentlemen, speaks for itself, and no words are necessary to convince you and the people of Waco of the spirit and love of fellow man which prompted the donors in the most generous act, unprecedented in this city, and which act, I predict, will prove an inspiration and a blessing to cementing as never before, this whole community, leading to greater confidence, friendship, and brotherly love. Its influences will be felt not only by this but future generations.<sup>28</sup>

A resolution accepting the gift was read by Commissioner J.H. Mackey and unanimously adopted. Though no member of the Cameron family was in attendance to hear the resolution, their absence was attributed by all to the humble nature of the Cameron family. Mr. W.J. Neale sent a letter to his friend William Waldo Cameron thanking him and his family for the priceless gift.

By 1922 the Chamber of Commerce was touting Waco as a city "built in a park." In his 1925 work *Texas As It is Today*, Alfred E. Menn exposed readers to Waco's best asset—Cameron Park. Menn wrote that "to pass through the city of Waco one would doubt if its citizens had ever seen a real park, when in reality nearby is the famous Cameron Park, that is the trouble with the tourist today, they come to the city . . . they drive right through town taking for granted that the city only contains what he has seen." Today, Wacoans are still struggling to share the beauty, educational and recreational opportunities Cameron Park offers with their fellow Texans and tourists from across the country. Who were the people behind this magnanimous gift? What had compelled the

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<sup>28</sup>"Proctor Springs Given to Waco: Generosity of Mrs. Flora B. Cameron and her Three Children Responsible for this Gift," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1910.

Camerons and the citizens of Waco to pursue park property so aggressively? How had civic improvement become a rallying cry for all of Waco?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>“Proctor Springs Given to Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1910; Waco Chamber of Commerce, “Waco, Built in a Park,” in *The Encyclopedia of Texas*, ed. by Ellis Arthur Davis and Edwin H. Grobe (Dallas, TX: Texas Development Bureau, 1922), 97 (quote 1); Alfred E. Menn, *Texas As It is Today* (Austin, TX: Gammel’s Book Store, 1925), 227 (quote 2).

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Clan Cameron”

No one envisioned that a boy from humble surroundings in rural Scotland might one day rule over one of the largest lumber empires in the Southwestern United States. A member of the heralded Scottish clan Cameron of Lochiel, William Cameron was born to John and Isabella Cameron on January 11, 1834, on the estate of Glen Ericht near the town of Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland. Isabella Cameron imbued her two daughters and three sons with the teachings of the Presbyterian faith. William Cameron received elementary schooling in Blairgowrie. Desiring that their son pursue a career in either the ministry or law, John and Isabella Cameron were dismayed when William announced that he would depart for America.

Before leaving Scotland at the age of eighteen, Cameron briefly entertained a career in law. After a one term stint in college at Dundee, Cameron began a three year apprenticeship in a barrister's office. During his apprenticeship, Cameron read as much about America as the law. Ultimately, Cameron abandoned his legal aspirations to pursue a new life across the Atlantic in the land of opportunity. Cameron's family provided him with a fifty dollar purse before he embarked on a month long voyage to America. Armed with an iron will and insatiable ambition, William Cameron set foot in New York City in 1852.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Most of the biographical information about William Cameron and his family in this chapter is taken from R.J. Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co. (inc.) with a Biographical Sketch of William Cameron and others* (Waco, TX: J.S. Barnett, 1926): Sketch on William Cameron.

After a few days, and with his purse whittled down to eighteen dollars, Cameron headed west. Although an educated man, Cameron preferred to work outdoors. He took a job on a farm owned by distant relatives in Illinois. In his first few years in America, Cameron worked a number of jobs that revolved around the bustling railroad industry, including stints as a fireman, section boss, and contractor. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Cameron left his job as a construction foreman for the Missouri Pacific Railroad to help organize a Union militia in Sedalia, Missouri. Cameron's military career quickly came to an end when he was captured at the Battle of Springfield on August 10, 1861. After being paroled, Cameron spent the duration of the war providing grain and feed for the Union army. The contacts Cameron made during the war proved beneficial when he earned a contract with the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad. The contract afforded Cameron his first foray into the lumber business by selling railroad ties and construction lumber as the railroad expanded.

In 1864 Cameron married Miss Letitia Stewart in Sedalia, Missouri. The union produced two daughters, Sadie and Annie. Following the southwest expansion of the M.K. & T., Cameron eventually journeyed to Texas. In partnership with J.S. Mayfield, Cameron opened a retail lumber yard in Denison in 1871. Capitalizing on his early success, Cameron established yards in Sherman and Dallas in 1872. Tragedy struck the following year with the death of Cameron's wife. Over the next two years, a grief stricken yet undaunted Cameron sold the retail yard in Denison and bought Mayfield's interest in the Dallas yard.

The year 1875 proved to be a watershed year for William Cameron. On September 1, 1875, he married a young lady from Little Rock, Arkansas, Miss Flora

Anne Berry. Earlier that year, Cameron had visited Waco and purchased a retail yard from John F. Sedwick. After a brief period of operation, Cameron sold the yard back to Sedwick. The few months in Waco proved infectious as Cameron opted to reestablish a presence in Waco in 1876 and opened a yard at the corner of Fifth and Austin. The following year, Cameron reacquired Sedwick's yard in East Waco and an additional yard at Seventh and Austin. In 1878, with business interests on both banks of the Brazos, Cameron moved his family and headquarters to Waco.

By 1890, William Cameron & Company, having expanded at a relentless pace, operated more than sixty retail lumber yards. At one time or another, Cameron owned or operated retail yards in nearly corner of the state. The firm eventually established yards in Louisiana and the Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). Because of his propensity for speculation, Cameron often dared to open a retail yard under risky circumstances, and as a result, he closed retail yards as quickly as he opened others. When a retail yard revealed signs of liability, Cameron shut it down and moved to another town. A quintessential risk taker, Cameron made sure that an operation paid off more often than not.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the enterprising Scotsman eventually carried Cameron outside the familiar confines of the lumber industry. In 1885 Cameron entered the grain and flour mill business, establishing elevators and mills in Fort Worth and Waco. Cameron demonstrated talent in the banking industry as well. He served as president of the First National Bank in Waco and as either director or officer of banks in Abilene, New Orleans, and New York. The Slayden-Kirksey woolen mills in Waco also benefited from his astute business acumen as Cameron was president of the mills for a

number of years. Reflecting the influence of his religious upbringing, William Cameron also served as a director of the Young Men's Christian Association.<sup>2</sup>

Demonstrating uncanny foresight, Cameron and several partners formed the Texas Lumber Company to procure vast tracts of pristine timberlands in East Texas and Louisiana. By 1899 Cameron became sole owner of the company and its thousands of acres of cypress trees in Louisiana and pine trees in East Texas. The acquisition of such sprawling interests required a huge part of Cameron's attention. Personally overseeing the operations of his timber empire, in early 1899 Cameron collapsed while boarding a train in Morgan City, Louisiana. Stricken with apoplexy, the Scottish lumber tycoon died on February 6, 1899.<sup>3</sup>

Cameron biographer R.J. Tolson characterized William Cameron as a man of exceptional physical and mental prowess. Never averse to hard labor, William Cameron often worked side by side with some of the estimated twelve thousand people employed by his firms. Paradoxically, Cameron was devoted to efficiency, yet he loathed detail. Results, not methods, constituted the chief business concern for Cameron. He expected his employees to take the initiative and express their opinion. According to Tolson, Cameron harbored little care for who a man was or where he came from so long as he passed Cameron's three tests of manhood—"Work, Honesty and Brains."<sup>4</sup> Described as a tough and demanding taskmaster, Cameron managed to extract every last drop of sweat

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<sup>2</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on William Cameron; "Death of William Cameron," *Dallas Morning News*, February 7, 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on William Cameron.

<sup>4</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on William Cameron (quote 1); *Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 1899.

from his employees. Yet for all his “firmness there was kindness; with his great physical and mental strength there was gentleness; and with his dominating will there was also charity, charity in his thought and action, which he frequently bestowed upon those who were subservient to his rigid policy.”<sup>5</sup>

Beneath the gruff business persona was a man dedicated to his God and his family. William Cameron retained the strong religious and moral convictions his mother had instilled in him. At some point, Cameron became a member of the Episcopal Church, probably at the urging of his wife, Flora. Despite leaving the Presbyterian Church, Cameron was never without the prayer book his mother gave him. Married in 1875, William and Flora Cameron remained committed to each other until death. They raised one son, William Waldo Cameron, and two daughters, Margaret and Flora.

Reaction to Cameron’s death and funeral demonstrated the public esteem the Scotsman had garnered. The funeral procession extended over a mile. Family, friends, and colleagues from all over the Southwest came to pay their last respects and console the bereaved family who were “overwhelmed with grief” at the unexpected death of their beloved husband and father. Through hard work and business brilliance, the Scotsman who arrived in America with eighteen dollars passed away worth an estimated three million dollars. Perhaps of greater importance to Cameron were the respect, love, and admiration that his tireless efforts and unwavering loyalty evoked from the countless number of men and women whose life he touched.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.* Sketch of William Cameron.

<sup>6</sup>“Death of William Cameron,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 7, 1899 (quote 1); “Funeral of William Cameron,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 2009.



In his will, Cameron instructed that \$2,000 to be donated to both the Y.M.C.A. and St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and that \$5,000 be sent to each of his three surviving siblings. As for his estate, property, and personal effects, Cameron bequeathed everything to his family with a warning that they should cooperate and avoid the courts. As for William Cameron & Company, Cameron directed that the business should operate as normal.<sup>7</sup> With Cameron's unexpected death, however, a number of people anticipated that William Cameron & Company would soon face a similar fate as its founder, albeit under more gradual and anguishing circumstances. For the next year the company operated as a partnership between the heirs of William Cameron. On October 10, 1900, William Cameron & Company incorporated with a capital stock of nearly two and half million dollars, and twenty-two-year-old William Waldo Cameron as president.<sup>8</sup>

Businessmen across the Southwest questioned whether the young and inexperienced Cameron son would be able to manage a multi-million dollar company. From the moment of his birth in Waco on August 1, 1878, great things were expected of William Cameron's only son. After briefly attending A & M College in College Station, Texas, and St. Albans Military Academy at Radford, Virginia, William Waldo left school on his own volition. Like his father, William Waldo possessed a greater affinity for hands-on experience. At the age of seventeen, William Waldo asked his father for a job. His request granted, William Waldo entered the Cameron workforce at the Slayden-Kirksey Woolen Mills with his superiors being instructed by the elder Cameron to disregard the familial relationship and make the boy work. William Waldo worked at the

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<sup>7</sup>"Waco Budget: William Cameron's Will," *Dallas Morning News*, February 12, 1899.

<sup>8</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of William Waldo Cameron.

woolen mills and the Cameron Mill & Elevator Company for little over a year before being promoted to the position of billing clerk at William Cameron & Company in 1897. Serving as a junior partner in the company when his father passed away, William Waldo had not yet reached the legal age required to assume control of the company. William Waldo asked that the restrictions be removed in order to represent the interests of his mother and sisters. When William Waldo assumed the presidency of the newly incorporated William Cameron & Company, the business consisted of “fourteen active retail lumber yards, four yellow pine saw mills, more than 100,000 acres of East Texas pine timber land, a quantity of bank and industrial stock, wholesale lumber businesses in Waco and Ft. Worth, and a small planing mill operating in conjunction with the Waco retail yard.”<sup>9</sup> The livelihood of thousands now rested in the hands of a young man who had little more than two years of experience and no executive training. Preserving the lumber empire his father had established only compounded the pressure on William Waldo.

In contrast to his father, William Waldo adopted a conservative business philosophy. He abandoned the practice of speculation in favor of placing the time, energy, and resources of the company in more secure investments generally affiliated with the lumber industry. William Waldo explained to friend and Cameron family biographer R.J. Tolson that although his conservative approach might not make his family much money, “I am dead sure I am not going to lose any for them.”<sup>10</sup> During his

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<sup>9</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of William Waldo Cameron; “William Cameron Dies in Witness Chair,” *Waco Times-Herald*, October 16, 1939; “William Waldo Cameron: A Biography,” *The Mitre* 13, no. 10 (1939) (quote 1).

<sup>10</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of William Waldo Cameron.

first few years as president, William Waldo focused on solidifying the foundation of the company by eliminating “unprofitable and dormant assets and to liquidate every liability of the corporation.” The conservative strategy worked as the William Cameron & Company expanded at a steady and healthy rate. Within fifteen years the number of retail yards rose from fourteen to forty-seven. Two new saw mills and the opening of a wallpaper, paint, and mantel store in Waco complemented the retail yard growth. Established in 1907 a new wholesale department producing sashes and doors quickly became the largest such company in the South. By 1939 the number of retail yards had grown to eighty-eight, the sash and door manufacturing and wholesale company operated fifteen branches in two states, and the wallpaper store in Waco continued to thrive. Later that year William Cameron & Company faced its first major tragedy in nearly forty years, and once again it involved the sudden and unexpected death of its leader.<sup>11</sup>

On October 16, 1939 William Waldo Cameron died at the age of sixty-one. To the horror of the approximately fifty people, he died while providing courtroom testimony in a lawsuit involving his company and the First National Bank. In a scene reminiscent of his father’s death, the younger Cameron slumped in the witness stand, succumbing to a blood clot in the coronary artery.<sup>12</sup> Surviving William Waldo were his second wife of seventeen years, Helen Miller Cameron, their daughter Flora Elizabeth Cameron, and Eleanor Courtlandt Van Clief, a daughter from William Waldo’s first marriage, who lived with her husband in Buffalo, New York. An outdoorsman, William Waldo had spent much of his spare time at hunting, riding horses, and landscaping the

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<sup>11</sup>“William Waldo Cameron: A Biography,” *The Mitre*.

<sup>12</sup>“William Cameron Dies in Witness Chair,” *Waco Times-Herald*, October 10, 1939.

grounds at his country residence, “Valley View”—which currently houses the Waco Art Center next to the campus of McLennan Community College. A member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, a Mason, a Shriner, and a former Cotton Palace King, William Waldo had lived an active yet humble life. He shared with his father many of the same qualities that contributed to the creation and expansion of a lumber empire. In 1905 the *American Lumberman* described Cameron as displaying “none of the arrogance and pride that so often accompany the ownership of riches,” and that Cameron had “no desire to heap up more riches for himself . . . but he devotes his life to carrying on and increasing the business . . . because by its proper conduct he may be of genuine service to the community.” Decisive and firm in his opinions, William Waldo also placed considerable trust in the judgment of his employees. Concerned with results, he took the blame for failed ideas, and he expected his employees to reflect his personal commitment to honesty and integrity.

The news of William Waldo’s death reverberated through Waco and the business world. Telegrams from across the United States expressed condolences to the family as did editorials in newspapers throughout Texas. Family members, Cameron employees, fellow Wacoans, and friends from across the nation attended the funeral at Valley View.

As much as he cared about preserving the welfare of his family and employees, William Waldo Cameron cared just as much about Waco. Given by William Waldo, his mother, and two sisters, William Cameron Park remains the most visible and valuable contribution of the Cameron family to Waco.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>“William Cameron Dies in Witness Chair,” *Waco Times-Herald*, October 10, 1939; “William W. Cameron” in the *American Lumbermen: The Personal History and Public Business Achievements of One Hundred Eminent Lumbermen of the United States* (Chicago: American Lumbermen, 1905), 1:389 (quote 1 and 2); Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of William Waldo Cameron; “William

Standing behind the Cameron men was a strong, philanthropic, and civic-minded woman, Flora B. Cameron. Considered by many of her contemporaries as Waco's "greatest benefactor," Flora Cameron proved to be an inspiration to many thousands of Wacoans and employees of William Cameron & Company. She served as a regent for the College of Industrial Arts in Denton, Texas, and as commissioner on the Texas Board at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. A devout Episcopalian and member of the Federation of Women's Clubs, Flora Cameron was an advocate for civic improvement. Her humble nature often precluded her from publicizing donations to charitable causes. The *Dallas Morning News* characterized Mrs. Cameron as a benefactor who disregarded "color, class, or denomination."<sup>14</sup> Wacoans best remembered her for her liberal donations to the parks and playgrounds in the various wards of Waco.

With her children by her side, Flora Cameron died on October 5, 1931, while spending the summer at her daughter's home in Buffalo, New York. When news of Flora's death reached Waco, Mayor Thomas F. Bush declared that all city government activities would cease from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on the day of her funeral. Mayor Bush also requested that all businesses in Waco close for at least thirty minutes out of respect for a departed "pioneer" of Waco. A crowd of several hundred waited mournfully for the train carrying the body of the woman who had given so generously to Waco. Flags at the

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Waldo Cameron: A Biography," *The Mitre* 13, no. 10 (1939); "Relatives of William Cameron Are Arriving," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 17, 1939; "Cameron Given Local Tribute," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 18, 1939; "Cameron Rites Held Thursday," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 19, 1939.

<sup>14</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of Flora Cameron. "Body of Mrs. Cameron Due Tuesday," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 5, 1931; "Mrs. Cameron's Body Arrives on Noon Train," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 6, 1931; "Pioneer Goes to Her Grave," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 7, 1931; "Prominent Waco Woman Succumbs in Buffalo, N.Y.," *Dallas Morning News*, October 5, 1931 (quotes 1 and 2).

Cameron Park Clubhouse, Waco City Hall, and Cameron offices flew at half mast. When Flora Cameron was laid to rest on October 7, 1931, Waco paused to remember and give thanks to the woman who had done so much for her community.<sup>15</sup>

With the gift of William Cameron Park, Mrs. Cameron and her children accomplished three things. First, the gift created a living memorial that would sustain the name of William Cameron for the ages. Second, the gift established the Camerons as one of Waco's most philanthropic families. Finally, Cameron Park instantly became the main pleasure ground of Waco. Today the park remains a recreational paradise and peaceful haven for patrons and a sanctuary for flora and fauna. The park is a place that all Wacoans enjoy together. Cameron Park is Waco's melting pot. But was the cultural diversity found in the park today present at the time of its donation?

When the Cameron family gave the Proctor Springs property to the City of Waco as a memorial to William Cameron, they stipulated that the land be used exclusively as a public park for the "pleasure of the people" of Waco. To a twenty-first century audience that statement seems to be a straightforward decree to allow all Wacoans, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, or religious persuasion, to use the park. However, it is necessary to consider the context in which the statement was made. Waco was a segregated city in 1910. Racial violence often permeated public life, especially when Waco became a hotbed of activity for the Ku Klux Klan. This is not to say that the Cameron family held malice toward any race. Nor is it to claim that the Camerons meant to exclude a

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<sup>15</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of Flora Cameron. "Body of Mrs. Cameron Due Tuesday," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 5, 1931; "Mrs. Cameron's Body Arrives on Noon Train," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 6, 1931; "Pioneer Goes to Her Grave," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 7, 1931 (quote 1).

particular race from using the invaluable gift of Cameron Park. But the question arises, how did Wacoans in 1910 interpret the gift of a *public* park? How did Wacoans interpret the phrase, “for the pleasure of the *people*”? Of equal importance is the question, what spurred the Cameron family to give back to the community? More precisely, what prompted the Cameron family to focus their philanthropic efforts on parks for the people of Waco?<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch of William Cameron Park (quote 1 and 2, italics added by the author).

## CHAPTER THREE

### “Waco Beautiful”

On February 12, 1911, the *Waco Times-Herald* reproduced a paper read to the members of the Civic League of Waco by the acting president, Mrs. J. P. Carpenter. Praising the achievements of the Civic League, Mrs. Carpenter stated that the organization had “caught the wave which is engulfing the entire country.” The “wave” was a civic improvement movement known as the “City Beautiful,” a movement encapsulated by “the Progressive Era.” Beginning in the 1890s the Progressive ethos is characterized by historian Jon A. Peterson as a “complex drift . . . away from competitive and individualistic ethics toward more altruistic, cooperative values; away from orthodox laissez-faire economics toward more socially interventionist policies.” The City Beautiful movement, an expression of “urban progressivism,” was often described in moral and religious language, and evolved from a village improvement movement with roots stretching as far back as the 1850s to a mature ideology of a national “crusade against ugliness” by the early 1900s.

Reflecting the mood of the City Beautiful, Mrs. Carpenter exuded civic enthusiasm by proclaiming that the “Civic league was only the prophet who came out of the Waco wilderness and preached the gospel of cleanliness, health, and beauty. The people have heeded the gospel and in manifold ways carried forward the work unaided by us.” As she reminded her audience, many Wacoans rallied behind the ideals of the City Beautiful working toward the achievement of their goal of a “Waco Beautiful.” In



recounting the achievements of the Civic League, Mrs. Carpenter congratulated its members for securing a “crown” for their efforts—“the grand Cameron Park.”<sup>1</sup>

Tracing the origins and context of the City Beautiful movement is necessary to understand the ideology that influenced Wacoans to fight for parks and playgrounds in Waco such as Cameron Park. In 1897 a group of landscape architects, park superintendents, and park enthusiasts gathered in Louisville, Kentucky, for a conference to discuss possible avenues to promote “outdoor art.” A fluid term, outdoor art originally encompassed “architecture, landscape design, sculpture, and horticulture,” but gradually expanded to include almost any effort associated with urban beautification. The result of the May 1897 meeting was the formation of the American Park and Outdoor Art Association (APOAA). Led by landscape architects Warren Manning, George E. Kessler, Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., and Charles Eliot, the APOAA also included a number of enthusiastic laymen, such as J. Horace McFarland. With less than twenty professional landscape architects in the United States in 1897, the charter members of the APOAA recognized that successful advancement of an outdoor art agenda required the vocal support of a large number of interested laymen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. J.P. Carpenter, “The General Civic League,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 12, 1911. (quotes 1, 5, 7); John A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 101(quotes 2 and 3); William H. Wilson, “J. Horace McFarland and the City Beautiful Movement,” *Journal of Urban History* 7, no. 3 (May 1981): 323 (quote 4); Mary Ross, ed., “Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 15, 1910 (quote 6).

<sup>2</sup>William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 35-36. In my estimation, Wilson’s work is the most thorough and comprehensive study of the “City Beautiful” movement available. There are several works on the development of urban planning, but only Wilson’s focuses strictly on the City Beautiful. Jon A Peterson’s work *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* (Baltimore MD: The John Hopkins Press, 2003) contains one of the most up-to-date and concise overviews of the City Beautiful. For other studies that discuss the City Beautiful see: Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982); Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

Allies for the advancement of landscape architecture proved plentiful. Composed largely of men and women from the upper and middle class, lay improvement organizations promoted not only outdoor art but also all types of civic improvement. Campaigns to rid towns and cities of unsightly billboards and wires and the promotion of healthier sanitation for residents in all corners of the city characterized the early activities of lay organizations. With the publication of *The How of Civic Improvement*, Miss Jessie M. Good, organizer of the convention that formed the lay National League of Improvement Associations in Springfield Ohio in October 1900, provided a handbook for civic improvement. Good noted that “since the movement of the promotion of civic beauty has become of national importance, the need for such a manual became imperative.” With crusading zeal, Good provided suggestions and pointed to examples of civic work undertaken by cities across America.<sup>3</sup>

Good pointed to the 1893 exposition in Chicago as the event that spawned an explosion of civic improvement associations in towns and cities across the country. If the World’s Fair in Chicago truly accelerated civic improvement efforts, why was there an eleven year lag between the exposition and a major national organization consolidating lay and professional improvement advocates? Furthermore, what role, if any, did the 1893 exposition play in forming an ideology known as the “City Beautiful”?<sup>4</sup>

At the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, fair-goers were awed by the efficiency, harmony, cleanliness, and beauty of the White City. A decade after the exposition Charles Zueblin, professor at the University of Chicago, characterized the

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<sup>3</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 41-42; Jessie M. Good, “The How of Improvement Work,” *The Home Florist* 4, no. 1 (January 1901): 1 (quote 1).

<sup>4</sup>Good, “The How of Improvement Work,” 42-43; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 50.

White City as the “epitome of the best we had done and a prophecy of what we could do if we were content with nothing but the best and added to individual excellence a common purpose.” In retrospect, Zueblin considered the success of the White City as the catalyst for launching the fervor and enthusiasm for civic improvement. Historian William H. Wilson asserts that although the influence of the White City should not be discounted, Zueblin’s claim that the City Beautiful sprang from the exposition is chronologically and factually false.<sup>5</sup>

Wilson argues that while it might seem that the “White City”—as the Chicago exposition was commonly called—served as a catalyst for the emerging City Beautiful movement, civic improvement efforts in the United States predated the exposition by at least forty years. Mary Hopkins of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, founded the first village improvement association in 1853. As the idea for improving the health and appearance of towns grew, so did the scale and aspirations of the adherents of the village improvement movement.<sup>6</sup>

Why did Zueblin champion the White City as the impetus for civic design and the City Beautiful? Why was the connection eagerly accepted by the public? References to the White City began to appear in the National League of Improvement Associations in 1901, predecessor of the American League for Civic Improvement, which Zueblin served a term as president. Civic leaders such as Zueblin recognized the opportunity to use the White City, a symbol of cooperation and civic utopia, for propelling the agenda of

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Zueblin, “The Civic Renaissance: ‘The White City’ and After,” *The Chautauquan; A Weekly News Magazine (1800-1914)* 38, no. 4 (December 1903): 374 (quote 1); Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 62-64.

<sup>6</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 35, 42-43 (quote 1); William H. Wilson, “J. Horace McFarland and the City Beautiful Movement,” *Journal of Urban History* 7, no.3 (May 1981): 320.

comprehensive city planning that emerged in the early 1900s. Wilson concludes that Zueblin successfully persuaded Americans that the White City launched the City Beautiful “because it was thematically and visibly plausible even if chronologically false, and it supplied the City Beautiful movement with a unified, vivid, and highly regarded origin.” Agreeing with Wilson, historian Jon A. Peterson summarizes that it was the City Beautiful itself expressed through the 1902 McMillan Plan for redesigning Washington, D.C., “that marked the birth of a new, generalized method for shaping a city; the Columbian Exposition had been only the beginning of a wish that some such means would be found.” Thus the Columbian Exposition in Chicago served as a galvanizing image that civic leaders and professionals used to unify the various municipal improvement groups into a cohesive and ideologically motivated movement known as the City Beautiful.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts to articulate the principles fueling the City Beautiful movement emerged at the second national convention of the National League of Improvement Associations in August of 1901. Renamed the American League for Civic Improvement (ALCI), the adoption of the term “civic improvement” exhibited the organization’s shift in focus from the confines of rural America to the urban landscape. Historian Jon A. Peterson notes the altering of semantics also reflected the organization’s growing identification with the “reform ethos” of the City Beautiful movement and the Progressive Era.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 65-71 (quote 1); Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning*, 127, 131-132 (quote 2).

<sup>8</sup>Jon A. Peterson, “The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings,” *Journal of Urban History* 2, no. 4 (August 1976): 423; Wilson, “J. Horace McFarland,” 321.

At the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, the ALCI and APOAA merged, forming the American Civic Association (ACA). In the *Times-Herald*, Wacoans read the constitution of the ACA, and the organization's stated purpose as seeking "the cultivation of higher ideal of civic life and beauty in America; the promotion of the city, town and neighborhood improvement; the preservation of landscape, and the advancement of outdoor art." William H. Wilson asserts that the creation of the ACA "gave organizational expression to the struggle for the City Beautiful, uniting citizen activists and professionals for civic perfection." Selected as the president of the ACA, J. Horace McFarland—owner of a printing company in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—quickly put his stamp on both the function and direction of the ACA. A progressive, McFarland combined the men and women wings of the APOAA, making the ACA a gender neutral organization. Women, in McFarland's estimation, were directly responsible for or inspired "seven-eighths" of all civic improvement efforts. Under McFarland's leadership, the ACA directed its efforts of civic improvement to smaller, yet rapidly growing cities like Waco. McFarland based this strategy on the fact that during the Progressive Era most of the urban centers in the United States contained between 2,000 and 250,000 residents. As a consequence, cities such as Waco were in a position to institute civic improvement efforts, such as securing parkland and developing a boulevard system, that could dictate and adapt to growth patterns.<sup>9</sup>

In a 1903 article for *Outlook*, McFarland furthered Americans' growing identification of civic improvement as a patriotic, moral, and seemingly religious duty by

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<sup>9</sup>*Waco Times-Herald*, February 26, 1911 (quote 1); Wilson, "J. Horace McFarland," 321; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 50-51 (quote 2); J. Horace McFarland, "The Great Civic Awakening," *Outlook* 73, no. 16 (April 18, 1903): 918, 920 (quote 2).

appealing to the engrained beliefs of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny. McFarland asserted that it was the responsibility of “every man and woman who believes that God has set America in the forefront of human progress,” and who desires America and its people to realize its destiny, “to join hands with those who are trying to hasten the day. Combination, federation, unity of effort, mean power and efficiency, in philanthropy as well as in business.”<sup>10</sup>

Reminiscent of the role of a circuit preacher, McFarland delivered his keynote lecture, “Crusade Against Ugliness,” in over 250 cities by 1911, including the growing urban centers of Dallas and Houston. Using slogans such as “civic awakening” and “crusade,” McFarland appealed to upper and middle class women and men concerned with sanitation and the perceived decaying of morality and education, particularly among children and the lower classes housed in the slums produced during the Gilded Age.<sup>11</sup>

For many followers of the City Beautiful, beauty represented an ideal that possessed the power to educate people about culture and morality. However, beauty itself constituted only one principle of the City Beautiful. To be truly beautiful, McFarland stressed, a city and its designers must focus on improving efficiency, thereby limiting waste, and increasing the utility of every aspect of the city. For example, parks and boulevards, while possessing beauty, must also be designed to carry visitors from Point A to Point B in the least amount of time, to be strategically placed to maximize the amount of use, and to attempt to account for future city expansion. This ideological triad

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<sup>10</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 51-52; J. Horace McFarland, “The Great Civic Awakening,” 920 (quote 1).

<sup>11</sup>Wilson, “J. Horace McFarland,” 326 (quote 1). Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 41, 51-52 Wilson asserts that despite the religious rhetoric and illusions, the City Beautiful remained secular, but was built on Christian principles.

of utility, efficiency, and beauty required civic improvement efforts to simultaneously focus on the short and long-term development of the city. Wacoans espoused this type of philosophy in their quests for securing Proctor Springs and a riverside boulevard.<sup>12</sup>

With McFarland serving as the public face and spokesman of the ACA and City Beautiful, Charles Mulford Robinson—a journalist from Rochester, New York—assumed the role as author of the gospel of civic improvement. After returning from a European tour to study the civics and aesthetics on the European continent, Robinson recognized the necessity for a purely American book concerning civic improvement. The result was the publication of *The Improvement of Towns and Cities* in 1901.<sup>13</sup>

*The Improvement of Towns and Cities* flew off the shelves, entering its eleventh edition in November 1916. Robinson intended *The Improvement of Towns and Cities* to serve as a “reminder that none fight alone” in the righteous crusade against ugliness. Success, Robinson argued, hinged upon the “co-ordination of the efforts, the dependence of each upon all the others, in order to secure a logical, harmonious result; the place and duty of each regiment of fighters in the battle for urban beauty.” *The Improvement of Towns and Cities* served as the battle-cry for the advocates of civic improvement to unite and synthesize their efforts under the City Beautiful. Catapulted into the spotlight of the

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<sup>12</sup>Wilson, “J. Horace McFarland,” 318-319; Kate Friend, “The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters: The City Federation Urges the Passage of the Park and School Bonds,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 11, 1910; “City Planning is Commended: Mayor-Elect H.B. Mistrot Thinks Waco Should Lay Good Foundation. Parks Opening Street, Etc.,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 27, 1910; “River Boulevard a Brilliant Conception,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 6, 1910.

<sup>13</sup>Peterson, “The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings,” 426-428; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 46.

City Beautiful movement, Robinson was hailed by one civic improvement disciple as having penned the “bible of the believers in the city beautiful.”<sup>14</sup>

Robinson himself capitalized upon the religious fervor with which Americans engaged civic improvement efforts. “In the Bible itself,” Robinson wrote, “the progress of mankind is represented as ending in a celestial city, after having begun in a garden.” For Robinson, God’s province and creative force rested in nature, the city belonged to Man. Robinson argued that Man, as architect of the city, was responsible for instilling and manufacturing beauty in the urban wastelands. Robinson noted the motives and means for creating and preserving beauty were multifaceted with some groups touting civic improvement as a moral issue, others as political, economic, educational, or philanthropic—all of which were issues women in Waco touched upon in their appeals for the park bond issue. Largely concentrating civic energies towards obtaining a system of parks and boulevards accessible by all sections and social classes of Waco, progressive Wacoans sought to reclaim the banks of the Brazos for a riverside boulevard, and preserve areas of natural beauty such as Cameron Park for the enjoyment of people. By preserving natural beauty, both Robinson and Wacoans argued that Man was embracing his duty to protect that which God created. Thus City Beautiful disciples viewed Man as the agent of urban beauty and the guardian of natural beauty.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Charles Mulford Robinson, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901), vii-viii (quotes 2 and 3); Mrs. Marion Louise McCall, “What Organization has Done for St. Louis,” *Home and Flowers* 12 (1902): 50, quoted in John A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning 1840-1917* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 121 (quote 3).

<sup>15</sup>Peterson, “The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings,” 428; Robinson, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics*, 288-289, 292-293 (quote 1); Robinson, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities*, vii-viii (quotes 2 and 3), 288-289, 292-293 (quote 3); Kate Friend, “The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 11, 1910; “River Boulevard a Brilliant Conception,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 6, 1910; W.H. Hoffman, “Small



In 1903 Robinson completed *Modern Civic Art: Or the City Made Beautiful*, which read as “textbook of aesthetic-utilitarian taste” with guidelines of how to accomplish “civic design.” The book reveals Robinson’s shift from municipal improvement to comprehensive city planning—a shift which required cooperation between the layman and expert, and would impact the development of Cameron Park. On the one hand, the cleaning of streets and efforts to secure parklands that characterized municipal improvement beckoned to the citizen activist. On the other hand, designs for and development of a beautiful and efficient park and boulevard system, schematics for a civic center, and comprehensive city plan were the province of experts and well beyond the organizing and campaign efforts of laymen. At its core, *Modern Civic Art* moved beyond the call for civic improvement to the concept of a united City Beautiful movement with a rubric of comprehensive city-planning.<sup>16</sup>

In *Modern Civic Art*, Robinson also demonstrated an acute awareness of the growing problem of urban housing, sanitation, and need for open spaces. The turn of the century was witness to what Robinson called “municipal evolution.” The ability of citizens, public officials, and experts to see the city as “the most complex of organisms” would allow for the consideration of the city’s “many functions and how it may best be fitted with its various parts for their performance, and only then when we have finished that shall we behold rising before us the City Beautiful.”<sup>17</sup> Although the affluent were working and funding civic improvement, Robinson believed the City Beautiful was about

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Parks are Favored,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 13, 1910; “Proctor Springs Given to Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1910; River Boulevard Again Stressed,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 20, 1910.

<sup>16</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 72.

<sup>17</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 72-73; Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art: Or the City Made Beautiful* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 4 (quote 1); Charles Mulford Robinson, “The City Beautiful,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, October 6, 1904 (quote 2 and 3).

“making possible and opening up of a larger, fuller, and richer life for the city’s multitudes.” To afford the greatest amount of people the greatest opportunity to revel in the relaxing, regenerating, and educating powers of beauty, Robinson suggested a series of parks and boulevards.<sup>18</sup>

By taking into consideration the difficulty of the lower class’s means to travel across town, Robinson urged that cities adopt a policy of placing a small park in each section of a city, thereby maximizing the use and availability of parks to all citizens. When securing land for park purposes, Robinson advised cities to reserve the banks of waterways for park development and to select a “tract of movingly beautiful scenery, developed on natural lines that it may present the greatest contrast to the town’s artificiality.” After all, for Robinson, a park represented the “cathedral of the modern city” and all efforts should be undertaken to “preserve to public enjoyment the most striking natural feature, be it the finest view or the best scenery” the Creator blessed a city with.<sup>19</sup>

No one can doubt that Cameron Park reflects Robinson’s ideal park, but were Wacoans aware of Robinson’s work? Did the City Beautiful movement influence Waco? The answer to both questions is a resounding yes. One need only look through the pages of the *Times-Herald* to find countless editorials and articles espousing City Beautiful ideology. The Waco Public Library advertised its collection of civic improvement literature, including books and articles written by Robinson, McFarland, and Zueblin. *The*

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<sup>18</sup>Robinson, “The City Beautiful,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, October 6, 1904 (quote 1); Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 345.

<sup>19</sup>Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 327-329, 344.

*Chautauquan Weekly Magazine*, a nationally distributed periodical, often devoted entire issues to civic improvement.<sup>20</sup>

In the June 1906 edition of the *Chautauquan*, Frederick M. Crunden espoused the importance of the public library to civic improvement efforts. Crunden argued that the value of public libraries rests in their function as a clearinghouse of information, and their accessibility to every class in order to “open the eyes” of the multitude of people who would adopt and implement civic improvement and social reform programs. Crunden also noted that the emerging science of sociology revealed that the success of the City Beautiful hinged on the ability of Americans to transform their “weaker brethren” into the “brother prosperous—at least well-fed, well-clad, decently housed, and fairly educated.” Sociology, Crunden argued, brought the realization that “society is an organism,” therefore the “body politic” can only be as strong as its weakest member. For Crunden the remedy for healing the ailing parts of society rested in enlightenment, and therefore education must be the cornerstone of civic improvement efforts. Articles such as Crunden’s at the Waco Public Library helped to inform Wacoans about the intellectual thrust of the City Beautiful movement.<sup>21</sup>

During the City Beautiful movement, the elite class assumed the duty to educate the lower classes in matters pertaining to civic improvement. Historian William H. Wilson asserts that by becoming educators and imparting their own value system on the lower classes, the elite class became “environmentalists.” Wilson chooses the term environmentalists for two primary reasons. First, the elite sought to reform society

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<sup>20</sup>“Public Library Notes,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 27, 1910.

<sup>21</sup>Frederick M. Crunden, “The Public Library and Civic Improvement,” *The Chautauquan; A Weekly Magazine (1880-1914)* 43, no. 4 (June 1906): 338-339.

within the social construct of the day. Conscious of class lines, the elite felt obligated as privileged and enlightened citizens to assert “cultural hegemony” over the lower classes by imparting their progressive views of morality and aesthetics. Beauty, the elite believed, served as a vehicle for instructing and refining the tastes of the poor. Beauty possessed the “capacity to shape human thought and behavior.”

One must bear in mind that the City Beautiful operated as a Progressive Era reform movement within the American social environment of the early twentieth century. Thus one should not be surprised that the City Beautiful did nothing to promote racial equality; rather, the City Beautiful perpetuated the rigid separation and discrimination that characterized the Jim Crow South by recognizing and seeking to improve social class relations, but not race relations. Moreover, the height of the City Beautiful occurred during the apex of the racial tension and violence in Waco and McLennan County. The intent here is not to disparage the City Beautiful—for the movement profoundly shaped the development of the modern American city—but to highlight the context in which the City Beautiful movement took place.<sup>22</sup>

Wilson’s second reason for applying the “environmentalist” label to City Beautiful advocates stems from the emphasis placed on preserving the natural beauty of towns and cities. The parks movement simultaneously reflected the desire to preserve natural beauty and to use the beauty of nature to imbue the lower classes with a more civilized culture and morality. As malicious as this program of “social control” may sound, Wilson quickly notes elites of the Progressive Era neither sought to coercively inculcate the lower classes with their own values, nor was control of the social environment the prime motivation for civic improvement. In an article appealing to

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<sup>22</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 78-81 (quotes 1, 2, and 3).

Wacoans to pass a park bond issue, Kate Friend deferred to the educational and influential power of natural beauty as a reason to approve the bond. A park's beauty aids in a subliminal refinement of one's aesthetic taste. Moreover, a public park in every city ward, Friend reasoned, would foster civic pride and inspire citizens to tend their own yards and avoid littering city streets. Parks would also provide a beautiful place for relaxation and social interaction for the working class. Also urging the need for public parks on behalf of the lower classes, Hannah A. Bloch wrote to the *Times-Herald* expressing the need for Waco to purchase land for a series of small parks accessible to all citizens "instead of going so far that a poor man and his family will be debarred the privilege" due to lack of funds and transportation.<sup>23</sup>

Friend and Bloch revealed another aspect of the City Beautiful of which Wacoans were keenly aware—the role of women. The City Beautiful movement presented women an opportunity to influence politics and take a measure of control over the development of life outside their domestic sphere. This was especially important for women in the South, where a patriarchal environment persisted and the progressive, outspoken woman remained socially unacceptable. Kate Friend, perhaps the most outspoken woman in Waco, stated that the parks bond election marked the "first time in local history the women of Waco are using their voice to influence votes." Quick to qualify the women's venture into politics, Friend assuaged any fears the men of Waco might have, insisting that the club women of Waco did not intend to pursue suffrage. Through publications

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<sup>23</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 78-81 (quote 1); Kate Friend, "The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 11, 1910; Mrs. Hannah A. Bloch, "The Park Question," *Waco Times-Herald*, August 9, 1910 (quote 2).

and conventions the American Civic Association helped to embolden women to take an active stance for civic improvement.<sup>24</sup>

Mrs. Charles F. Millspaugh's *Chautauquan* article, "Women as a Factor in Civic Improvement," cited numerous examples of how women across America—such as the Federation of Women's Club and Waco Civic League—had initiated improvements to their cities. Women were keenly aware of the opportunities that civic improvement afforded them. A woman as old as sixty might "preside over the meeting to promote civic improvement and be the leading spirit in procuring small parks or proper garbage collection for her city." The women of Waco voiced their own frustrations with poor sanitary conditions by establishing an annual cleanup day in 1908; by 1910 cleanup expanded to an entire week in March. Wacoans took pride in the fact that their city earned a "reputation for being the cleanest city in Texas." Clean streets and yards, while important, often represented an initial step into serious civic improvement and constituted one of the few things over which women could assert a large measure of control. Still, men monopolized the right to vote and hold the public offices that could pass ordinances mandating sanitation improvements. The women of the City Beautiful movement recognized that truly fulfilling the City Beautiful ideal required active male participation.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, women were the primary instigators and proponents of civic improvement in towns and cities, and the most active women belonged to the upper class.

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<sup>24</sup>Kate Friend, "The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 11, 1910.

<sup>25</sup>Mrs. Charles F. Millspaugh, "Women as a Factor in Civic Improvement," *The Chautauquan; A Weekly Magazine, (1880-1914)* 43, no. 4 (June 1906): 312 (quote 1); *Waco Times-Herald*, February 21, 1909; "This is 'Clean-Up' Week for All Waco," *Waco Times-Herald*, March 6, 1910 (quote 2).

Women wisely focused their campaigns on male civic leaders in a position to bring about change. Naturally, these men also resided in the upper echelon of society. At the national level, J. Horace McFarland, Charles Mulford Robinson, and Charles Zueblin embraced leadership roles and urged men and women to take an activist stance; yet these men all resided in the more progressive Northern and Midwestern states. The women of the Waco Civic League faced the challenge of convincing the “easy-going Southern men” from imagining “aesthetics a strictly feminine branch of municipal work.” Moral, environmental, and educational arguments aided in rallying the women of Waco to voice support for civic improvement; but touting the benefits of parks and natural beauty as an economic boon proved to be an effective tactic in convincing men to vote for bond issues.<sup>26</sup>

Waco political leaders such as City Commissioner James H. Mackey, Fire and Light Commissioner John F. Wright, Mayor H.B. Mistrot, and business professionals such as W.C. Lawson, William Waldo Cameron, and Ben G. Kendall worked especially hard to improve Waco’s park system. Despite the earnest efforts of the upper class, much progress depended on middle and lower class men. Upper class men did not constitute a large enough bloc of votes to approve the passage of bonds and the purchase of land. Ironically, the elite’s attempts to influence the lower classes through beauty revolved around the willingness of the lower classes to consent to the adoption of civic improvement measures. Thus by voting the working class was able to project its voice on

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<sup>26</sup>Mary B. Taylor, “General Civic League of Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 22, 1910; Kate Friend, “The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February, 11, 1910.

matters of civic improvement. In Waco all classes sounded off in unison with the overwhelming passage of the parks bond issue.<sup>27</sup>

Passage of the \$35,000 park bond issue also galvanized Wacoans in support of other civic improvements related to the City Beautiful. In his book *Modern Civic Art*, Robinson stressed that water-front property should be secured for parks and parkways. A riverside drive fulfilled the triad of utility, efficiency, and beauty. Dutifully, W.C. Lawson heeded Robinson's advice, urging Waco to purchase land fronting the west bank of the Brazos River for a riverside drive. For Lawson, the idea of a riverside boulevard was continually linked with efforts to procure Proctor Springs for the citizens of Waco. Mayor-Elect H.B. Mistrot and the *Times-Herald* echoed Lawson's sentiments, claiming a parkway along the Brazos could rival the beauty of the famous Riverside Drive in New York City and prove beneficial and accessible to all the people of the city.<sup>28</sup>

In Waco, complaints over an insufficient amount of parks intertwined with concern about a lack of playgrounds. Historian William H. Wilson argues that the playground movement tended to be "much more activist and more militantly environmentalist" in terms of conditioning children of all ages, of all classes, and all ethnic groups to be respectful of authority, considerate of others, and a willingness to embrace patriotism and "civic idealism." Whereas City Beautiful advocates believed beauty could inspire a person to right conduct, playground enthusiasts believed morality "was not independent and divine but environmentally conditioned." Baylor University

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<sup>27</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 76; *Waco Times-Herald*, February 17, 1910.

<sup>28</sup>Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 329; W.C. Lawson, "Riverside Boulevard and Proctor Springs," *Waco Times-Herald*, March 27, 1910; "River Boulevard Again Stressed," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 20, 1910, "City Planning is Commended," *Waco Times-Herald*, February 27, 1910; "River Boulevard a Brilliant Conception," *Waco Times-Herald*, March 6, 1910.



professor Enoch J. Mills argued that the presence of playgrounds reduced juvenile crime, and that in the eastern United States a belief that “one playground supervisor is worth a dozen policemen” constituted more than enough reason to construct playgrounds instead of jails. Kate Friend reinforced Mills’ claim to the rehabilitating power of playgrounds by citing her conversation with a policeman from Denver who attributed a downward spiral in crime to the installment of playgrounds. Whether playgrounds actually deterred crime is debatable, but removing children from the streets and placing them under a watchful eye certainly helped fuel the playground movement in Waco.<sup>29</sup>

In an effort to educate and imbue Wacoans with the need for and value of public parks and playgrounds, the *Times-Herald* began producing a “Civic Department” in May of 1910. Debuting in the Sunday, May 15, 1910, edition of the newspaper, the “Civic Department” acknowledged the galvanizing efforts of the Civic League of Waco in helping to establish cleanup days and securing funds to purchase lands for parks, encouraged Wacoans to attend lectures on the benefits of parks, and noted work being undertaken to beautify Waco. Mary Ross, editor of the “Civic Department,” sought to inspire Wacoans by reporting how Wacoans were helping to realize the goal of a “Waco Beautiful.”

Typically free and open to the public, civic improvement lectures helped to educate Wacoans on the benefits of parks and playgrounds. At the behest of the South Waco Parks Association, Professor J.L. Kesler and Mrs. J.B. Powell delivered addresses reflecting City Beautiful ideology. Kesler argued for the influence natural beauty

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<sup>29</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 81-82 (quotes 1 and 2); Enoch J. Mills, “Public Playgrounds for Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 15, 1910 (quote 3); Kate Friend, “The Women of Waco Appeal to Voters.”

imparted on the “moral character” of anyone who gazed on groves of trees and fields of flowers. “No one,” Kesler contended, “who looks upon a beautiful landscape and is affected by it can go away and commit a crime.” Mrs. Powell stated that playgrounds were capable of developing both a child’s mental and physical abilities.<sup>30</sup>

In February 1910 the Waco Civic League invited Chicago landscape architect E.H. Weed to deliver a lecture on “A More Beautiful Waco.” Weed’s lecture reinforced the need of beautifying parks, cemeteries, and plots of land surrounding railroads and factories. Impressed with Weed’s observations of Waco’s own park system, Waco city leaders retained Weed’s services to improve the Sul Ross Park, situated on two blocks of land located on Jefferson Street, secured in 1909 through cooperation of the citizens and city officials.<sup>31</sup>

By employing Weed, Waco city leaders affirmed their commitment to perhaps the most crucial element of the City Beautiful—a reliance on experts. Civic improvement activists in Waco recognized they lacked the training necessary for implementing and completing park designs, the laying out of boulevards, or a comprehensive city plan. In *Modern Civic Art* Charles Mulford Robinson constantly reiterated the need for cities to secure an expert or a commission of experts to achieve a true City Beautiful. Robinson claimed “there is almost uniformly recognition of the necessity of expert guidance, not merely in the engineering features of the park, but . . . in its original location, and almost completely in its artistic development.” Robinson’s sage advice apparently influenced

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<sup>30</sup>*Waco Times-Herald*, May 8, 1910; Mary Ross, ed., “Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 15, 1910 (quote 1, 2, and 3).

<sup>31</sup>“Great Interest In the Lecture,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 12, 1910; “Waco Has Another Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 4, 1909 (quote 1).

the Cameron family. Accompanying the donation of William Cameron Park was a check for five thousand dollars to be used, “first in securing the services of a competent landscape architect, to plot the property into a public park, and the remainder to be used in assisting in carrying out said plans.” Choosing W.C. Lawson as chair of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners, the Cameron family again heeded Robinson’s advice by selecting a man who had voiced concern over the location of the park. As “trustees of scenery,” Cameron Park’s first board of commissioners, W.C. Lawson, Ben G. Kendall, and W.J. Neale, wasted little time in proceeding with the wishes of the Cameron family.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 83-84; Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 326, 338, 345 (quotes 1 and 3); “Proctor Springs Given to Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1910 (quotes 2).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Building and Growing Cameron Park, 1910-1930

Within days of the of the Cameron family's gift of Proctor Springs in May of 1910, W.C. Lawson—newly appointed Chair of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners—received a letter from renowned Kansas City landscape architect George E. Kessler. A German immigrant, Kessler worked tirelessly in developing a reputation as one of America's foremost landscape architects. On his résumé Kessler boasted of designing the park and boulevard system in Kansas City, laying out the grounds at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, and improving Fair Park, home of the Texas State Fair in Dallas, Texas. Impressed with Kessler's work, Dallas city leaders retained Kessler's services again in the winter of 1910, commissioning him to prepare a comprehensive plan for the city of Dallas. It is unclear whether Kessler or Lawson initiated the correspondence, but Kessler wrote to Lawson on May 27, 1910, saying that he would be unable to attend the Cameron Park dedication ceremony. On June 9, 1910, Lawson responded to Kessler's letter by soliciting Kessler's advice on how to proceed with developing the recently acquired parkland. Lawson enclosed a small map of the property and provided a brief description of its diverse topography. At the end of the letter, Lawson stated that the Board of Commissioners intended to employ the services of a "competent landscape architect" to draw up and implement a design, "with a view to retaining as nearly as possible the woodland effect." Lawson's clear implication of wanting to hire Kessler for such work did not go unnoticed by the masterful German;

however, before any improvements to the property would commence, Wacoans needed to march out to Fifth and Herring and dedicate their beautiful new park.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the Camerons' gift to Waco, excitement and jubilation permeated the conversations at dinner tables and on the streets of Waco. The new slogan of the Young Men's Business League, "'Waco, built in a park,'" gained legitimacy with the city's ownership of Proctor Springs firmly in hand. Many hailed the donation of Cameron Park as marking "a new era in Waco's progress, a start in the right direction." Described by the *Times-Herald* as "generous, thoughtful, and patriotic," the philanthropic act of the Cameron family deserved a park dedication worthy of remembrance.<sup>2</sup>

City leaders chose Friday, May 27, 1910 as the day Wacoans would give thanks to the Cameron family and commit themselves to the maintenance and development of Cameron Park. Mayor H.B. Mistrot issued a proclamation to the citizens and businessmen of Waco asking them to take part in the celebration proceedings. Mistrot declared May 27 a half holiday to accommodate the schoolchildren and to encourage everyone "of high or low degree, to rich and poor alike" to attend the celebration. Wacoans decorated their streets, cars, and businesses with the colors of the Cameron clan—crimson, white, and navy blue. Starting at the intersection of Twelfth Street and Austin Avenue, a long and elaborate parade meandered through the streets of Waco

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<sup>1</sup>Lisa C. Maxwell, s.v. "Kessler, George E.," *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/KK/fke44.html> (accessed October 16, 2009); William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 260; William C. Lawson to George E. Kessler, June 9, 1910, George E. Kessler Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, University of Missouri

<sup>2</sup>"Jubilee to be Held Friday Afternoon," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 25, 1910.

before arriving at its destination at Fifth Street and Herring Avenue, the grand entrance to Cameron Park.<sup>3</sup>

In describing the enthusiasm generated by the parade, the *Waco Times-Herald* reported that “even the negro float drivers and express men had caught the spirit, and were driving their teams around over the city with flags sticking from their bridles or parts of the harness.” Even drug stores and saloons closed their doors to participate in the dedication ceremony, “something unprecedented in the history of Waco.” When the massive parade line of children, bands, businessmen, women, military companies, and fraternal societies finally reached Cameron Park, they gazed upon a crowd already several thousand strong. The Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Samuel Palmer Brooks, president of Baylor University, raised his hand and the throng of an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 people fell silent. Reverend S.C. Littlepage gave the invocation asking God to bless all, especially the beneficent Cameron family. Following the invocation, Dr. Brooks announced that “Cameron Park, a place where peace would reign supreme” should be christened. Pouring out a pitcher of the cold, pure water, young Eleanor Cameron, daughter of William Waldo Cameron, christened the tract William Cameron Park. With the christening of the park, the thousands in attendance unleashed a thunderous roar of applause, and the Baylor University band performed a rousing rendition of the quintessential Southern tune “Dixie.”<sup>4</sup>

Brooks then read a resolution expressing the appreciation and indebtedness of Wacoans to the Cameron family for their generous gift. The resolution acknowledged

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<sup>3</sup>“Plans Taking Form for Friday Jubilee,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 25, 1910. Some articles present the Cameron colors as crimson and white, while others claim the colors are crimson and navy blue.

<sup>4</sup>“Waco’s Unanimous Tender of Appreciation of Princely Gift,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910 (quotes 1 and 3); “Cameron Days and Its Observance,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910 (quote 2).

that “divine wisdom created” Cameron Park, making it a “spot of wondrous natural beauty to the end that its beauties might be utilized by the community as a resting place, a spot of recreation for the people, and especially for the good and joy of little children.” At the conclusion of the resolution, Brooks asked that those who recognized “this gift, inspired out of love for [William Cameron] and out of love for humanity, too, will be a material as well as a moral blessing to us and those who come after us” raise their right hand in acceptance of the resolution. Brooks’s plea was met with a unanimous show of hands from the thousands in attendance.

A series of five-minute speeches followed the acceptance of the resolution. W.C. Lawson, who had fervently lobbied the city to acquire Proctor Springs, delivered the initial address. Lawson recalled his first visit to Proctor Springs in 1884, and since that time he had desired that the springs be secured as a “haven” of recreation and relaxation for Wacoans. Edward Rotan, successful businessman and entrepreneur, recounted a conversation with the late William Cameron in which the lumber tycoon expressed his opinion that a monument should be “something definite, tangible, that would appeal to all the people.” Rotan contended, as did several other speakers, that William Cameron must be smiling down on the memorial his family gifted to Waco in his honor. Captain M.B. Davis spoke of a decree by the chiefs of the Waco Indians that “no war song should ever be chanted in the grove” in Cameron Park. Regardless of its historical truth, the anecdote exemplified Wacoans’ association of peace with the park.<sup>5</sup>

The only speech to be preserved in its entirety came from Pat Neff. Laced with flowery rhetoric and lofty comparisons, Neff’s address expressed his wish that the Camerons’ gift might inspire additional acts of philanthropy. The future Texas governor

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<sup>5</sup>“Waco’s Unanimous Tender,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910.

and Baylor president likened the Camerons' service to humanity as an act of philanthropy on par with Christ's washing of the disciples' feet. Neff also contrasted the "misguided ambition" of the Egyptian pharaohs with the munificent gift of the Camerons' that would serve to benefit humanity and provide a "breathing spot" where Wacoans might "commune with nature and Nature's God."<sup>6</sup> It did not take long for Neff's earnest wish to come true. Eager to revel in their new pleasure ground, a multitude of Wacoans remained in the park several hours after the festivities, traversing the paths and exploring the woods. When eyes could no longer pierce the darkness, many headed back downtown to continue the celebration. They were greeted with the rare treat of the business district being "brilliantly illuminated" in honor of the "completion of the first part of the work of building a city park and boulevard system." With the Cameron family thanked profusely and dedication ceremonies completed, Wacoans retired to their homes. Preserving and developing the nature commune Neff so eloquently spoke of now rested in the hands of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners.<sup>7</sup>

Signed by the members of the Cameron family on May 19, 1910, the deed conveying the Proctor Springs property to the City of Waco contained a few key provisions—one of which included the appointment of three persons to serve without pay as commissioners of Cameron Park. Authority to appoint commissioners rested with the Waco City Council, but the Cameron family retained some control by reserving the right to approve or reject each appointment. The deed also included the following stipulations: that private commerce on park property is prohibited, that property is used exclusively for

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<sup>6</sup>Pat Neff, *A Collection of Twenty-Three Addresses by Pat M. Neff, Waco, Texas* (Waco, Texas: Philomathesian Society), 23-26.

<sup>7</sup>"Waco's Unanimous Tender," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910; "Illumination Tonight," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1910 (quotes 1 and 2).



park purposes, that the City of Waco must provide a “sufficient sum” for maintaining the park, and that the park be known perpetually as “William Cameron Park.” By recommendation of the Cameron family and with approval of city officials, W.C. Lawson, Ben G. Kendall, and William J. Neale composed the first board of commissioners of Cameron Park.<sup>8</sup>

Of the first three commissioners, Lawson was the most vocal and staunchest supporter of parks. In *A History of William Cameron & Co.*, author R.J. Tolson credited Lawson with formulating the idea of Cameron Park. Lawson “lived and dreamed and worked with this hope—that this beautiful property should some day be dedicated to the pleasure of the people,” and once appointed chair of the board of commissioners, Lawson served with “unselfish devotion” until his death in January 11, 1919.<sup>9</sup> Like Lawson, Neale was a successful cotton man, serving terms as president of the Texas Cotton Shippers Association and the American Cotton Shippers Association; Neale also held the title of Director of the Texas Power and Light Company. After twenty-five years of service to Cameron Park, Neale passed away in 1935.<sup>10</sup>

Born in Elkton, Kentucky, in 1877, newly appointed Cameron Park Commissioner Ben G. Kendall moved to Waco with his family in 1890. Although he attended Baylor University, Kendall largely educated himself in matters of jurisprudence. Kendall embarked on a prosperous career as an attorney when he gained admission to the bar two years prior to his turning twenty-one. In 1907 Kendall joined William Sleeper

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<sup>8</sup>“Proctor Springs Given to Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1910.

<sup>9</sup>R.J. Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co. (inc.) with a Biographical Sketch of William Cameron and others* (Waco, TX: J.S. Barnett, 1926), Sketch on William Cameron Park.

<sup>10</sup>Dayton, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County, Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1972), 201.

and C.A. Boynton in forming a successful law firm, with William Cameron & Co. Inc., as one the firm's principle clients. After Lawson died in 1919, Kendall assumed the role of chair and devoted much of his time and energy toward the development of the park until his own death in 1939. In praising Kendall's liberal devotion of his time to Cameron Park, Tolson claimed that there was "not a ten foot square space of ground" in the park Kendall did not know intimately.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, Cameron Park benefited tremendously from loyal and hard-working commissioners. But what kinds of improvements to the park did the commissioners envision? Who designed and implemented the plans? What role did the city have in helping to develop the park?

City officials wasted little time in fulfilling their obligation to fund maintenance and improvements for the park. Of the \$35,000 approved in the 1910 park bond issue, \$15,310 went toward improving Cameron Park, including the purchase of two additional pieces of property along Fourth Street and Herring Avenue at a cost of \$8,060. The decision of how to improve the park with the remaining \$7,250 appropriated from the bond issue and the \$5,000 provided by the Cameron family rested with the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners.<sup>12</sup> Shortly after the dedication of the park, suggestions for improvements began to emerge, some more practical than others. One of the less practical suggestions involved moving the famed suspension bridge to Herring Avenue to connect the east and west banks of the Brazos River thereby allowing Wacoans in East Waco direct access to the park. Al Cowan wrote to the *Times-Herald* recommending that the park commissioners consider constructing a stadium or amphitheater capable of

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<sup>11</sup>Dayton Kelley, *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County*, 149; Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park.

<sup>12</sup>Nannie Hillary Harrison, "Cameron Park," in *Illustrated Municipal Handbook of Waco: The Happy Prosperous City of Central Texas* (Waco, TX: City of Waco, 1914?), 115, 117.

holding several thousand people.<sup>13</sup> Lawson and the other commissioners undoubtedly entertained a multitude of different ideas, but they refused to proceed with improvements without first consulting and retaining an expert.

In his letter to George E. Kessler, Lawson pontificated on the wisdom of receiving an “expert’s instructions before preparing a topographical map.” Mindful of Kessler’s work in St. Louis and Dallas, Lawson desperately wanted Kessler to visit Waco to offer his opinion on how to proceed with improvements to the park.<sup>14</sup> On June 24, 1910, Sam Sanger, prominent businessman and former owner of the Proctor Springs property, received a letter from his brother Alex Sanger asking him to take care of Kessler while he visited Waco. A personal friend of Kessler, Alex Sanger claimed that “Waco could not procure . . . a better man than Mr. Kessler” to design improvements for Cameron Park. However, Kessler did not visit Waco. Instead he appointed his capable assistant R.C. Barnett to assess the park and offer a proposition.<sup>15</sup>

Barnett spent June 26 evaluating the park with Lawson. Barnett informed Lawson that Kessler “would furnish a general preliminary plan and follow with a working plan” for development “for the sum of \$10.00 per acre”—a total cost of approximately \$1,000. Still needing to produce topographical maps, photographs, and

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<sup>13</sup>“Cameron Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 4, 1910; “Suggests Stadium for Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 5, 1910.

<sup>14</sup>William C. Lawson to George E. Kessler, June 9, 1910, George E. Kessler Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, University of Missouri.

<sup>15</sup>Alex Sanger to Sam Sanger, June 24, 1910, George E. Kessler Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, University of Missouri; “Inspected Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1910. Whether Kessler himself ever visited Cameron Park is debatable. Alex’s letter to Sam specifically mentioned Kessler as the bearer of the letter, but the *Waco Times-Herald* never reported anyone other than Barnett evaluating the park. Due to Kessler’s demanding schedule and prior obligations, it is my estimation that Kessler did not come to Waco. Only the missing correspondence between Kessler and Lawson could answer this and other questions about the level of Kessler’s involvement with Cameron Park.

funds for actual development, Lawson replied that Kessler's asking price exceeded the amount of funds the board of commissioner wished to spend.<sup>16</sup> The Cameron Park Board of Commissioners' courtship of Kessler ended in July of 1910. Upon hearing that Lawson had rebuffed Kessler's offer, Alex Sanger wrote to his brother Sam warning that "you folks are making a great mistake in trying to save a few dollars by not employing Mr. Kessler." Although the push to employ Kessler failed, the Board of the Commissioners remained undaunted in its pursuit of an expert, having entered into discussions with at least two different landscape firms.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, an unimproved Cameron Park grew in popularity as Wacoans swelled the grounds during evenings and on weekends. During the hot summer months, picnickers often enjoyed supper and conversation as the moon rose to bathe Cameron Park in its light. For Harry Wheeler, a picnic in the park served as a pretense for a surprise birthday party in his honor. Young people especially reveled in the delight of possessing a new pleasure ground. "The opening of the park," one reporter observed, "has given so many opportunities theretofore unknown to Waco youth—to gather a few rose buds of pleasure in the open and fly with Time to jolly tunes."<sup>18</sup> From June to October of 1910, Professor V. Alessandro and his band delivered free evening concerts in various city parks, with concerts in Cameron Park often drawing "monster crowds." Traveling by streetcar, horse and buggy, or automobile, Wacoans turned out in droves to

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<sup>16</sup>R.C. Barnett to George E. Kessler, July 11, 1910, George E. Kessler Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, University of Missouri.

<sup>17</sup>Alex Sanger to Sam Sanger, July 16, 1910, George E. Kessler Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, University of Missouri.

<sup>18</sup>"At Cameron Park," *Waco Times-Herald*, August 21, 1910 (quote 1); "At Cameron Park," *Waco Times-Herald*, August 7, 1910; "Forty Singers Have a Picnic," *Waco Times-Herald*, July 17, 1910. I have provided just a small number of examples of stories of picnics in Cameron Park that litter the pages of the *Waco Times-Herald*.

hear music resonate through the park's shady groves. The *Times-Herald* published song lists for readers bring with them to the concerts. Often a group of mischievous young people did their best to interrupt concerts, prompting the city commissioners to provide a police presence. As the concerts grew in popularity, a lack of adequate seating started to draw complaints, especially from people desiring seats for older people. One such critic wrote to the newspaper asking if Wacoans would be forced to endure another year of an undeveloped park. Those complaining of a lack of seating joined a growing chorus of Wacoans lamenting the apparent lack of progress in developing Cameron Park.<sup>19</sup>

Critics placed the blame on the slow progress on the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners. Numerous articles appeared in the *Times-Herald* counseling Wacoans to be patient and urging them to recognize that proper development would require time. W.C. Lawson responded to the complaints directly by noting that the groundwork for physical improvements had commenced in July with the beginning of a month-long survey for a topographical map. Lawson explained that the densely wooded areas of the park cherished by park-goers spelled havoc for surveyors. Taking up the challenge, young surveyor Garland Foscue eagerly and patiently wrestled with the problem to produce a survey of the highest quality. Although improvements for the park moved slowly because of other major obstacles—such as a labor strike in Chicago that delayed the delivery of one hundred benches for seating—articles in the *Times-Herald* stated that Wacoans were not deterred from frequenting the park regularly to socialize and romp

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<sup>19</sup>“Free Concert at Cameron Park Today,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 19, 1910; A complaint of lack of seating can be found in “Parks and Band Concerts,” *Waco Times-Herald*, July 24, 1910; A description of “hoodlums” interrupting concerts is in an article titled, “Big Crowd Heard Concert Yesterday,” *Waco Times-Herald* August 29, 1910; “Monster Gathering Heard Band Concert,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 19, 1910; “Band Concert Drew Big Crowd to Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, October 10, 1910.

through the woods. The “fad” of an “evening meal on the grounds of Cameron Park” compelled park commissioners to hire a caretaker to clean up the trash left by picnickers. The *Times-Herald* cautioned Wacoans to respect the park lest it might fall into disrepair.<sup>20</sup>

To fulfill the Camerons’ request and Lawson’s earnest desire for an expert to lay out improvements for Cameron Park, park commissioners turned their eyes northeast. In early August 1910, A.L. Rose, head landscape architect for Brown Brothers Company in Rochester, New York, completed his own inspection of Cameron Park. Rose returned to Rochester with surveys, a topographical map, and copious notes, and over the next few weeks he worked to produce a development plan for Cameron Park.<sup>21</sup>

Any fear that Cameron Park might never be developed was dispelled in September with the presentation of A.L. Rose’s general plan of development. In his accompanying letter, Rose mentioned that while in Buffalo vacationing at her daughter’s home, Mrs. Flora Cameron and her daughters visited his office offering their approval of his suggested improvements. The plans designed by Rose and the rest of the Brown Brothers Landscape Department echoed Lawson’s intention to pursue a “purely naturalistic development” of Cameron Park. Included in the plans were proposals for a lake, playground, and a series of drives and walks. With the designers emphasizing the need to allow the “public the freedom of going any direction,” suggested development centered on the Herring Avenue entrance and the Proctor Springs area. Designers also

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<sup>20</sup>“William Cameron Park Development is On,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 4, 1910; “William Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 7, 1910; “Plans for Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 14, 1910; “Landscape Artist Completes Survey,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 10, 1910 (quote 1).

<sup>21</sup>“Landscape Artist Completes Survey,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 10, 1910; “Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 21, 1910 (quote1).

counseled that a riverside boulevard—a project at the top of Lawson’s wish list—should be pursued in the near future.<sup>22</sup>

The installment of one hundred benches accommodating approximately six hundred people coincided with the arrival of the plans from Brown Brothers Company. Wacoans greeted the news of both with jubilation. The completion of a new bridge crossing Lindsey Hollow leading to the Country Club further enlivened the civic atmosphere in Waco. In November Wacoans took pride in directing park visitors to the first Texas Cotton Palace in fifteen years. The “Civic Department” in the *Times-Herald* advised that a “stop should made at the springs, so that an idea of the full value of the property may be realized.”

Waco also publicized the park on the national stage. C. Wilbur Coons, Secretary of the Waco Business Men’s Club, contributed an article to the widely circulated periodical *The American City*, detailing Waco’s acquisition of the park from the Cameron family as well as A.L. Rose’s proposed plans for its development. At Thanksgiving the *Times-Herald* took the opportunity to express gratitude for the gift of William Cameron Park. The year 1910 closed with Wacoans still waiting for development of the park, but a report of the availability of \$12,500 to improve the park, Wacoans sensed that progress loomed around the corner.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>City of Waco, Records and Archives, Cameron Park File, Microfilm Reel 3, blip 0229-0230, A.L. Rose to W.C. Lawson, September 3, 1910; City of Waco, Records and Archives, Cameron Park File, Microfilm Reel 3, blip 0231-0238, Brown Brothers Company to W.C. Lawson, “Report On Landscape Development of Cameron Park.”

<sup>23</sup>“Seats Placed in Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 13, 1910; “Drives in and about Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, November 6, 1910; C. Wilbur Coons, “Park Development in Waco, Texas,” *The American City* 3, no. 5 (November 1910): 234; “Some Things Waco is Thankful for,” *Waco Times-Herald*, November 23, 1910; “The Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, December 25, 1910; Roger N. Conger, s.v. “Cotton Palace,” *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/lbc2.html> (accessed October 18, 2008).

As 1911 dawned, Wacoans probably took pleasure in reading the prefatory remarks in the new edition of *Morrison & Fourmy's City of Waco Directory*, which extolled both the beauty of the park and the magnanimity of the Cameron family. Claiming that Cameron Park vaulted Waco from the bottom rungs of Texas cities to the top in parkland, the prefatory remarks also compared the beauty and diverse topography of Cameron Park to Yellowstone National Park and Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. A visitor to Waco learned through *Morrison & Fourmy* that in Cameron Park could be found "deep canyons shaded with magnificent pecans, sycamore trees and stately oaks. There are shaded nooks and babbling brooks with ever running springs spouting from the sides of hills, the sparkling water flowing into basins and forming the most lovely drinking pools imaginable."

Finally in February of 1911 the development of Cameron Park commenced. The *Times-Herald* assured its readers that the improvements adopted by the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners would insure the preservation of the natural beauty the park, while seeking to enhance people's enjoyment. In April and May, thousands of Wacoans flocked to Cameron Park to inspect the improvements. Many were astonished at the progress made in laying gravel drives, carving out paths, and the addition of a number of benches. Out-of-town delegates attending a Texas State Federation of Labor barbeque in the park were impressed "with the combination of the skill of man with the handiwork of nature." The progress made in Cameron Park resulted in the *Times-Herald* dubbing Cameron Park as Waco's "Mecca." The *Times-Herald* also noted that although



incomplete, “improvements at the park are going rapidly now and the transformation into one of the most beautiful places in the south is eagerly noted by all citizens.”<sup>24</sup>

With significant attention directed towards blending landscaping features with the natural environment, the funds needed for installing a playground were sapped. The women and children of Waco undertook the task of raising the money through an ice cream cone drive at the schools. The First Ward Civic League also contributed money from their coffer to the cause. Spearheading the fundraising drive was staunch playground advocate Kate Friend. Altogether the fundraising efforts raised the first few hundred dollars needed to help ensure that the “little folk will have a vacation joy untold in Cameron Park.” However, more money was needed and the children of Waco received a 1911 Christmas gift from the Cameron family that brought merriment for years to come. On Christmas Eve of 1911, “acting the part of Santa Claus to the children of Waco,” the Cameron family presented Friend with a check for \$1,000.00 to be used to purchase and install a playground in Cameron Park. Friend wasted little time in raising an additional \$300 for the playground. Installed in April 1912, the playground—consisting of “swings, bars, slides, and other paraphernalia”—instantly earned the approval of the children of Waco.<sup>25</sup>

The roads in Cameron Park were one of the more impressive improvements in the park, and expansion of the series of roads continued in the early years of the park history.

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<sup>24</sup>*Morrison & Fourmy's Waco City Directory, 1911-1912* (Dallas, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1911), 3 (quote 1); “Civic Department,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 5, 1911; “Making Improvements in Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, February 19, 1911; “Thousands Visited Wm. Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 8, 1911; “Praise Wm. Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 21, 1911 (quote 2); “Wm. Cameron Park is Mecca,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 29, 1911 (quote 3 and 4).

<sup>25</sup>“Playground Assured at Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 1, 1911 (quote 1); “\$1000 Gift from the Cameron Family,” *Waco Times-Herald*, December 24, 1911 (quote 2); “Equipment has Arrived in Waco,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 21, 1912 (quote 3).

The loop that encompassed Pecan Bottoms withstood the flood waters that ravaged Waco in late 1913, helping to assuage the Cameron Park Commissioners concerns about gravelling roads in the park. Two new driveways were planned to “increase [Cameron Park’s] allurements for the city toiler” including the extension of Sturgis Road past the Clubhouse to Rice Avenue and over to Lindsey Hollow.

Serious efforts to realize the elusive dream of a riverside drive connecting downtown Waco with Cameron Park began in April 1913 when W.R. Orman donated a 590 foot strip of land fronting the Washington Street Bridge to where Barron’s Branch flows into the Brazos River. Orman’s contribution seems to have provided the impetus for Mrs. Kate S. M. Rotan’s zealous pursuit of acquiring the rest of land fronting the Brazos River for the planned river driveway. By late February 1914 Rotan had secured all but three of the deeds needed to create an unbroken chain of land for a riverside drive. The City of Waco proceeded by condemning the few remaining tracts and work on the boulevard began in April 1914. Hundred of Wacoans were making use of the completed parts of the road to be named Rotan Drive in honor of Mrs. Kate S.M. Rotan and her husband Edward Rotan, and dedicated to the memory of her father James L.L. McCall and mother Eliza Anne Sturm McCall. Finally after years of wishing and waiting Rotan Drive (also known as Riverside Drive) opened with a dedication ceremony that placed the beautiful driveway under the supervision of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>“Ground Given to Start the Great River Driveway,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 13, 1913; “Driveway Start is 590 Feet Long,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 14, 1913; “More Drives Planned Through Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 8, 1914 (quote 1); “Condemn Route of River Driveway,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 3, 1914; “River Driveway Work Progressing,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 5, 1914; *Waco Times-Herald*, August 11, 1914; Dayton Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County*, 235-236; *Illustrated Municipal Handbook of Waco: The Happy Prosperous City of Texas* (Waco, TX: City of Waco, [1914?]), 57 A 1914 ordinance for the dedication of Riverside Drive went missing from

In keeping with the Cameron family's request to provide adequate funds for the maintenance and development of Cameron Park, the City of Waco appropriated a total of \$44,060 by 1914. The Cameron Park Board of Commissioners guaranteed that each cent contributed to the beautification and enjoyment of the park by the people. Published in 1914, the *Illustrated Municipal Handbook of Waco* contained an essay by Nannie Hillary Harrison recounting the brief history of Cameron Park. Praising the progress made in improving the park thus far, Harrison asserted that Cameron Park was "universally recognized as the most beautiful park . . . in the South . . . [and] presents a picture that thrills the most prosaic." Answering only to the Board of Commissioners, Cameron Park Superintendent T.W. Shimmins directed crews working year-round to implement a system of roadways, flower beds, and manicured lawns enhancing the natural beauty of the park.

With no known records of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners surviving, how much of the improvements resulted from A.L. Rose's suggested plan of design proves a question difficult to answer. Early pictures of Cameron Park reveal that Rose's plans for improving the Proctor Springs area with a series of walks and wading pools gained the approval of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners and much of the work neared completion by 1914. The playground, footbridges, shelters, the Rotan Drive, and a watering system also developed along the lines that Rose and the rest of the Brown Brothers team suggested. Regardless of how the course of development progressed, Wacoans such as Nannie Hillary Harrison cared mostly about the results. Thrilled with

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the City of Waco Records and Archives building sometime in the 1980s. An ordinance does appear in the "Civil Ordinance" section, Article 151 in 1918, but a specific date is not included. Several sources such as Dayton Kelley's *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County* erroneously claim that the Riverside Drive was funded and completed in 1911.

the improvements accomplished by 1914, Harrison echoed the sentiments of many when she wrote that “no spot has been more lavishly favored from the frugal hand of Nature; add to this the embellishment of gracious art, and we have for our pleasure and pride, beautiful Cameron Park!”<sup>27</sup>

To commemorate the fifth year of Waco’s pleasure ground in 1915, sisters Fay and Bird Hoffmann organized and choreographed a “Dance Revue.” With Alessandro’s Band furnishing the musical accompaniments, eight dances were performed by various men, women, and children of Waco. Dance numbers such as the “Fox Trot,” “Fireflies,” “The Zephyr,” and the Spanish tune “La Gitana” delighted the thousands in attendance. During a rendition of “Narcissus,” the surprise of the evening occurred when a “huge birthday cake, on which had been placed five candles . . . opened” and “petite Goldie Lazarus, aged 5, stepped forth, the center of attraction that won the fullest measure of deserved praise.” The Hoffmann sisters honored Cameron Park with an even grander encore the following year. In advertising the annual event, the *Times-Herald* described Cameron Park, “one of Waco’s most valuable possessions,” as being in “the full zenith of its beauty, so far as the floral attractions are concerned, to which must be added the inviting emerald carpet,” which served as the stage for a host of dancers. The 1916 version of the “Dance Revue” included twelve dance numbers. Following the birthday ceremonies, a throng of Wacoans made their way to the opening of the Cameron Park Casino, owned by George G. Stublefield. Located on Fifth Street and Proctor Avenue,

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<sup>27</sup>Nannie Hillary Harrison, “Cameron Park,” *Illustrated Municipal Handbook of Waco: The Happy Prosperous City of Texas* (Waco, TX: City of Waco, 1914?), 115-117 (quotes 1 and 2); Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park; City of Waco, Records and Archives, Cameron Park File, Microfilm Reel 3, blip 0231-0238, Brown Brothers Company to W.C. Lawson, “Report On Landscape Development of Cameron Park.”

the Cameron Park Casino lay outside of Cameron Park and was, therefore, not constrained by the prohibition against private concessions on park property. A “pleasure resort par excellence,” refreshments, dancing, and beautiful roof gardens attracted Wacoans to the casino during the hot summer months.<sup>28</sup>

The entry of the United States into the First World War in April of 1917 precipitated a series of events that unexpectedly led to enhancing the grandeur of Cameron Park. On June 11, 1917, William Waldo Cameron, president of the Texas Cotton Palace, and J.M. Penland, president of the Waco Chamber of Commerce, received the news that Waco’s lobbying for an army training base had proved successful. Comprising over 10,000 acres in northwest Waco, Camp MacArthur housed approximately 28,000 soldiers for the duration of the war. On June 28, 1917, the Cameron family announced the purchase and donation of sixty acres as the recreational grounds for the soldiers at Camp MacArthur. Reprinted in the *Times-Herald*, a letter by the Cameron family explained that the tract would be leased to the Federal government for the time being. Once the government finished using the grounds, the Cameron family deemed that the tract, including the famed “picturesque bluff” of Lovers’ Leap, be added to Cameron Park. The Army manifested its thankfulness by permitting the 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry band to regale park-goers with a concert every Sunday in the summer of 1918. The stipulations of the first gift governed the gift of Lovers’ Leap with one additional condition—that the City of Waco purchase an additional twenty-eight acres abutting

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<sup>28</sup>“Immense Audience for Dance Revue,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 29, 1915 (quote 1); “Wacoans to Observe Birthday of Cameron Park This Evening,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 29, 1916 (quote 2); “Birthday Celebration at Cameron Park Gave Pleasure to Thousands,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 30, 1916; Casino’s Formal Opening Last Night Most Pleasing Event,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 30, 1916 (quote 3); “55<sup>th</sup> Infantry Band Will Giver Concert Every Sunday at Cameron Park,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 24, 1918.

Lovers' Leap and dedicate the land for park purposes subject to the same regulations as Cameron Park. Without hesitation, the people of Waco agreed.<sup>29</sup>

Many years prior to the Camerons' acquisition of sixty acres of the White tract—widely known as Lovers' Leap—Wacoans routinely had trekked to the bluff situated above the Bosque River for picnics, romantic excursions, or simply to take in the panoramic view of the Texas landscape. Over the years, a legend of how Lovers' Leap acquired its name developed within the Waco community. Miss Decca Lamar West frequently included the legend of Lovers' Leap in her historical sketches of Waco. Miss West's rendition of the fable centered on an Indian maiden, Wah-Wah-Tee. The daughter of a Waco chief, Wah-Wah-Tee fell in love with a handsome brave of the Apache tribe, the Waco Indians' fiercest enemy. This white man's tale of star-crossed Native American lovers ended much the same way as Shakespeare's story of *Romeo and Juliet*. Knowing the impossibility of being together, Wah-Wah-Tee and her Apache lover attempted to elope, only to be thwarted by Wah-Wah-Tee's father and brothers. From the east bank of the Bosque River, Wah-Wah-Tee's father watched his beloved daughter kiss her lover just before they leaped together from the bluff. The bodies of the two washed up on the banks of the river near their original meeting place still clasped in love's eternal embrace. Rooted in fiction, the tale nonetheless captured the romance and solemnity engendered by the beloved scenic venue.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>“Lovers' Leap Park Gift to City of Waco Today by Cameron Family,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 18, 1917; Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, s.v. “Camp MacArthur,” *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/qcc27.html> (accessed September 18, 2008).

<sup>30</sup>“Lovers' Leap Park Gift,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1917; Tolson, *William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park; Decca Lamar West, “The Legend of Lovers' Leap and an Historical Sketch of Waco, Texas,” (Waco: Knight Printing Co., 1912).

A casualty of the flu epidemic sweeping the globe at the time, W.C. Lawson—first chair of the Cameron Park Board of Commissioner—died on January 12, 1919. The obituary in the *Times-Herald* attributed both Cameron Park and the Riverside Drive to Lawson’s brilliance. Lawson had spent countless Sundays traversing the grounds of Cameron Park pondering ways to beautify the grounds he cherished. Grateful that Lawson “lived long enough to hear landscape artists, men of national reputation, declare Cameron Park, for its size, was without superior, from the standpoint of beauty in the United States,” the *Times-Herald* aptly expressed the sentiments and thanks of many Wacoans.

Lawson’s death in 1919 can be viewed as symbolically marking the end of the first stage in the development of Cameron Park. Facing enormous expectations from both the community and the Cameron family, Commissioner Ben G. Kendall embraced the opportunity to succeed Lawson as Chair of the Cameron Park Board. The first decade of Cameron Park’s history undoubtedly exceeded many Wacoans’ expectations, but the tenth anniversary passed with little fanfare. Over the course of several months, the Camerons worked as quietly and confidentially as possible in acquiring approximately 191 acres of land between Cameron Park and Lovers’ Leap. On September 3, 1920, the Camerons confirmed the cautious speculations surrounding their land acquisitions when they presented the massive tract as an extension to Cameron Park at a public meeting in Waco’s Chamber of Commerce building. Beneficiaries of the Cameron family’s philanthropic nature yet again, Wacoans were overcome with joy.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>“Waco Mourns Death of William C. Lawson,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 12, 1919 (quote 1); “Dedication of Cameron Park 10 Years Ago, May 27,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1910; “Camerons Give to City of Waco 191 Acre Addition to Cameron Park, Connecting with Lovers’ Leap,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 3, 1920.

Aside from “closing the gap” to Lovers’ Leap, the approximately 191 acres included the confluence of the Bosque and Brazos Rivers, and the soon-to-be-named bluffs of Lawson’s Point, Kendall Circle, and Emmons Cliff. In later years, the “series of limestone bluffs” included in the 1920 donation gained the name “The Devil’s Backbone.” The old Country Club building and property was the real jewel of the addition. Converted into a municipal clubhouse, the two-story Southern mansion afforded Wacoans comfortable reading rooms, spacious dance floors, and a roof garden with a breathtaking panoramic view of downtown Waco and the Brazos River valley. The deed for the addition mandated that twenty-eight acres adjacent to Lovers’ Leap—including land fronting the Bosque River at the base of Lovers’ Leap—purchased by the City of Waco at the request of the Cameron family in 1917, formally joined Cameron Park. Accompanying the enormous land gift was a check for \$15,000 from the Cameron family to be used by city officials in acquiring an additional twenty acres of land for parkland.<sup>32</sup>

Accepting the gift for the City of Waco, Judge William Sleeper praised the Camerons’ generosity, which now approached nearly \$100,000 in land and funding. The City of Waco had also purchased an additional eighteen acres for the park since the Proctor Springs gift. Largely governed by the same conditions as the 1910 gift of Proctor Springs, the 1920 Cameron Park addition contained a few key differences. First, to aid in supplementing rising maintenance costs—particularly the exorbitant annual water bill of \$1,000—City Commissioners enacted a tax levy of four cents on every one

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<sup>32</sup>“Land Bought Wednesday by Camerons Connects Cameron Park and Lovers’ Leap Tract, *Waco Times-Herald*, September 1, 1920 (quote 1); “Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Tribune Herald*, May 31, 1959 (quote 2); “Camerons Give City of Waco 191 Acre Addition,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 3, 1920.



hundred dollars. Second, recognizing the need for some concessions and privileges, the Camerons made allowances for the eight acres composing the Clubhouse grounds, on twenty-five acres at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers now known as the Mouth of the Bosque, and on the former gravel pit lands purchased by the City of Waco fronting North Fourth Street for several blocks and leading into Cameron Park. Cameron Park Commissioners retained control of the ability to confer concessions at the designated places so long as the activities pertained to park use. All proceeds from the sale of concessions in the park contributed to maintenance and development projects in the park.<sup>33</sup>

Validating the popularity of Cameron Park prior to the new addition, the Cameron Park Commissioners presented a tally of the number of people who had entered Cameron Park “via auto, in buggies, and on foot,” during one day—May 30, 1920—as reaching nearly 8,000 visitors, “one-fifth of Waco’s population.” The sheer number of visitors stressed the urgent need to take further action improving the park. Like a shot of adrenaline, the magnificent gift stoked the creative spirit and generosity of Wacoans. Ideas regarding landscaping, amusements, and concessions circulating amongst the Cameron Park Commissioners, city officials, and Chamber of Commerce included the following: sunken gardens, “municipal moving picture shows . . . a swimming pool, boating at the mouth of the Bosque river . . . two watermelon, two cold drink, two ice cream stands, two tea gardens, and concessions of a similar nature.” An extension of Riverside Drive through the park to Lovers’ Leap, as well as the drilling of an artesian

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<sup>33</sup>“Camerons Give City of Waco 191 Acre Addition,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 3, 1920. The actual deed was signed September 9, 1920, but a verbatim copy of the conditions of the deed appeared in the September 3, 1920 issue of the *Times-Herald*. Copies of the Cameron Park deeds for 1910, 1920, and 1921 can also be found at the City of Waco Records and Archives building.

well to help offset exorbitant water costs, also gained support. To pay for improvements, Mayor Ben C. Richards suggested that a vote for issuing \$65,000 worth of bonds be held as soon as possible. In November 1920, the \$65,000 bond election passed with 1,252 votes casts in favor to only 380 votes against.<sup>34</sup>

With seasoned landscapers, horticulturalists, and master gardeners, and with Cameron Park Superintendent Thomas W. Shimmins and Assistant Superintendent J.W. Head directing Cameron Park crews, development progressed smoothly. Like his predecessor, Chairman Kendall took an active role in the development of the park. One story claimed that Kendall—walking with cane in hand and trailed by engineer Adam D. Fasig—traversed the new parkland marking the path of the approximately four mile winding road leading from Pecan Bottoms to Lovers’ Leap. As a result, Fasig designed ways to grade and pave the steep and sharply curved path required by the diverse topography. The new Cameron Park road—often referred to as “Seven Turn Hill” or “The Seven Sisters” for the number of its violent twists—opened on September 23, 1922.<sup>35</sup>

As development continued, the Camerons enlarged the park by an additional twenty acres in March of 1921. The first celebration after the addition of the massive new tract proved to be monumental. Organized by the Business Women’s League, the eleventh birthday of Cameron Park included addresses by Ben Kendall and Kate Friend, a

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<sup>34</sup>“Camerons Give City of Waco 191 Acre Addition,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 3, 1920; “Waco Endorses Bonds; Passes Vaccination,” *Waco Times-Herald*, November 24, 1920.

<sup>35</sup>Tolson, *A History of Wm. Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, January 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; “Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Tribune Herald*, May 31, 1959 (Seven Turn Hill quote); Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin, March 19, 2009, in Hewitt, TX, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX (Seven Sisters quote); “New Part of Cameron Park Will Be Opened Saturday,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 22, 1922; “New Cameron Park Driveway Opened To Wacoans Today,” *Waco News-Tribune*, September 23, 1922.

dance program choreographed by the Hoffmann sisters, a track meet for the children of Waco's elementary schools, dancing at the clubhouse, and music by a hodgepodge of members from the Musicians' Union, Shriner band, and Baylor band. Legendary Waco photographer Fred A. Gildersleeve snapped several aerial photographs of the event showing activities at Pecan Bottoms, the Municipal Clubhouse, and a line of cars and buggies parked at the Fourth and Herring entrance to the park. Mayor Pro Tem J.W. Tinsely delivered the keynote address. "As long as the city stands," Tinsely professed, "this park continues not only a perpetual memorial to public spirit and generosity, but an unending source of joy and pleasure to generation after generation of Waco citizens." Throughout the joyous day, people could be heard praising the Camerons, the devotion of the park commissioners, and the natural beauty of the park.<sup>36</sup>

Thrilled at the development of Cameron Park over the past eleven years—including the addition of a playground, tennis courts, roads, colorful flower beds, and renovations to the clubhouse—the *Times-Herald* claimed "no giant baby has ever made such progress in the matter of growth and improvement as the park has made." On an aesthetic and physical level, the *Times-Herald's* assessment rings true. However, on a social level, Cameron Park was not immune to the racial tensions that pervaded the South during the Jim Crow era. Although marketed as a park donated and developed for the "pleasure of the people," Cameron Park did not have a tradition of including blacks from the outset. At the 1910 dedication, blacks primarily drove the floats carrying white children and prominent Wacoans to the park. Although not officially sanctioned, the

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<sup>36</sup>"Cameron Park Given Birthday Party Friday," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1921; Tolson, *A History of Wm. Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park. Reproductions of Gildersleeve's aerial photographs of 11<sup>th</sup> birthday of Cameron Park can be found in Tolson's book, which also contains a multitude of other copies of photographs of the park that, to the best of knowledge, can be found anywhere else.

exclusion of blacks from Waco's chief playground became engrained in the social life of the park. This is not to say that blacks never visited the park, since it was impossible to keep someone from entering the extensive and heavily wooded park. However, when blacks did attend they were not welcome. Cameron Park was not the only "white" park from which blacks refrained from visiting for fear they might incur the wrath of police or white park patrons. The construction of Edgefield Park next to Baylor University required the destruction of shacks owned by black families. The "separate but equal" philosophy of the Jim Crow era saw Mackey Park in East Waco converted into a park for blacks. During the Second World War, Mackey Park was renamed Bledsoe-Miller Park to honor two of the most famous African Americans from Waco, musician, composer, and singer Jules Bledsoe and Pearl Harbor hero and Navy Cross recipient Doris Miller.<sup>37</sup>

White Wacoans' determination to maintain Jim Crow policies came to the forefront in the public outrage over a racially charged murder in Cameron Park in 1922. The peace and serenity of Cameron Park evaporated on November 21, 1922, when nineteen year old Grady Skipworth was shot and killed at Lovers' Leap. Skipworth's body was tossed over the cliff and found at the base of Lovers' Leap. Miss Naomi Boucher—Skipworth's date—claimed that a "Negro" committed the murder (the case resembled the murder of Harrell Bolton and sexual assault of his date outside of Waco in May of 1922). A mob of 2,000 white Wacoans demanded that authorities turn over one of the six suspected African Americans confined in the jail. Matching the description provided by the assaulted girl, unsuspecting Jesse Thomas, an African American service

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<sup>37</sup>"Cameron Park Given Birthday Party Friday," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910 (quote 1); Tolson, *A History of William Cameron & Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park (quote 2); For reference to black float drivers see "Waco's Unanimous Tender of Appreciation of Princely Gift," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1910; *Illustrated Municipal Handbook of Waco*, 25; Dayton Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County*, 29, 189.

car driver, agreed to accompany specialized deputy E.L. McClure under the false pretense that Thomas would be paid to do yard work. Instead, McClure took Thomas to the house of Sam Harris, father of the sexually assaulted girl. Upon seeing Thomas, Harris' daughter exclaimed that Thomas was the murderer. Harris quickly and brazenly emptied his gun into Thomas, killing the young man where he stood.<sup>38</sup>

In February 1923, less than a year after the killing of Bolton and three months after the killing of Skipworth, Roy Mitchell was arrested for the murders of both Skipworth and Bolton. Mitchell, also an African American, purportedly confessed to the six murders, including the two an innocent Jesse Thomas was falsely accused of a few months before. In July 1923, Mitchell, sentenced to six death penalties, was hanged in the town square of Waco—the last legal hanging in Texas.<sup>39</sup>

The murder of Grady Skipworth did not deter visitors from frequenting Cameron Park. Whether the crimes further hardened and embittered whites toward permitting the already excluded black community from visiting the park is debatable. Regardless of whether or not Skipworth's murder at the hands of Roy Mitchell solidified the white community's resolve to maintain racial hegemony over Cameron Park, the park intended for and funded by all the people in Waco would not experience integration for several decades. Meanwhile, new amusements in the park attracted more people each year. Tennis courts located at the Municipal Clubhouse, near the Fourth Street and Herring

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<sup>38</sup>“Couple at Waco Attacked by Negro,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 22, 1922; “Negro Identified,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1922; “Officers Link Road Tragedy with Cameron Park Shooting,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1922.

<sup>39</sup>“Couple at Waco Attacked by Negro,” *Dallas Morning News*; “Charges Against Bouchers Dropped in Waco Killing,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 1, 1923; “Admission That He Slew 5 Attributed to Negro at Waco,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 10, 1923; “Roy Mitchell to be Hanged Monday,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 29, 1923; Dayton Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan County*, 192.

Avenue entrance and in the North Pecan Bottoms attracted a steady stream of players. Johnny Appell recalled that at one point visitors to the courts were required to furnish not only their own rackets and tennis balls but also the net. Often before or after picnics, people played pick-up games of basketball, volleyball, or baseball. Wearing her Sunday best, Ollie Mae Moen sometimes went with friends and family to Cameron Park on a “Kodak picture-taking expedition,” a popular activity known simply as “kodaking.” No matter how visitors spent time in Cameron Park, safety and security concerns seldom, if ever, entered their minds.<sup>40</sup>

Children of all ages in Waco typically spent the hot summer months at the playground along Wilson’s Creek and taking a dip in the ice cold waters of Proctor Springs. At Emmons Cliff, an observation tower built from cedar trees in the park furnished a spectacular view of the surrounding countryside and downtown Waco. English professor Dr. A.J. Armstrong from Baylor University sometimes held class at the elegant fountain and walls at Emmons Cliff. Picnics in the park tended to be the favorite pastime of Wacoans. Church picnics on Sundays or evening picnics throughout the week brought large numbers of Wacoans into Cameron Park. Adults enjoyed the dances and roof gardens of the beautiful two-story Municipal Clubhouse. On weekends or in the summer, entire days were devoted to enjoying the park.<sup>41</sup>

In a vignette of Cameron Park, Cameron family and company historian R.J. Tolson described “portions of the park where nature’s handiwork has been left

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<sup>40</sup>Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin, November 3, 2008, Woodway, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.; Ollie Mae Allison Moen, “Oral Memoirs of Ollie Mae Allison Moen,” interview by Jaclyn Jeffrey on May 29, 1986, in Waco, Texas (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 1988), 129-131 (quote 1).

<sup>41</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.* Sketch on Cameron Park; Dorothy Powell and Frank Curre Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, January 28, 2009, Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

untouched—where every species of native tree and bush find congenial soil and where the tanglewood and swinging vines and massive oaks and thicket shrubs—the Red Bud and Scarlet Berry—mingle in close communion, safe in their seclusion.” Tolson lauded the colorful flower beds bordering the roads filled with “Blue Bonnets, Indian Heads, Dandelions, Wild Poppies, and Verbena.” Lighting on Riverside Drive and into Cameron Park known as the “white way” accompanied the groups that chose to mingle just a few hours more. Pecan trees, planted as a memorial to soldiers from McLennan County who died in the First World War, lined the extension of the riverside drive. Sponsored by the Waco Lion’s Club and presented by the James Edmond Post of the American Legion, the pecan trees provided a somber yet elegant memorial to America’s bravest.

The beauty, tranquility, and majesty of Cameron Park lured tourists from across Texas. The *Dallas Morning News* informed readers that Cameron Park “is said to be second to none in size in Texas, but in natural beauties it is second to none in the State.” Surrounded by natural charm coveted by other cities, the drives, walks, and trails in Cameron Park provided an escape from the hustle and bustle of the outside world. Waco and Cameron Park continued to roar through the rest of the 1920’s. How did the onset of the Great Depression and the outbreak of the Second World War impact the festive and convivial atmosphere of Cameron Park? What role did the park play in shaping the lives of America’s “Greatest Generation?”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Tolson, *A History of William Cameron and Co.*, Sketch on Cameron Park (quote 1); “To Make Tax Levy to Cover Extension of White Way,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 1, 1921 (quote 2); “Pecan Trees Will be Planted in Cameron Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 20, 1922.; “Park Attracts Many Tourists to Texas City,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 4, 1928 (quote 3).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### An Escape from a World in Turmoil, 1930-1965

From its founding in 1850, the Waco economy revolved around cotton. During the Civil War, Waco manufactured cotton cloth for the Confederacy. With the extension of railroad lines into the city, Waco became known as the “Hub City” partially because of its nexus in the production and distribution of cotton in Texas. By 1884 Waco was shipping approximately 50,000 bales of cotton a year to markets around the globe. By the 1890’s the number of cotton bales shipped through Waco approached 120,000. To celebrate “King Cotton,” Wacoans established the Texas Cotton Palace in 1894 celebrating and further emphasizing the importance of the cash crop to Waco’s prosperity. However, Waco’s heavy reliance on cotton proved catastrophic to its economic health when cotton prices plummeted from eighteen cents a pound to five cents a pound between 1928 and 1931. Waco historian Patricia Ward Wallace notes that the dramatic shock of falling cotton prices signaled that “the depression was under way in Central Texas.” Sanger Brothers department store, the newly built Hilton Hotel, and the Texas Cotton Palace shut their doors and thousands of Wacoans were soon without jobs. Symbolically, the closing of the Texas Cotton Palace represented the end of an era of prosperity in Waco. As the 1930s wore on, the United States economy fell deeper into the grips of the Great Depression. Like most Americans, Wacoans needed a sanctuary,



an escape where troubles could be forgotten and a sense of normalcy found. Wacoans found such a place in the shaded confines of Cameron Park.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, the philanthropic nature of the Cameron family was not a casualty of the Depression. To commemorate the park's twentieth anniversary in 1930, the Cameron family commissioned Kansas City landscape architects Hare and Hare to design an entrance gate at Fourth Street and Herring Avenue. Nationally renowned landscape architect Sidney Herbert Hare designed the entrance gate in the "Italian Renaissance" fashion using limestone blocks from the demolished Waco City Hall. Highlighted with a bronze tablet reading "For the pleasure of the people," the entrance gate—topped with two bronze lamps—blended perfectly "into the natural beauty of the park." At the formal dedication ceremony on May 27, 1930, Baylor president Pat Neff delivered the keynote address. In typical fashion, Neff spoke about the generosity of the Cameron family, much to the delight of a large crowd of Wacoans. Reverberating across the radio waves of WACO—one of three stations Wacoans enjoyed in the 1930s—Neff's speech expressed his amazement at the growth of parks in the United States and the beauty of Cameron Park. One observer noted that only Neff "can soar to Egypt in search of a simile and find it," and to the banks of the Nile. Neff said that he would have rather donated Cameron Park than have built the pyramids of Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

As sincere as Neff was in expressing his gratitude, no one appreciated the park more than the untold number of children who played there on a daily basis. In a world

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<sup>1</sup>Roger N. Conger, s.v. "Waco, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/Hdw1.html> (accessed October 23, 2008); Patricia Ward Wallace, *Waco: A Sesquicentennial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company Publishers, 1999), 109 (quote 1).

<sup>2</sup>"Park Gateway to be Opened on 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 25, 1930 (quote 1); "Waco Gives Tribute Tuesday to Name of Its Clan Cameron," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1930 (quote 2); "Wacoans Hear Neff Address," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1930; *Waco Times-Herald*, May 28, 1930 (quote 3).

without television, video games, air conditioning, or the internet, children manufactured their own entertainment. At no time was this truer than during the Great Depression. Waco native Frank Curre, Jr., recalls making his own toys during the Depression. Frank and his friends spent hours repairing and tweaking discarded roller skates, and sometimes finding an old tire and pushing it around for hours. Charlie Jaynes and his pals built soap box cars, racing them down the steep hill that runs from the Clubhouse toward Proctor Springs. Frank Curre, Jr., Johnny and Beth Appell, Charlie Jaynes, and future Parks and Recreation Director Alva Stem all recall spending countless hours in Cameron Park. Whole days were devoted to the swings, see-saw, merry-go-round, slides, parallel bars, and a running board at the playground near Wilson's Creek. When the kids got hot, they ran across the footbridge and jumped into the frigid waters gushing out of the Lion's Mouth at Proctor Springs. Charlie Jaynes learned to swim in the wading pools at Proctor Springs. Frank Curre chilled watermelons in the waters, and many adults who grew up in Waco during the Depression recall cupping their hands to get a drink from the refreshing water at Proctor Springs—often referred to by kids as the “Cold Springs.”<sup>3</sup>

After a cool dip in the wading pools at Proctor Springs or a plunge off a rope swing into the Brazos River, kids enjoyed picnic lunches brought from home or caught catfish for dinner on trot lines in the river. A trek through the dense woods of Cameron Park or games of tennis and baseball might occupy the rest of the afternoon. During the Depression a miniature zoo that sat atop the hill overlooking Proctor Springs was a

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<sup>3</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, January 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quote 1); Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin, November 3, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin, January 9, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University Waco, TX; Charlie R. Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema, July 26, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; “Where Buffalo Clover Roamed,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 31, 1959.

favorite spot. Enclosed with chicken wire, the zoo held owls, rabbits, peacocks, birds, swans, and monkeys. A man-made pond with exotic ducks just inside the Fourth and Herring entrance at the bottom of a hill drew curious visitors as well. As a boy growing up in East Texas, future Waco City Manager David F. Smith, Jr., came to Waco with his Boy Scout troop and camped in Pecan Bottoms. Thick woods, grassy knolls, cold water springs, scenic bluffs, and a top notch playground made Cameron Park a recreational retreat for an increasing number of Texans as well as Wacoans.

For those visitors fortunate enough to own a car during the Depression, attempts to negotiate the steep grades on the roads in Cameron Park often met with mixed results. Luther Lavender recalled that on one occasion it took him two hours to get his 1930s Studebaker up the steep hill at Lovers' Leap because the old car could only lurch forward six to eight feet at a time before sliding back a few feet. Worried that his brakes would give out, Luther asked his girlfriend to get out of the car and meet him at the top of the hill. The steep hill leading to the clubhouse also provided a measuring stick for the power of a car. Charlie Jaynes recalls the old Model T's had to be driven up the road leading to the clubhouse in reverse because they lacked the gear to climb the steep incline.<sup>4</sup>

While parents and young adults struggled to get their cars up the hills, children romped around the park carefree. Parents relished the fact that Cameron Park afforded their kids with countless activities free of charge in a safe environment. Cameron Park

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<sup>4</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin; David F. Smith, Jr., interview by Mark, August 1, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema, July 26, 2008, in Waco, Texas, Compact Disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; "Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed," Waco Tribune-Herald, May 31, 1959.

kept them off the streets and out of serious trouble. Parents did not even think twice about allowing their children to romp all over the park unattended. There was no need to worry about their safety. However, kids hardly avoided all mischief. Johnny Appell recalls that kids frequently walked recklessly along the stone walls at Lovers' Leap. Not until one of Johnny's friends fell down the face of the bluff and had to be rescued by the fire department did Johnny learn his lesson. Crack shots with sling shots, Frank Curre and future brother-in-law Allen "Son" Head shattered bottles of bootleg liquor that they saw being hidden near Lindsey Hollow. With children off exploring, parents stole a few hours to relax with friends and neighbors. In the summer and on weekends, Cameron Park assumed the role as the heart of Waco's social life. Despite the poverty and misery imposed by the Depression, the 1930s were an era when kids could still be kids. What better place for children and adults alike to go and briefly ease the harsh realities of the Depression than the paradise that was Cameron Park?<sup>5</sup>

Despite the therapeutic effect of Cameron Park, concerns over food, work, and bills remained a constant worry for most Wacoans. With the constant need for maintenance and landscaping and with new projects undertaken almost annually, Cameron Park provided jobs at time when work was scarce. When the Federal government's New Deal went into effect, many people went to work in Waco and Cameron Park. University High School was a Works Progress Administration project. Several Wacoans recall that the walls at Lovers' Leap were erected by workers employed by one of the New Deal agencies (either the Works Progress Administration or Civilian Conservation Corps). Several rock walls, trails, and drainage in Cameron Park benefitted

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<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin.

from New Deal workers. Even as a young kid, Johnny Appell did his part to help out his family. For two years he delivered morning newspapers to the families living in the residential area bordering the park. His daily route took him past the Clubhouse, across the wooden bridge over Wilson's Creek, and through Proctor Springs.<sup>6</sup>

The best job in the Depression was the one never lost. John William "Billie" Head enjoyed the luxury of such a job as Assistant Superintendent in Cameron Park. Born in Mississippi in 1886, Head came to East Texas with his family, to the small town of Winona. Working grueling hours in the rose fields around Tyler, Head developed exceptional skills in gardening and landscaping. He first came to Waco as a road contractor, helping to build the original bridge connecting South Pecan Bottoms with the road (now Sturgis Road) leading to the Clubhouse. Head returned to Waco in 1914, joining the Cameron Park labor force as Assistant Superintendent to T.W. Shimmins—a job he held until retiring forty-two years later in 1957.<sup>7</sup>

At the height of the Depression in 1934, J.W. Head went to work on a project that became a focal point of beauty in the park for more than forty years—the Kendall Rose Garden. Memorable to those fortunate enough to have visited it, the Kendall Rose Garden—named in honor of Cameron Park Commissioner Ben Kendall—contained over 1,400 rose bushes when completed in April 1934. "The roses are of 58 varieties," reported the *Times-Herald*, "and range in color from white to yellow, pink, red, and copper apricot." The rose bushes and ligustrum hedges on four separate terraces

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<sup>6</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema; Ollie Mae Allison Moen, "Oral Memoirs of Ollie Mae Allison Moen," interview by Jaclyn Jeffrey on May 29, 1986, in Waco, Texas (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 1988), 130-131.

<sup>7</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; "John W. Head, Cameron Park Builder, Retires," *Waco Times-Herald*, January 16, 1957.

supported by retaining walls were not the only feature of the garden. Described as a “landscape unit which has two fountains, fed by an artesian well 3,000 feet away, and a center pool,” the Kendall Rose Garden sat a few hundred feet inside the Herring Avenue entrance, the current site of the Cameron Park Zoo. An elegantly carved stone stairway led down to the 25 by 40 foot wading pool. Head’s son-in-law, Frank Curre, Jr., and granddaughter Dorothy Head Powell recall that Head patterned the design of the Rose Garden landscaping he saw at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1933.<sup>8</sup>

Pumping over 225,000 gallons through the fountains each day, the pipeline connecting the artesian well feeding the fountains required trenches some nine feet deep in places as it traversed the ravines and ridges to the Kendall Rose Garden. Blooming in time for park’s twenty-fourth anniversary in May 1934, the Rose Garden instantly became a must-see-attraction for visitors. Much to their surprise, J.W. Head and his crew uncovered several Native American graves while digging the trenches for the pipeline (perhaps Cameron Park had been a sacred burial ground for the Waco Indians).<sup>9</sup>

From the heights of the Herring Avenue entrance grounds, known as “flagpole ridge” to park employees, Wacoans witnessed the fury of the Brazos River when it flooded in May 1935. Rising over thirty-three feet (a thirteen-year high) the flood damaged East Waco most, but affected Cameron Park as well. The flood waters washed over roads in the park and inhibited use of Samuel J. Quay Park (more commonly

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<sup>8</sup>“1400 Roses! Count ’Em,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 15, 1934; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin; Ollie Mae Allison Moen, interview by Jaclyn Jeffrey; “Waco: The Hub City Takes Justifiable Pride in Beautiful Cameron Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 17, 1940.

<sup>9</sup>“1400 Roses! Count ’Em,” *Waco Times-Herald*, April 15, 1934; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; “Cameron Park is Natural Beauty Spot of Central Texas,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1936; “Waco: The Hub City Takes Justifiable Pride in Beautiful Cameron Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 17, 1940.

referred to as Shakespeare Park for its memorial to the British playwright)—a small park located along Rotan Drive. The combination of flood waters and the Depression apparently prevented or significantly delayed Wacoans from celebrating the park’s twenty-fifth anniversary in 1935, as no record of a commemoration appeared in the *Times-Herald* in the days preceding or following May 27.<sup>10</sup>

The damage caused by the 1935 flood, although significant, paled in comparison to the gigantic flood of late September 1936. Even with Lake Waco lowered three feet in anticipation of heavy rainfall and runoff from upstream, the levees guarding East Waco—“strengthened and heightened” by WPA workers after the 1935 flood—burst open. With nine inches of rain in Waco alone, the Brazos swelled to a historic high of forty-one feet, displacing more than 2,000 Wacoans from their homes. Engulfed by raging flood waters, residents in East Waco again bore the brunt of the catastrophe. On the western bank, “Little Mexico”—lying between the river and Fourth Street and along Washington Avenue—suffered significant damage. The Edgefield neighborhood near Baylor University also suffered damage. In Cameron Park much of Riverside Drive became one of the many Waco “streets converted into rivers,” as the foundations of the gravel road were washed away—not to be rebuilt for more than twenty years. Standing on the Suspension Bridge, Frank Curre witnessed a barn and other debris crashing into the Washington Avenue Bridge. An estimated million dollars in cotton was lost. Thousands of livestock were washed away. At Lovers’ Leap a single cow was rescued when ropes

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<sup>10</sup>“Brazos Rises to Highest Flood Level in 13 Years,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 19, 1935; “Brazos Danger Mark is Past,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 20, 1935; “Dedication Park in Memory Sam J. Quay,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 8, 1916. Since Shakespeare Park lies along University-Parks Drive, many Wacoans naturally assume it is part of Cameron Park, but it is not. Dedicated in 1916, the Shakespeare Park rested outside of Cameron Park until devastated by the flood in 1936. The memorial to Shakespeare still stands in the shadow of the water plant.

placed around the cow lifted it up the face of the chalk bluff to safety. Although many families in Waco were strapped by the Depression, they responded to the disaster by helping out their fellow citizens, by donating \$14,000 to aid families left “homeless, most of them destitute.”<sup>11</sup>

In the flood’s aftermath a number of children headed to Cameron Park to find what adventures awaited them. Both Alva Stem and Frank Curre, Jr., vividly remember that the waters swallowed the playground overlooking Wilson’s Creek and crested near the wading pools fed by the Lion’s Mouth at Proctor Springs. Making the best of the situation, Alva and his friends swam out to the partially submerged wooden pavilion below the springs, climbed onto the roof, and dove off the top, splashing into the water below.<sup>12</sup>

When the flood waters receded, normal activity in Cameron Park resumed. Driving along roadways in the 1930s and 1940s, one might witness any number of events taking place the same day. Family reunions, fish fries, games of horseshoes, tennis, horse riding, swimming, and monkeying around at the playground typified use of the park. Church groups were frequent picnickers. Baptist pastors from Waco and McLennan County often held their annual picnic in Cameron Park. Religious services, even on weekdays, sometimes comprised an outing to Cameron Park. Reverend C.M. Nyquist, pastor of Colcord Avenue Methodist Church, used a church outing at Cameron Park to deliver a devotional aptly titled “A Spiritual Picnic.” On one “bright, fine” Saturday,

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<sup>11</sup>“Lake Waco Ready to Take Care of Any Flood Water,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 27, 1936; “Cotton Loss One Million,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 28, 1936 (quotes 1, 2, and 3); “East Wacoans Dig Into Mud Tuesday Morn,” *Waco Times-Herald*, September 29, 1936; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; “2000 Are in Need of Aid, *Waco Times-Herald*, September 28, 1936 (quote 4).

<sup>12</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.



Baylor students Roy King and Mabel Odom spontaneously moved their wedding services to Lovers' Leap to take full advantage of the ideal weather and beautiful vistas.<sup>13</sup>

Boy Scouts from across Central Texas descended upon Cameron Park in August 1932 to compete in an archery contest. A group of Blue Birds—a club for young girls—ventured to Cameron Park to observe the various birds. In 1933 Cameron Park hosted the annual gathering for the Texas Federation of Garden Clubs. Two years later, the park served as the launching point for a one-hundred-mile bike race that finished at Lake Cliff Park in Dallas. More than two hundred children took part in the performance of “Pageant of Raindrops” in Cameron Park to celebrate National Children’s Day in June 1930. A 1941 Central Texas festival, “Cavalcade of the Huacos,” featured Hopi and Navajo Indian dancers.<sup>14</sup>

Each spring a host of painters and photographers flocked to Cameron Park to capture images of the innumerable bluebonnets that covered the park. According to a *Times-Herald* reporter, only the Rose Garden—leaving “a never-to-be forgotten impression on memory’s tablet”—trumped the fields of bluebonnets in beauty. To help maintain Cameron Park, Colonel Charles Hamilton, a highly respected railroad executive, and his wife, Maude E. Hamilton, bequeathed in their joint will a \$10,000 fund—known as “The Hamilton Memorial Fund in Cameron Park”—to be invested in bonds and

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<sup>13</sup>“Cameron Park is Natural Beauty Spot of Central Texas,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1936; “Over Four Score Attend Gathering of Barcus Family,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 5, 1930; “Pastors Will Stage Picnic,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1930 (quote 1); “Spiritual Picnic to Feature Park Outing,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 27, 1930 (quote 2); “Romantic Young Couple Marry at Lovers Leap,” December 15, 1935, Cameron Park Vertical File, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quote 3).

<sup>14</sup>“Boy Scouts to Hold Contest in Archery,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 18, 1932; “4 O’ Clock Blue Birds Have Park Nature Trip,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 11, 1941; “Texas Federation of Garden Clubs to Meet in Waco,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 14, 1933; “Forty-One Enter Waco-Dallas Bike Marathon Sunday,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 26, 1935; “200 Waco Child Actors Will Stage ‘Pageant of Raindrops,’” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 21, 1930 (quote 1); “Indian Dancers Coming for Waco Cavalcade,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 13, 1941 (quote 2).

administered by the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners. With the deaths of Colonel Hamilton in 1927 and Mrs. Hamilton in 1936, Cameron Park became the memorial and beneficiary of another philanthropic family.<sup>15</sup>

Sadly, death became a recurring theme for Cameron Park during the Great Depression. Mrs. Flora B. Cameron, matron of Cameron clan, passed away on October 4, 1931. Commissioner E.W. Marshall had passed away the previous year. Marshall was succeeded by Commissioner W.J. Neale, who passed away in 1935. Perhaps the greatest sorrow was felt in 1939. The last of the original Board of Commissioners, Ben G. Kendall, died on August 1, 1939. Kendall had spent twenty-nine years as either a commissioner or chair of Cameron Park. In honor of Ben G. Kendall the Cameron Park Clubhouse shut its doors on the day of his funeral. Then only a few months later, on October 16, 1939, William Waldo Cameron died suddenly while testifying in court. All activity in the park ceased until after William Waldo Cameron's funeral. Through philanthropy, planning, overseeing development, and service to the park, all of these people played vital roles in the early history of Cameron Park and Waco.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the tragedy of losing several great leaders in a short period, life and work in Cameron Park continued. Faced with the daunting task of following in the footsteps of exceptional commissioners before them, E. P. Hunter, E.S. Fentress, and Roy Hamlin

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<sup>15</sup>"Cameron Park is Natural Beauty Spot of Central Texas," *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1936 (quote 1); "Hold Funeral of Col. Charles Hamilton," *Dallas Morning News*, December 19, 1927; "Gift of \$230,000 in Cash Are Left by Mrs. Hamilton," *Dallas Morning News*, August 27, 1936; Copy of pertinent parts of the Hamiltons's will, Cameron Park Vertical File, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX. (quote 2). Aside from a reference to Hamilton in August 1910, I have been unable to ascertain his connection to the park. See "Plans for Cameron Park," *Waco Times-Herald*, August 14, 1910, for reference to Col. Hamilton introducing Col. Shalley to W.C. Lawson.

<sup>16</sup>"Body of Mrs. Cameron Due Tuesday," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 5, 1931; "Cameron Park is Natural Beauty Spot," *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1936; "City Mourns Ben Kendall, Waco Leader," *Waco Times-Herald*, August 2, 1939; "Waco Leader Stricken in a Court Room," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 16, 1939; "Relatives of Will Cameron Are Arriving," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 17, 1939.

Hatch embraced the challenge, committing their time to further improving Cameron Park. Hunter joined the board in 1930, Fentress joined after the death of Neale in 1935, and Hatch was chosen to fill the vacancy left by Kendall. Fortunately for these commissioners, park builders T.W. Shimmins and J.W. Head continued to lead the park's work force.<sup>17</sup>

Even before the United States entered the Second World War in 1941, many Wacoans had joined in the various branches of the military. Among them was Frank Curre, Jr., who enlisted at the age of seventeen and gained his mother's consent after threatening to go out find a man to sign his papers if she would not. A Pearl Harbor survivor, Frank spent the war in the Pacific, returning home only long enough to marry his girlfriend Alma Louise Head—daughter of Cameron Park Assistant Superintendent J.W. Head and better known as “Toots” to her family and close friends. By 1942 hundreds of Wacoans had enlisted in the armed services.<sup>18</sup>

In late December 1942 Wacoans received a morale boost when the *News-Tribune* announced that William Cameron and Company—now under the leadership of William Cameron's son-in-law, E.R. Bolton—purchased and donated an additional 64.5 acres to Cameron Park as a late Christmas gift to people of Waco. Accompanying the land was a check for \$5,000 to be used at the discretion of the Board of Commissioners to aid in improving the park. A provision of the deed allowed for the commissioners to exchange part or all of the donated land for different property so long as it would be used for park purposes. Quick to implement this provision, park commissioners swapped some of the

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<sup>17</sup>“Cameron Park is Natural Beauty Spot,” *Waco Times-Herald*, June 28, 1936; “Park Board Member Named,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 12, 1939.

<sup>18</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, May 22, 2009; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Wallace, *Waco*, 111-112.

donated land for property occupied by a few homes and the Lovers' Leap Baptist Church, an African American congregation, which voted to relocate the church at Third and Marlboro.<sup>19</sup>

Cameron Park Commissioner Roy Hatch noted that the war impeded the board's ability to implement new improvements. Although "rated by the national park commission as the fourth most beautiful natural park in the United States," Cameron Park still required a "great many needed improvements," but Wacoans exercised commendable patience, keeping any anxiety to themselves.<sup>20</sup>

With Waco service personnel fighting in the conflicts that raged throughout North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific during World War II, one might think the recently expanded Cameron Park experienced a decline in use. On the contrary, the U.S. Army Air Corps opened two air fields, Blackland Army Air Field and Waco Army Air Field, in McLennan County, which brought thousands of men and women into Waco. The military bases and wartime industries that flourished in Waco infused sorely needed people and money into a city and economy ravished by the Depression. Several veterans might disagree with Waco historian Patricia Ward Wallace's assessment that "there was not much to do by way of entertainment in Waco during the war, although the town swarmed with servicemen from the two Waco bases and from nearby Camp Hood" in Killeen. For entertainment, soldiers frequented the United Service Organization (USO) club and Waco's four movie theaters. Soldiers also used the Kiwanis Pool on Fourth

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<sup>19</sup>64 1-2 Acres Given By Cameron Firm to Enlarge Park," *Waco News-Tribune*, December 30, 1942; City of Waco Records and Archives, Cameron Park File, microfilm, reel 3, blip 0063, "Trustees of Lover's Leap Baptist Church to the City of Waco for use of William Cameron Park as shown in Vol. 502, page 475, Deed Records McLennan County."

<sup>20</sup>"64 1-2 Acres Given By Cameron Firm to Enlarge Park," *Waco News-Tribune*, December 30, 1942 (quote 1).

Street—better known as the “Beach”—as well as Cameron Park. Numerous photographs reveal pilots, soldiers, and seamen recreating and relaxing in Cameron Park.<sup>21</sup>

Although everyone fought for a common cause, the policy of racial segregation continued to pervade the ranks of the military and the factories churning out ammunition, planes, tanks, and supplies. Segregation extended to entertainment as well, as African American soldiers made use of the Negro USO and Elizabeth Lee Recreation Center. Along with black servicemen, African Americans from Waco continued to be barred by convention from Cameron Park. Despite being warned by his parents that Cameron Park was a dangerous place for blacks, a young Noah Jackson, Jr., occasionally rode his bike along Riverside Drive and into Pecan Bottoms. Each time, Jackson was asked to leave by either police or white park-goers. On one particular occasion Jackson, with his sister sitting on the handlebars, was pedaling out of the park when a car came up from behind, and a passenger struck Jackson with a blunt object across his back, sending both he and sister crashing to the ground. The African American community was forced to wait several more years before exploring a park that stoked their curiosity.<sup>22</sup>

With the completion of a “1,000-bed tent camp, provided with wooden floors and mess facilities,” in March 1943 soldiers visiting Waco on weekends from Camp Hood actually stayed overnight in Cameron Park. For soldiers overseas, the beds were not nearly as comfortable and the scenery was grimmer than the beautiful Cameron Park. During the lull of battles in North Africa and Europe, medic Ralston Cecil “Goober” Head often found his thoughts drifting toward Waco. Having grown up a stone’s throw

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<sup>21</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 111-114 (quote 1 on 114); Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>22</sup>Wallace, *Waco*, 115; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Noah Jackson, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, May 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

from Cameron Park at 2224 North Fourth Street, Ralston had spent countless hours playing or working in the park with his father J.W. Head. To help assuage her husband's longing to be home, Marie Ellison Head went through Cameron Park on a snowy day snapping photographs of the Clubhouse, the Rose Garden, the kiddie pool, and the entrance gates on Herring Avenue. On the back of each photograph, Marie scribbled a few lines about the picture to remind Ralston of memories of a happier time. The photographs of Cameron Park blanketed in snow accompanied Ralston until he returned home to Marie.<sup>23</sup>

Ralston and Marie Head were one of the lucky couples to be reunited after four years of war. A somber tribute and reminder of the cost of war came to Cameron Park in July 1944. A memorial of eighty-four trees representing the number of Wacoans that had fallen in battle was planted in Cameron Park in the fall of 1944. By the end of the war, 414 residents of McLennan County had lost their lives.<sup>24</sup>

With the war over and normalcy returning to Waco, Cameron Park underwent a change in its governance. In August 1948 the City of Waco passed ordinance #1188, which consolidated the Recreation Board, Park Board, and Cameron Park Board, forming a Park and Recreation Commission. Prior to the ordinance's passage, the City of Waco's involvement with Cameron Park was strictly limited to appropriating a sufficient sum to operate the park and selecting members to replace vacancies on the Cameron Park Board. Despite providing an annual sum for the maintenance and improvement the park, the City of Waco wielded little influence on how the tax dollars were spent. Recognizing this

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<sup>23</sup>“Solider Tent Camp Completed at Waco,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 21, 194 (quote 2); Dorothy Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>24</sup>“Trees Will Be Planted in Cameron Park in Memory of Wacoans Killed in War,” *Waco News-Tribune*, July 25, 1944.

flaw in the governing of Cameron Park, the Cameron heirs agreed to the new ordinance under the condition that they retain the right to approve or reject members appointed to the new commission. When the Parks and Recreation Board merged with the Lake Waco Development Board in 1965, the Cameron family requested that three of the seven members of the Park and Recreation Commission be selected to serve as a subcommittee whose primary responsibility focused on decisions made regarding Cameron Park. The City of Waco honored the request of the Cameron heirs.<sup>25</sup>

With the return of veterans to Waco, activity in Cameron Park continued much as it had before the war. If anything, use of Cameron Park skyrocketed during the 1950s. Demand for one of the park's estimated seventy-five picnic tables rose so rapidly that securing a space apparently became a competitive sport. Sundays tended to be the busiest day of the week in the park. On Sunday mornings, for example, members of Johnny and Beth Appell's Sunday school class gathered in the park for breakfast. Johnny discovered that to grab a table required arriving at the park by five o'clock in the morning, bringing a literal meaning to the term "sunrise breakfast."<sup>26</sup>

A number of new activities took place in the area surrounding the Green Lake in Cameron Park. More a murky pond infested with moss and lily pads than a lake, Green Lake occupied a swath of land near the old Waco High football practice field. Back

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<sup>25</sup>Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; "Ordinance #1188," City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, file for October 1954-September 1955, Parks and Recreation Department, Waco, Texas; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes from the Parks and Recreation Commission, January 22, 1965. Unfortunately, any files from the Cameron Park Board of Commissioners or the Parks and Recreation Commission are missing or in an unknown private collection. This first Minutes and Director's Report of the Parks and Recreation Commission to appear are for the year 1954. These reports appear relatively every month until September 1972 when a seven year gap begins, ending in August 1979 through 1980. Record keeping has begun to improve and reports for the last several years can be found at the Parks and Recreation Department.

<sup>26</sup>Johnny and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin (quote 1); "Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 31, 1959.

when legendary coach Paul Tyson was leading the Waco High Tigers to states titles, spectators sometimes saw football players run near the shore of the lake hoping that they might accidentally fall in for a brief, yet refreshing cool-down in the water— no doubt a welcome respite from the notorious Texas sun. Fishermen at the lake practiced their casting by attaching a dummy weight to end of their fishing lines and aiming for one of the targets that sat in the water. Frank Curre recalls seeing a few African Americans fishing in Green Lake and catching a number of small perch that could be taken home, fried, and consumed whole, bones and all. Today, Green Lake envelops the Gibbon exhibit at the entrance to the Cameron Park Zoo.<sup>27</sup>

Sometime after World War II, a miniature train known as the Smokey Hollow Railroad began to operate in the vicinity of Green Lake. Built by former engineer A.H. Garland, the Smokey Hollow Railroad entertained children for a number of years before being moved to its current home at Lion's Park. Throughout the 1950s, Wacoans tested their putting skills at a miniature golf course that also sat near Green Lake and the Smokey Hollow Railroad. Having fallen into disrepair by late 1961, the putting course, like the miniature train, was relocated to Lion's Park.<sup>28</sup>

Dorothy Head Powell, growing up on North Fourth Street, enjoyed Cameron Park as a backyard. A baby boomer and granddaughter of J.W. Head, Dorothy spent every hour she could spare at the riding stables that bordered Cameron Park along Riverside Drive. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Vernon Ponder, Alton Thornton, and Ed

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<sup>27</sup>Dorothy Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>28</sup>Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, November 22, 1961.



McGee each owned and operated the stables at various times. When she was not riding horses, Dorothy went swimming in the wading pools at Proctor Springs and the Rose Garden with her sister Sue Ellen Head. Sometimes the two girls wandered down to the playground near Wilson's Creek for a quick swing and trip down the slick metal slide embedded into the side of the hill.<sup>29</sup>

New administrative faces in Cameron Park appeared in the 1950s. Superintendent of Cameron Park for the first forty years of the park's history, T.W. Shimmins retired on December 1, 1950. Homer H. Martin replaced Shimmins for five years before health problems compelled him to give up the position to Andy Neumann. Waco native and Baylor graduate Alva Stem succeeded Johnny Morrow as Director of the Parks and Recreation Department in 1955. Having served as Director of Recreation, Stem possessed a thorough knowledge of the advantages and challenges facing the Parks and Recreation Department. One challenge Director Stem and Park Superintendent Andy Neumann faced almost immediately was to replace the loss of forty-two years of experience when Assistant J.W. Head—affectionately referred to as “Sheriff Head” by Director Stem—retired in January of 1957. Sustaining the loss of the original park builders, Cameron Park continued to prosper for much of the more than twenty years Alva Stem managed the Parks and Recreation Department.<sup>30</sup>

By June 1954 the Parks and Recreation Commission faced a number of problems. For the Chairman of the Commission, Mrs. Rodney J. LeBlanc, the leading problem

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<sup>29</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Alton Thornton, interview by Mark Firmin, March 25, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

<sup>30</sup>“Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 31, 1959; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; “John W. Head, Cameron Park Builder, Retires,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 16, 1957.

stemmed from the need for “a complete and thorough cleaning of Cameron Park.”

Before cleaning and improvements efforts in the park commenced, the Commission was compelled to address an even more pressing issue— racial segregation. At a July 1954 commission meeting—the same year as the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*—members of two separate African American groups, the Citizens Committee on Recreation and the Waco Commission on Race Relations, demanded unfettered access to all tax-funded parks and recreation facilities in Waco. With Bledsoe-Miller Park largely reduced to ruins by the devastating tornado in 1953, African Americans also requested that “immediate steps be taken” to remedy the unsatisfactory condition of the black community’s primary recreational facility. A formal statement declared “several groups of Negroes have been forced by police to leave Cameron Park and a park at Lake Waco.”<sup>31</sup>

Chief of Police Jesse Gunterman responded that until action was taken to reverse the traditional “policies of racial segregation” in Waco’s parks and recreational facilities, he and the police force were compelled to ask African Americans “to leave these areas not set aside for their use.” Although providing little consolation to the black community, Gunterman stressed that if a new policy of desegregation were adopted the police would enforce it. With racial tensions on the rise across the country, Thomas Turner, Central Texas correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News*, reported that “many prominent Waco residents of both races are privately predicting a rash of ‘incidents’ if the city’s parks, pools, and golf courses are thrown open to Negroes in the tradition-steeped Brazos River

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<sup>31</sup>Mrs. Rodney J. LeBlanc to W.W. Naman, June 24, 1954, City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission (quote 1); “Negroes Present Four Bids to Waco Recreation Panel,” *Waco Times-Herald*, July 22, 1954 (quote 2); “City Park Segregation Policy to Continue, Gunterman Says,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 4, 1954 (quote 3).

stronghold.” The rest of the summer passed without incident, but changes to the entrenched policies of segregation did not occur just yet.<sup>32</sup>

With the help of local landscape architect Hal Stringer, Superintendent Johnny Morrow reported to the commission in January 1955 that work on beautifying Cameron Park showed signs of producing a marked improvement. More than one hundred Texas honeysuckle plants, four Carolina Jasmine plants, ten American Elm trees, more than one 150 yards of Saint Augustine grass, and six oversized gardenia bushes helped to cover unattractive areas by adding new growth. In 1956 many of the landscaping improvements of the previous year were offset by the most dreaded ecological disaster for a natural park such as Cameron Park—drought. The average annual rainfall for Waco in 1956 was almost twenty-seven and half inches, but by late October less than eleven inches of rain had fallen. Much to the chagrin of Park Superintendent Andy Neumann, Cameron Park lost an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 trees, “some of them as old as 100 years.” Burdened with the task of removing the thousands of “wooden corpses,” Neumann and his work crew could only pray for the dying trees. Eventually, the drought subsided but the damage done to the park was difficult to fathom.<sup>33</sup>

Before plumbing extended to Lovers’ Leap, the romantic spot suffered more during dry spells than did other areas of the park. A subsequent drought wiped out the majority of the plum trees with their beautiful white blossoms. Prior to their untimely demise, the plum trees occasionally bore fruit. To make jam or jelly from the small

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<sup>32</sup>“Police Policy Stated on Park Segregation,” *Waco News-Tribune*, August 4, 1954 (quote 1); “City Park Segregation Policy to Continue, Gunterman Says,” *Waco Times-Herald*, August 4, 1954 (quote 2); Thomas Turner, “Waco Negroes Bidding for Use of City Parks,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1954 (quote 3).

<sup>33</sup>City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of Park and Recreation Commission, January 3, 1955; “7,000 Trees Dead in Cameron Park,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 26, 1956 (quote 1); Thomas Turner, “Drouth Strikes at Beauty,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 19, 1956 (quote 2).

amount of pulp, Alva Stem recalled that one was forced to use twice as much sugar to reduce the tartness of the plums.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, repairing ancient and outdated equipment proved a huge challenge to the Parks and Recreation Department. Before the widespread use of lawn mowers, a small herd of sheep and white mules helped with maintenance. Natural lawn trimmers, the sheep were used to keep the grass in Pecan Bottoms under control. Housed in stables behind J.W. Head's home at 2224 North Fourth Street, the team of white mules pulled equipment all over the park, especially the water wagon that kept the gravel roads wet enough to reduce accumulations of dust. Progress, however, did not come without cost, and modern equipment such as lawn mowers required gasoline, oil, and continual repairs. Expressing frustration over the "deplorable condition" of the Parks and Recreation equipment, the Minutes of the August 29, 1957, Commission meeting reveal park crews being forced to use eleven-year-old lawn mowers, thirteen-year-old vehicles, and nineteen-year-old tractors. The fact that the park remained such an attractive spot despite a meager budget and poor equipment was a testament to the hard work and dedication of the members of the Cameron Park Crew.<sup>35</sup>

With outdated equipment soaking up much of the already paltry budget, improvements continued regardless. Directors Johnny Morrow and Alva Stem consistently sought outside sources of funding. Two funds established by the Cameron family—the Cameron Park Improvement Fund and the Flora B. Cameron Foundation—

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<sup>34</sup>Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>35</sup>"Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed," *Waco Times-Herald*, May 31, 1959; Dorothy Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, August 29, 1959 (quote 1). Budget reports for the Parks and Recreation Department can be found with the City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

helped furnish money for improvements. For example, the Flora B. Cameron Foundation provided \$30,000 for replacing the rapidly deteriorating two-story Southern style clubhouse in 1950 with the present one-story structure. Established in 1954 with two separate checks totaling \$75,000 from the Bolton Foundation and Flora B. Cameron Foundation, the Cameron Park Improvement Fund greatly aided Superintendent Andy Neumann and his crew of sixteen full time employees to maintain and enhance the experience of park patrons' excursions.<sup>36</sup>

Founder and owner of the Crawford Austin Company, Wilbur F. Crawford teamed with the philanthropic Cooper Foundation in 1957 to undertake the reconstruction of Riverside Drive—a project characterized by the *Tribune-Herald* as “Waco’s most impressive self-propelled restoration since the 1953 tornado.” “Cameron Park’s 20 year eyesore,” the once scenic Riverside Drive had remained out of operation since being washed away by the devastating flood of 1936. Known for the constant presence of his cigar and the curse words that spewed from his lips, Crawford was a civic-minded, no nonsense leader who got things done. Estimated at a minimum cost of \$50,000, the project received a total of \$26,000 from the Cooper Foundation. Crawford found ways to do the rest. Bulldozers provided by C.F. Binner and Sons and dump trucks owned by the City of Waco worked for more than a month moving debris and hauling sand and rock for grading and paving chiseled out of the foundations of abandoned barracks at Blackland Army Air Field. Strapped for funding, Crawford compensated companies that helped by

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<sup>36</sup>“Park Rededication Today,” *Waco News-Tribune*, May 22, 1960; “Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 31, 1959; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, December 1, 1954. For more information on the Cameron Park Improvement Fund and it uses see the City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Park and Recreation Department, Waco, TX.

presenting them with a “certificates of appreciation” thanking them for services rendered to the city—a move only the audacious Crawford could accomplish. Connecting with a preexisting road, the restored Riverside Drive reintroduced drivers to in Brazos and along with West Park Road created a loop that encompassed Pecan Bottoms, provided additional parking, and enhanced the overall quality of the park.<sup>37</sup>

In March 1960 the Cooper Foundation provided a \$12,166 grant for reconstructing the bridge across Wilson’s Creek. Lying between Lindsey Hollow and Proctor Springs, the old wooden bridge leading to the Cameron Park Clubhouse had been condemned in 1948. Established as a memorial to Madison A. Cooper—author of the monumental novel *Sironia, Texas*—and Cooper’s wife, Martha Roane Cooper, the Cooper Foundation is a “benevolent, non-profit trust whose income is used to make Waco a better and more desirable city in which to live.” Aside from funding construction projects, the Cooper Foundation also helped Alva Stem acquire new vehicles and the Parks and Recreation Department’s first tree spade.<sup>38</sup> Fittingly, for many years Cameron Park, a philanthropic gift in itself, has consistently benefitted from the generosity and civic mindedness of like-minded people and organizations throughout its history.

A crowd numbering more than 5,000 gathered in Pecan Bottoms on May 23, 1960, to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of Cameron Park. Tagged as the “rededication” of Cameron Park, the ceremony included a brief history of the park by Waco’s best known historian, Roger Conger, as well as a fiddlers’ contest won by J.H Riddlehouver of

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<sup>37</sup>Lyn Dell Raney, “Down by the Riverside,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 10, 1957 (quotes 1 and 2); “Cooper Grant for New Bridge,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 7, 1960; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; David F. Smith Jr., interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>38</sup>“Cooper Grant for New Bridge,” *Waco Times-Herald*, March 7, 1960; (quote 1); “1914 Beautification Effort by Wacoan Being Rebuilt,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, August 29, 1970; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.

Hillsboro. Baylor University's Golden Wave marching band held a music concert, and visitors also perused a collection of historic items, including an old fire truck, several unnamed Civil War items, and the "first desk shipped to a post office west of the Brazos River, in about 1850." However, a vintage 1910 Buick owned by Tyler Payton stole the show.<sup>39</sup>

Prior to the park's fiftieth anniversary, an article by Bob Sadler in the *Waco News-Tribune* illustrated several recent improvements, including the replacing of a decaying rustic wooden pavilion near the entrance with a much more durable, yet less attractive, concrete shelter equipped with electrical outlets. A new playground was constructed in Pecans Bottoms to replace the playground near Wilson's Creek originally furnished by the Cameron family. In 1959 development of the underused Lawson's Point included the construction of a shelter capable of housing forty people as well as a number of concrete picnic tables and benches.<sup>40</sup>

Soon after the fiftieth anniversary celebration, Alva Stem and Andy Neumann embarked on one of the more ambitious improvement programs in the park's history. Such ambitious plans often require a large budget. In spite of the ongoing financial challenges, Stem and Neumann employed uncanny ingenuity in finding ways to accomplish their goals, including finding free scrap materials for building projects.

In September 1960 development efforts at the Mouth of the Bosque and the Circle Point neared completion. Much like Lawson's Point, the Mouth of the Bosque was a

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<sup>39</sup>"Crowd Turns Out to Rededicate Park," *Waco News-Tribune*, May 23, 1960 (quote 1); "Historic Items Offered for Park Celebration," *Waco News-Tribune*, May 19, 1960.

<sup>40</sup>Bob Sadler, "Park Rededication Today," *Waco News-Tribune*, May 22, 1960; "New Picnic Area," *Waco News-Tribune*, November 23, 1959; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, December 2, 1959.

relatively underused area in the park. Older Wacoans might remember fishing at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque for catfish and gasper goo, and some might even remember “Uncle Billy Reviere,” an old man who lived in a hut down by the river, “where he fished, made long range predictions on the weather, and kept his dogs.” Improvements to the Mouth of the Bosque and Circle Point consisted of two shelters along the confluence and one atop of the bluff at Circle Point. Built from scrap lumber salvaged from a home owned by the city, the shelters cost the tax payers a mere \$75 each at most. Originally painted in “various pastels . . . to add a variety of color throughout these park areas,” a color scheme that did not last long, someone fortunately possessed the commonsense to paint the shelters a more rustic color.<sup>41</sup>

Development at the Mouth of the Bosque continued into 1961 as underbrush was cleared, a retaining wall constructed, and concrete steps leading down to the river were added. A small shelter in the Lindsey Hollow area was completed as well. Aside from serving as a picnic spot and launching point for a nature trail, Lindsey Hollow possesses a legend all its own. Named for a captured cattle thief who was said to have been shot and killed, Lindsey Hollow was the supposed site of the murdered man’s shallow grave. Rumors persisted for years that Lindsey Hollow was a haunted place. One story teller claims that Lindsey’s restless spirit wandered in the hollow pleading for help until driven out from the area by the development of Cameron Park and the sound of car horns, since as “all spiritualists know” ghosts hate car horns as much as “the devil hates holy water.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, October, 19 1960 (quote 1); Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>42</sup> City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, November 22, 1961; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, September 21, 1961; Dayton Kelley, ed., *Handbook of Waco and McLennan*



Hauled in from Coryell County, thirty-two loads of natural rock obtained free of charge went into the construction of the Rock Shelter, which received its first visitors in March 1962. Situated in the North Pecan Bottoms, the Rock Shelter was enhanced immeasurably in 1963 with the completion of the one-hundred-foot zigzag rock and concrete stairway known as “Jacob’s Ladder.” Some Wacoans may be surprised to learn that a wooden ladder leading from the top of the clubhouse grounds down to the Brazos River existed long before the completion of the present Jacob’s Ladder in 1963. Built by James Sturgis, agent for the Scottish American Mortgage Corporation and owner of twenty-six acres of land now occupied by Anniversary Park and Miss Nellie’s Pretty Place, the original ladder was built entirely of cedar taken from the park. According to Carroll Sturgis, son of James Sturgis, his father donated the land for the road leading to the Clubhouse, but he refused to sell the rest of his property to the City of Waco. Around 1914 the City of Waco seized James Sturgis’s property through eminent domain and eventually incorporated this property into Cameron Park. Rising vertically up the hillside, the original ladder was in use prior to the First World War and remained a heavily used structure until decay caused it to be condemned in the 1940s and removed in the early 1950s.<sup>43</sup>

Characterized by its cedar railing, zigzag design, and uneven stairs, the Jacob’s Ladder built in 1963 featured a pavilion at the top and the Rock Shelter near its base.

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*County Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1972), 159-160; “Legend of Lindsay Hollow as Told by One Who has Experienced the Fact and Fiction of It,” *Waco Times-Herald*, October 31, 1920 (quote 1).

<sup>43</sup>City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, November 22, 196; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, March 21, 1962; Carroll Sturgis, interview by Benjamin Vetter, April 16, 1998, Cameron Park Research Collection, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; ‘Riverside Shelter,’ *Waco Times-Herald*, February 7, 1962; “New Jacob’s Ladder Stirs Waco Memories,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 9, 1963.

Building the staircase required considerable strength and ingenuity. Stem says that work began at the top and required hauling buckets of cement up the steep hundred-foot slope. Each step was built according to what the ground on the slope permitted, which accounts for the uniqueness of each step. Opened in time for the spring of 1963, Jacob's Ladder garnered favorable attention from park users, as did the newly remodeled shelter at Proctor Springs, and the wild plum and crab apple trees that the Parks and Recreation Department planted after previous trees had died. Built in 1966 with scrap lumber stained red and funded with proceeds from the Hamilton Memorial Fund, the Redwood Shelter brought a new reserve facility to the park. Constructed with restrooms, a fire pit, and enough space to accommodate a group of one hundred, the Redwood Shelter provided an outdoor facility to the North Pecan Bottoms.<sup>44</sup>

Overall, Superintendent Andy Neumann estimated that use at Cameron Park “has probably doubled in the 17 years” since he joined the department in 1946. A 1964 article in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* cited an estimate by park officials that “400,000 visitors enter the gates marked ‘For the Pleasure of the People’ each park season—May through September.” The mid-1960s were a time when eighty concrete picnic tables did not meet user demand, when camping was still permitted in the park, and when people “found it necessary to spend the night at a favorite location they’ve chosen for the following day.” On the first working day in January, it became customary for Alva Stem to be greeted by a line of shivering people waiting outside the Parks and Recreation Department to book a reservation at the Clubhouse or Redwood Shelter. Such was the demand for facilities in

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<sup>44</sup>Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; “New Jacob’s Ladder Stirs Waco Memories,” *Waco Times-Herald*, January 9, 1963; “Spring Weekends Draw Large Crowds to Park,” *Waco Tribune Herald*, March 24, 1963; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes from the Parks and Recreation Commission, December 9, 1965; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, July 8, 1966.

Cameron Park that Wacoans braved the winter elements to secure a reservation months in advance for fear that if they waited too long, their chosen day would be unavailable.<sup>45</sup>

Over a ten-day period in December 1965 more than 11,000 cars viewed the Christmas scene near the Herring Avenue entrance in Cameron Park. An annual tradition for many Waco families, the scene included Santa's sleigh and reindeer, elves, gifts, and a workshop. In the spring children went to the park to make Easter eggs. On Easter Sunday "sunrise services" were often held at the Rose Garden. The Huaco Bowmen Archery Club—which entered into an agreement with the Parks and Recreation Department in December 1961—brought a new activity to the park. The sheer volume of people using the park in the 1960s became staggering. Favorite pastimes and locations such as the playgrounds, wading pools, bridle paths, beautiful vistas, and ball games brought Wacoans to the park each year in droves.

About the same time, the informal policy of racial segregation began to slowly ease in the same way that downtown businesses began to accommodate African Americans. Testing the laxness of the policy, Reverend Marvin C. Griffin of New Hope Baptist Church started an annual church picnic in the early 1960s. In April 1967 Reverend Griffin became the first African American appointed to the powerful and prestigious Parks and Recreation Commission. Future park ranger Larry Simms remembers crossing from East Waco into the park with his friends to pick pecans, play ball games like "Strikeout," and ride their bikes all over the park. Racial tensions in the park began to soften somewhat, but work still needed to be done in order for Cameron Park to become truly a park for all the people of Waco.

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<sup>45</sup>"Spring Weekends Draw Large Crowds to Park," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 24, 1963 (quote 1); "For the Pleasure of the People," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 26, 1964 (quotes 2 and 3); Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin.

After the resounding success of the fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1960, the massive building and beautification campaign—producing more shelters, picnic tables, and barbeque pits and clearing brush and planting new trees and flower beds—and the progression towards racial integration made Cameron Park seem destined for bigger and better things in the years to come. However, the passage of a bond issue in 1967 set in motion a series of events that led to the virtual abandonment of Cameron Park by the city and citizens in the late 1970s. The grand and beautiful park that weathered the Great Depression and the Second World War and served as Wacoans’ escape from worries and turmoil became embroiled in bitter conflict by 1968.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, January 22, 1965; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes from the Parks and Recreation Commission, December 13, 1961; “Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 31, 1959 (quote 1); City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, May 16, 1967; Marvin C. Griffin, interview by Mark Firmin, August 12, 2008, in Austin, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin, May 13, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Decline and Revitalization, 1965-2000

Waco was not immune to the social and political upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. In the throes of the Cold War, the American presence in the Vietnam conflict continued to escalate. The Civil Rights movement forced Americans to confront directly racial segregation and discrimination. The assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and civil rights icons Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., disillusioned Americans' psyche. The youthful counter-culture generation and anti-Vietnam War movement were in full swing, rebelling against the values and traditions of older Americans. Locally, the failed pedestrian mall on Austin Avenue and the Federal Government's Urban Renewal initiatives stoked economic turmoil and racial tensions in Waco. Constituting 5.2 percent of Waco's population in 1960, the Hispanic community bore much of the brunt of Urban Renewal efforts as barrios like Sand Town and Calle Dos were demolished, forcing the relocation of the Hispanic community. Black owned businesses and communities also endured considerable suffering and dislocation. The decay of downtown contributed to the "white flight" movement toward West Waco and the suburbs of Hewitt, Woodway, and Robinson.<sup>1</sup>

Some progress was made when respected local dentist Dr. Gary H. Radford—encouraged by his colleague and future mayor Oscar Du Conge—won his 1966 campaign to become the first African American elected to Waco's City Council. Still reeling from

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<sup>1</sup>Patricia Ward Wallace, *Waco: A Sesquicentennial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company Publishers, 1999); Noah Jackson, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, May 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

the 1953 tornado, Waco's recovery efforts received a boost from developments in the 1960s. Waco historian Patricia Ward Wallace notes that "the addition of McLennan Community College in 1964, an enlarged Lake Waco in 1965, Texas State Technical Institute in 1966, and most significantly . . . Interstate Highway 35" proved to be economic, educational, and transportation boons for the city.<sup>2</sup> After the passage of a 1967 bond issue, city officials announced their intention to widen and extend Herring Avenue with the construction of a bridge across the Brazos. Perceived as a threat to the serenity and natural beauty of Cameron Park by bisecting the most historic and highly used areas of the park, the proposed Herring Avenue Bridge generated considerable and vocal opposition. The controversy over the Herring Avenue Bridge marked the beginning of a period of slow decline for Cameron Park.

The first seeds of the Herring Avenue Bridge conflict were sown ten years earlier. In February 1956 the City of Waco commissioned Harland Bartholomew and Associates of St. Louis to develop a comprehensive plan for Waco. The recommendations of the study—accepted by the Waco City Council in March 1959—included a need to overhaul Waco's parks and street system. To alleviate traffic congestion along Waco Drive and to provide a much needed major thoroughfare connecting East and West Waco, experts recommended widening and extending Herring Avenue through Cameron Park as well as a bridge spanning the Brazos. For the next ten years a series of transportation and improvement studies by federal, state, and local commissions, culminating in the revised comprehensive city plan by Harland Bartholomew and Associates—presented to the public at meeting on the campus of Baylor University in September 1966—reaffirmed the

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<sup>2</sup>Wallace, *Waco: A Sesquicentennial History*, 161 (quote 1).

need for a bridge through Cameron Park at Herring Avenue. Designers from Harland Bartholomew and Associates assured the city officials and private citizens in attendance that the Herring Avenue route—“one of the highest priority routes on the plan”—could be “designed to preserve the functions and appearance of Cameron Park and to separate the traffic in Cameron Park from traffic crossing the bridge.” On February 21, 1967, about 15,000 Wacoans went to the polls to vote on a bond issue, which included a provision for \$7.8 million toward “street improvements.” The bond issue passed with a nearly two to one majority.<sup>3</sup>

The reaction of the Parks and Recreation Commission and the William Cameron Park Committee—a subcommittee of three commission members appointed to represent the Cameron family—to the proposed bridge through the heart of Cameron Park varied over time. On August 8, 1967, the City Council passed Resolution 4975 requesting the advice of the Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the proposed Herring Avenue Bridge. At the meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission two days later, prominent Waco attorney and one of three representatives of the Cameron heirs, Wilford W. Naman, proposed a motion to “offer no opposition” to the Herring Avenue Bridge plans. The motion carried.<sup>4</sup>

Naman’s motion was a stunning reversal of the Parks and Recreation Commission’s unanimous vote on July 7, 1964, which informed the City Council of the

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<sup>3</sup>Harland Bartholomew and Associates, “A Report Upon Comprehensive City Plan, Waco, Texas,” Harland Bartholomew and Associates, Saint Louis, MO: March, 1958; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, Charles Trost Consultants, and City of Waco Planning Department, “Revised Comprehensive Plan, Waco, Texas,” volume 1, (Waco, TX: December 1967), 91-92 (quotes 1 and 2); “A Chronological History of Planning, Facts and Other Information Concerning the Proposed Extension of Herring Avenue Through William Cameron Park and Across the Brazos River,” Nell Pape, Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX, (1-3, 7) (quote 3).

<sup>4</sup>City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, September 15, 1967, Parks and Recreation Department, Waco, TX (quote 1).

dissent of the Commission to a bridge they considered “wholly unnecessary . . . and . . . a tremendous hazard.” Absent from the July 1967 meeting were long-time commission members and representatives of the Cameron family Dr. Tom Oliver and Eleanor “Nell” Pape, wife of the late cotton agent Gustav “Gus” Hermann Pape. Although small in stature, Pape wielded considerable influence and power in Waco. A civic minded and gracious woman, Pape was shocked and angered to hear of the Commission’s approval of a project, which she viewed as destroying one of Waco’s most valuable assets. A resident of the neighborhood bordering Cameron Park, Pape and many of her other affluent neighbors such as Dr. Maurice Barnes formed an opposition committee to protest the bridge, which they named “Save Cameron Park.”<sup>5</sup>

Edward Cameron Bolton, grandson of William Cameron, joined the chorus opposing the bridge. In a letter to the Mayor of Waco, H. Malcolm Loudon, Bolton expressed his indignation and displeasure at having learned about the proposed bridge through the newspapers instead of from city officials. Bolton asserted that the original deeds protected against any “unusual” activities in the park without the permission of the Cameron family. Since Cameron Park “was not given as a cheap right-of-way for highways or any other activity of the City Government,” Bolton claimed the proposed

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<sup>5</sup>City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, August 12, 1964 (quote 1); Mrs. G.H. Pape to Mrs. Everett Jones, July 19, 1968, Nell Pape, Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX.; M. Rebecca Sharpless, s.v. “Pape, Eleanor Fay Journey,” *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/fpa78.html> (accessed May 22, 2009); John Philpott, interview by Mark Firmin, January 14, 2009, in Georgetown, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Patricia Ward Wallace, *A Spirit so Rare: A History of the Women of Waco* (Austin: Nortex Press, 1984), 264-265 (quote 2).



bridge violated the original deeds of the park. If the city continued to press the issue, the Cameron family retained the right to reassert custody of the park.<sup>6</sup>

Pape, offering to fund landscaping on alternative routes, suggested that a bridge two blocks south at Tennessee Street would still provide the much needed crossing and maintain the cherished entrance gates, large oaks, and picnic grounds in Cameron Park. In a letter to Mayor Loudon, Pape also proposed that both Colcord and Indiana streets served as viable alternatives to the Herring Avenue site. She also suggested constructing a throughway using Herring Avenue as a conduit to connect the airport, downtown, Interstate 35, and Baylor University. City officials rejected Pape's offer, citing that numerous transportation studies conducted over the previous ten years had evaluated her proposed routes and deemed them not "economically feasible."<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Fred Gehlbach, biology professor at Baylor University and staunch supporter of natural conservation and preservation efforts, also voice disapproval of the proposed bridge. When the Committee to Save Cameron Park selected its officers in October 1968, Gehlbach stated the purpose of the committee as "'not only to save Cameron Park now, but to develop public awareness, a public consciousness of the values of these kinds of recreational lands.'" When Gehlbach came to Baylor in 1963, vehicles for educational field trips were not readily available. Cameron Park served as a close and diverse laboratory for Gehlbach and his students to study. For Gehlbach, Pape, E.C. Bolton, and many others, the preservation of the natural and aesthetic values of Cameron Park

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<sup>6</sup>E.C. Bolton to Mayor Loudon, June 24, 1968, Nell Pape, Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quotes 1 and 2).

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. G.H Pape to Edward C. Bolton, August 28, 1968, Nell Pape, Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX; "A Chronological History," Nell Pape, Papers, (12); Wallace, *A Spirit So Rare*, 264-265 "Herring Route Gains Backing," *Waco News-Tribune*, October 6, 1968 (quote 1).

constituted the primary reason for their opposition to the bridge. Through the pages of the *News-Tribune*, the Save Cameron Park committee rallied opponents of the bridge and gathered a petition signed by some 1,300 Wacoans against the bridge and presented it to the City Council in hopes of securing a public hearing, but the City Council refused.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years the popular claim that the Herring Avenue Bridge controversy largely centered on heavily white West Waco wanting to deny largely black East Waco direct access to Cameron Park has emerged. While race was undoubtedly an underlying issue, it did not play as prominent a role in the opposition as has been suggested. On the contrary, some Wacoans suggest that racial tensions surrounding Cameron Park were exacerbated only after the completion of the Herring Avenue Bridge and the increased access, traffic, and mixing of blacks and whites.<sup>9</sup>

For most people opposed to the bridge, the primary issue centered on preserving the beauty and integrity of the Cameron Park entrance at Herring Avenue. The entrance gates donated by the Cameron family had welcomed visitors for nearly forty years. The big oaks inside the entrance provided not only beauty but also shaded picnic spots and the site for the annual Christmas scene. With the widening and expansion of Herring Avenue, the Rose Garden and Proctor Springs would be bisected by a busy street that prohibited children from crossing from one area of the park to another without serious safety issues. Concern over an increase in traffic, noise pollution, and litter also pervaded

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<sup>8</sup>“Save Cameron Park Panel Picks Officers,” *Waco News-Tribune*, October 15, 1968 (quote 1); Fred Gehlbach, interview by Mark, August 12, 2008, in Austin, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; “A Chronological History,” Nell Pape, Papers, (11-12, 14-15).

<sup>9</sup>David F Smith, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, August 1, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, January 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin, March 19, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

the minds of opponents. While most agreed that increasing the ease of access to the park for all segments of Waco's population was needed, many Wacoans simply did not want to sacrifice the oldest, most beautiful, and most heavily used part of their park. Many Wacoans feared that the Herring Avenue Bridge would ruin Cameron Park.<sup>10</sup>

Racism did not motivate most critics of the bridge. Critics were clearly willing to consider increasing access to Cameron Park, but they simply opposed locating the bridge at Herring Avenue—the heart of the park. Dr. Maurice C. Barnes, Congressman W.R. “Bob” Poage, and Walter G. Lacy, Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission in 1968, either suggested alternative routes, asked for a public hearing to discuss the issue, or stated that the project should be “postponed, not abandoned,” so that Wacoans could reevaluate its merits. If opponents truly did not want blacks in the park, they would have argued against any bridge regardless of the location or construction timeframe.<sup>11</sup>

Fractured by the controversial issue, a media war featuring countless editorials and articles representing both sides bombarded the pages of the *News-Tribune* beginning in June 1968 and continuing throughout the rest of the year. Proponents of the bridge included entrenched city officials such as Mayor Malcolm C. Loudon and City Manager Elmer Roberts. Prominent and influential business and civic leaders such as Jack H. Kultgen, Hilton Howell, Sr., and Carson Hoge also supported the bridge proposal. The Parks and Recreation Commission itself split on the issue. Joining the chorus in favor of

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<sup>10</sup>Fred Gehlbach, interview by Mark Firmin; David F. Smith Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin, January 9, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University Waco, TX; Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin, November 3, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

<sup>11</sup>“A Chronological History,” Nell Pape, Papers, (9, 12) (quote 1); Maurice C. Barnes to H. Malcolm Loudon and City Council, July 13, 1968, Nell Pape, Papers; W.R. Poage to Mrs. G.H. Pape, December 21, 1968, Nell Pape, Papers.

the bridge was W.W. Naman and longtime Parks and Recreation Director Alva Stem. Torn between preserving the natural beauty of the park or increasing access, Stem reasoned that the positive factor of increasing access for all of Waco outweighed the risk of harming the natural beauty of the park.<sup>12</sup>

City officials refused to grant a public hearing on the issue, claiming that the approval of the bond issue itself provided the voice of the people and that “extreme caution” was used in explaining projects entailed by the bond issue. While it is true that affluent citizens such as J.H. Kultgen, city officials, and the members of the Parks and Recreation Commission had known about the proposal of the bridge for a number of years, knowledge of the bridge proposal had not widely circulated among Waco citizens. Some Wacoans even insisted that if the citizens had truly known that “street improvements” meant a bridge bisecting Cameron Park, the measure would never have passed.<sup>13</sup>

In December 1968 E.C. Bolton and others brought a lawsuit against the City of Waco to prevent the construction of the Herring Avenue Bridge. The case of *E.C. Bolton et al v. City of Waco* was appealed all the way to the Texas Supreme Court, with rulings in favor of the City of Waco each time. Even in defeat, Pape did not begrudge her friends who favored the bridge, least of all Alva Stem and David F. Smith, Jr.; however, the sting of losing the cherished entrance to Cameron Park stuck with Pape for her remaining years. Even today there remains disagreement over whether the construction of the

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<sup>12</sup>*Waco Tribune-Herald*, October 20, 1968; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; “A Chronological History,” Nell Pape, Papers, (7-8, 12). The “Save Cameron Park Committee” file in the archives at the Texas Collection includes a thick scrapbook and index of a host of articles voicing approval or dissent of the Herring Avenue Bridge. For the best summary of the events leading up to the controversy see the chronological history of events included in the papers of Nell Pape.

<sup>13</sup>“A Chronological History,” Nell Pape, Papers, (7-8) (quote 1); Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin.

Herring Avenue Bridge was the right decision; however, there is no denying that the controversy and completion of the bridge irrevocably altered Cameron Park both physically and demographically. The psychological impact of the bridge on many Wacoans' perceptions of the park also profoundly shaped how people experienced or avoided the park in the ensuing years.<sup>14</sup>

Before construction of the Herring Avenue Bridge began, another national controversy found its way to the gates of Cameron Park. In November 1969 a group of approximately one hundred anti-Vietnam War protesters held a "Work for Peace" rally near the Fourth Street and Herring Avenue entrance to Cameron Park. Composed mostly of Baylor students, the crowd listened to short speeches by Baylor history professors Dr. Ralph Lynn and Dr. Rufus Spain. The protest coincided with a national movement to gather signatures for a petition to send to President Richard Nixon to cease hostilities in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup>

On a separate occasion in the 1960s, former City Manager David F. Smith, Jr., learned that a professor from the University of Texas had reserved the Redwood Shelter with the intention of holding an anti-government rally. Smith phoned the professor explaining that the rules governing Cameron Park prohibited political rallies inside the park at reserved shelters. The indignant professor refused to abdicate his reservation and suggested that "his followers would welcome a confrontation with the police." To avert a potential disaster, Smith doused the area with a bottle full of "skunk juice." The

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<sup>14</sup>*E.C. Bolton et al., Appellants v. City of Waco et al., Apelles*, 447 S.W.2d 718 (TX. Ct. App. 1969), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Wallace, *A Spirit So Rare*, 265; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Tuner, interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin; David F. Smith, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Fred Gehlbach, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>15</sup>Linda Little, "Cameron Park Peace Rally of 100 Linked to National Moratorium," *Waco News-Tribune*, November 11, 1969 (quote 1).

stench was so foul and pungent that it drove the professor and his cohort of protestors out of the park.<sup>16</sup>

In August 1970 the Rotan Driveway leading to the southern entrance of Cameron Park in the Pecan Bottoms was “widened, moved over,” and renamed University-Parks Drive. Marking the start of Rotan Drive since 1914, the red brick gates were salvaged and moved over to the new road. The entrance gates donated by the Cameron family were also moved, but also reconstructed. To accommodate the expanded Herring Avenue, the gates were torn down, stored, and eventually reformed to provide a tasteful entry to the park. A piece of history in Cameron Park was recognized in 1971 when Proctor Springs became the first site in the park to receive a Texas State Historical Commission Marker. At the unveiling ceremony, Waco historian Roger Conger recounted the early history of the Proctor Springs land. Following Conger’s remarks, William Cameron heir E.C. Bolton shared with the small audience his memories of discussions within the Cameron family to purchase the property, which at the time Wacoans feared might be “swallowed up” by real estate development. Bolton believed that the desire to assuage the public’s concerns “spurred . . . the Cameron family in its decision to assure perpetual public use of the springs.”<sup>17</sup>

Changes to the park during the late 1960s coincided with changes in the ways Americans and Wacoans spent their recreation and leisure time. The revised 1967 comprehensive city plan by Harland Bartholomew and Associates contained an

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<sup>16</sup>David F. Smith, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Bob Sadler, “Whew,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 26, 1985 (quotes 1 and 2).

<sup>17</sup>“1914 Beautification Effort by Wacoan Being Rebuilt,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, August 29, 1970; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, February 19, 1971; “Proctor Springs History Cited,” *Waco Times-Herald*, May 12, 1971 (quotes 1 and 2).

informative section on the emerging recreational trends of Americans. At the time of the report, the most popular recreational activity for adults in America was, not surprisingly, “watching television.” “Pleasure driving and walking” constituted almost half of the time adult Americans spent engaged in outdoor recreation. Thanks to a rather outlandish projection of a thirty-two hour work week, the report suggested that by the year 2000 Americans would “have more money, more time, and more desire to participate in recreational activities.”<sup>18</sup>

Still, the stories and experiences of Wacoans in Cameron Park in the 1960s and 1970s corroborate the Harland Bartholomew and Associates report on activities that began to dominate the park. Born in Waco in 1951, Charlie Turner—current Mayor of the City of Hewitt—recalls spending many days during his childhood in Cameron Park. Raised in a modest home without a backyard, Cameron Park served as Charlie’s playground, a place where he was free to use his imagination.

For Turner, his friends, and countless other Waco teens, the term “pleasure driving” took on a whole new meaning in Cameron Park by the late 1960s. If you owned a car—particularly a fast car—you attempted to run the “Seven Sisters” in Cameron Park as fast as you could. Named for the seven treacherous turns leading from North Pecan Bottoms to Lovers’ Leap, the Seven Sisters tested the traction of the tires and the courage and stupidity of the teenage driver. To compound the lunacy of racing the turns in Cameron Park, Turner explained that some teenagers would pour motor oil on the road to make the roads a little slicker. Like a fisherman exaggerating the size of the one that got away, he remembers fellow teenagers claiming to have run the Seven Sisters at a speed of

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<sup>18</sup>Harland Bartholomew and Associates, Charles Trost Consultants, and City of Waco Planning Department, “Revised Comprehensive Plan, Waco, Texas,” volume 1, (Waco, TX: December 1967), 110-111 (quotes 1 and 2).

seventy-five miles per hour, a ludicrous boast undoubtedly meant to garner attention from girls. The Parks and Recreation Commission established a speed limit in the park of twenty-five miles per hour, which high school and college speed demons simply ignored. Alva Stem recalls having to replace damaged cedar railings lining the roads of Cameron Park because of cars driven by reckless motorists. Maintenance on the cedar railings became so frequent that park employees could routinely predict which areas would need repairs.<sup>19</sup>

Cars were also used in Cameron Park for another quintessential teenage activity—“parking.” Charlie Turner recalls that fellow students at Waco High drove to Lovers’ Leap on dates. Those fortunate enough to have a convertible might pop the top and take in a starry sky or the view of the Brazos River valley bathed in moonlight. Oftentimes the only place teenagers on dates in Cameron Park focused their attentions were on each other; after all the romantic point is called Lovers’ Leap. If couples arrived in the park in early evening, they might be disturbed by the blaring sounds emanating from the dirt bikes at the “motorcycle pits.” Located just off the sharpest turn of the Seven Sisters, the motorcycle pits were a bowl shaped piece of ground where young daredevils rode their bikes up and down the steep sides of the hills crisscrossing each other’s paths.

Fortunately, no one was ever terribly injured. The noise pollution, however, began to irk

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<sup>19</sup>Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, July 25, 1962; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema, July 26, 2008, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; “Where Buffalo Clover Bloomed,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 31, 1959.



park-goers. Park administration officials proposed an ordinance to “govern the motorcycle enthusiasts” in July 1971.<sup>20</sup>

In every decade children rode their bikes through Cameron Park. During the 1960s and 1970s, young African Americans began riding their bikes in the park more frequently. As a young teenager, Walter Abercrombie, Waco native and legendary Baylor football player, regularly rode his bike to the park with friends all the way from his house on South Eighth Street near Baylor University. After an exhausting ride to Lovers’ Leap, the youths put their bikes aside to rest their legs and worked their arms by challenging one another to throw a rock to the other side of the Brazos, a difficult feat for even the strongest of men. The young teenagers could not hurl the rocks any farther than halfway across the river. The arduous journey to Lovers’ Leap on bicycle—which Abercrombie laughingly credits as developing all of the strength in his football legs—was worth it purely for the ride down. Smarter than their older counterparts sitting behind the wheel of a car, the rascally youths planted a lookout at the blind spot of each hill to watch for oncoming traffic. If Abercrombie got a thumbs up from the spotters, the coast was clear and he pedaled down the Seven Sisters as fast as possible. The bike picked up so much speed that by the time he hit the straightaway near Jacob’s Ladder, he could coast on his bike all the way through the North Pecan Bottoms past the Redwood Shelter.<sup>21</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s also brought a sharp increase in the number of Hispanic-Americans using Cameron Park. Ernesto Fraga recalls that during these two decades “it

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<sup>20</sup>Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; City of Waco, Parks and Recreation Department, Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission, August 13, 1971 (quote 1).

<sup>21</sup>Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin, March 23, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

seemed like Cameron Park was a Mexican-American park . . . because we were so many.” Family gatherings on Sundays at Lovers’ Leap or Pecan Bottoms were a weekly event for many Hispanic families. Formal events like graduation, wedding, and quinceaneras were often held at the Clubhouse. For many Mexican-Americans after church on Sundays “Cameron Park was the very next thing on the agenda.” Ernesto Fraga recalls that at least one member of his family often drove to Cameron Park early on Sunday morning to reserve a spot for gatherings that often included forty or fifty people and lasted for the duration of the day. While the parents visited children wandered all over the park or played pick-up games of football. On one occasion, several members of the Baylor football team accepted a challenge from more than a twenty members of Fraga’s family to game of tackle football. The friendly contest ended with both sides bruised and exhausted. Although not subjected to the stringent traditional policies of segregation that the African-American community endured for at least half of the park’s history, some Hispanics did endure racial profiling after sunset. Ernesto Fraga recalls that as a young Hispanic person, you did not go to Cameron Park after sunset unless you had a reason to be there.<sup>22</sup>

Organized sports activities began in the park in the late 1960s, introducing a new generation of young African Americans to Cameron Park. The Parks and Recreation Commission granted the all black Eastern Little League permission to establish fields on the old Waco High athletic field along Fourth Street. Noah Jackson, Jr., and other black leaders largely funded and constructed the facility themselves, helping to foster tremendous civic pride. Eastern Little League and the YMCA Kennedy-King Elks—the

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<sup>22</sup>Ernesto Fraga, interview by Mark Firmin, March 26, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quotes 1 and 2).

Pee-Wee football team that used the fields in the fall—are classic models of well oiled organizations. The Elks, who won nearly every city championship in three divisions for more than twenty years, instituted a “no pass, no play” rule long before it was implemented in schools. Eastern Little League also flexed competitive muscles by winning a state title in 1981. Both the Elks and Eastern Little League earned respect not just for their athletic prowess, but for the discipline and sportsmanship of both players and parents.

When the leagues were asked to relocate to make way for the construction of the Cameron Park Zoo, longtime director and coach Noah Jackson, Jr., said he felt good about leaving Cameron Park because of the opportunities it furnished for people from all walks of life in the black community. Jackson credits the athletic organizations and the facilities in Cameron Park for fashioning children into well disciplined and educated young men and women.<sup>23</sup>

With the completion of the Herring Avenue Bridge in the early 1970s, Cameron Park saw a surge in park use by African Americans. Emmons Cliff became the favorite social spot for African Americans. A convivial family atmosphere characterized the weekend gatherings at Emmons Cliff. Music by artists and groups such as Frankie Beverly and Maize, the Commodores, Lakeside, and Parliament poured out of car stereos, and boom boxes added to the festive mood. The heavy aroma of smoked barbeque and grilled burgers filled the air along with the laughter of children romping around. Cameron Park afforded African American families a safe, inexpensive, and beautiful

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<sup>23</sup>Noah Jackson, interview by Mark Firmin. Mr. Jackson says that the Eastern Little League and YMCA Elks began playing in Cameron Park in the 1960s, but the earliest documentation in the Parks and Recreation Minutes is August 1972 in the Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes, August 18, 1972, Parks and Recreation Department, Waco, TX.

environment—essentially the same luxuries that whites in Cameron Park had enjoyed since the park’s dedication over sixty years earlier.<sup>24</sup>

As more people poured into Emmons Cliff, the area became overcrowded and unsafe. The traffic congestion and parking nightmare caused by the massive gatherings prevented emergency vehicles from reaching the point. Alcohol and drug use by a few ruined a good time for most, and many law-abiding African American families opted to stay at home. The music played at deafening volume levels increasingly became a nuisance to families living in the vicinity. Noah Jackson and City Councilman Dewey Pinckney pleaded with the younger African Americans to be respectful of people living in the area.

To alleviate the traffic problem, the Waco City Council banned parking on Cameron Park Road leading up to Emmons Cliff from the Mouth of the Bosque and for a short distance north of the cliff. Parking on a portion of the adjacent side street Merriwood Drive was also forbidden. Some members of the black community believed that parking restrictions were designed to force African Americans to leave the park. Speaking on the behalf of two black organizations, the Northeast Neighborhood Council and the Grass Roots Organizations, Don Freeman acknowledged the traffic issue, but he concluded from his personal investigation that traffic and parking problems were pervasive in all areas of the park, not just at Emmons Cliff. City Councilmen Dewey Pinckney sought to assure the black community that no group was being targeted and that all groups should feel welcome in the city’s parks. A *Tribune-Herald* article reporting the parking ban also stated that harassment of both whites and blacks by police was occurring

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<sup>24</sup>Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; “Emmons Cliff Area Parking Banned,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 4, 1977.

in parks throughout the city. Seeing the escalating racial tensions, Freeman concluded that the problem in the parks “boils down to the mixing of blacks and whites in Waco which has always been a problem.” Eventually, several African American leaders requested the Parks and Recreation Department shut off the electricity to the Emmons Cliff area. The parking ban and loss of electrical outlets gradually diminished the black community’s use of Emmons Cliff.<sup>25</sup>

Both whites and blacks faced a park plummeting into decay by the late 1970s. The perception, and to a degree the reality, of Cameron Park was that it was becoming a haven for criminal activity. How did this image develop? Was the negative perception of the park fair? Could Cameron Park be revitalized?

Inklings of problems in the park had begun to develop even prior to the 1968 Herring Avenue Bridge controversy. A few years after his arrival in Waco in 1963, Baylor professor Dr. Fred Gehlbach heard rumors of crime emerging in the park. While on a date with her future husband in Cameron Park on a warm night in 1964, Dorothy Head Powell remembers a police officer rapping on the window of her boyfriend’s car. The police officer wanted the lovebirds to be vigilant because of reports of men reportedly attacking people in the park. Although she literally lived next door to the park and had played there for eighteen years, Dorothy distinctly remembers the incident in 1964 as being the first time she ever feared for her safety in the park.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Noah Jackson Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; “Emmons Cliff Area Parking Banned,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 4, 1977; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin, May 13, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

<sup>26</sup>Fred Gehlbach, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin.

The completion of Lion's Park on Bosque Boulevard and New Road in 1965, the opening of several parks surrounding the new Lake Waco, changes in recreation patterns, new neighborhood parks, and the white population's movement to West Waco and the suburbs all contributed to creating a vacuum in Cameron Park that needed to be filled. The African American community largely filled the vacuum created by the white community's gradual abandonment of the park. The completion of the Herring Avenue Bridge in the early 1970s certainly accelerated African Americans' use of the park as well because of the city's stated purpose of the bridge—to create more access for all of Waco. On weekends, traffic congestion from massive numbers of people congregating at Emmons Cliff and later in the South Pecan Bottoms became so severe that it might take a person anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour and a half to get from one end of the Bottoms to the other—a distance of three blocks. Charlie Turner said that if you were white and waiting in traffic, you did not even consider honking your horn out of fear. While stuck in the traffic line in Pecan Bottoms, Dorothy Head Powell remembers her truck being surrounded by a group of people and rocked back and forth. Traffic congestion, compounded by “racial suspicions,” played a major role in the white community's perception that they were no longer welcome in Cameron Park—a perception Noah Jackson, Jr., suggests whites were correct to have. In Jackson's opinion, Cameron Park in the 1980s became a place of reverse discrimination. Jackson, who had been thrown from his bicycle by a blunt object wielded by a white motorist in the 1940s, lamented that by the 1980s some members of the African American community were now guilty of a policy in the park they had fought to end.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>“Cameron Park Merits New Life,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 19, 1985 (quote 1); Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin; Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin, October 29, 2008, in Cleburne,

As a result of the white community's gradual abandonment of Cameron Park, the African American community owned Pecan Bottoms on the weekends, especially on Sundays. Despite negative perceptions by segments of both the African American and white communities, Parks and Recreation Director Max Robertson confidently stated that "99 percent" of the people in Pecan Bottoms were law abiding citizens there to enjoy the social and recreational experience. The massive congregations in Pecan Bottoms occupied only a fraction of the total area of the park, leaving the heavily wooded and secluded areas open to illicit activity. Larry Simms, a former officer with the Waco Police Department, commented that on weekdays secluded areas such as Lovers' Leap, Circle Point, Lindsey Hollow, Proctor Springs, and the Mouth of the Bosque witnessed crimes such as prostitution, drug-trafficking, and homosexual activity.<sup>28</sup>

Media reports of crimes only served to exacerbate people's negative view of the park. In September 1980 Thomas Graves and Carl Kelly shot and killed two men while robbing a Waco convenience store for money to buy drugs. The bodies of the two slain men were taken to Cameron Park and thrown off one of the cliffs. Graves was convicted and served a life term, and Kelly was executed by lethal injection in August 1993. Although the double homicide did not originate in Cameron Park, it only intensified Wacoans' convictions that the park was a dangerous place. Crimes such as grand theft

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Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Noah Jackson, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>28</sup>Lynn Bulmahn, "William Cameron Park Enjoys Ceremony Marking Service to City," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 19, 1985 (quote 1); Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.

auto did not take place in the park, but stolen vehicles were often stripped and left at Lovers' Leap, further contributing to the stigma of the park.<sup>29</sup>

Cameron Park's poor reputation in the 1980s extended beyond the city limits of Waco. A September 1984 *Dallas Morning News* feature on Lovers' Leap depicted a romantic point in the day time as the reporter encountered Baylor students talking about engagement plans, a Hispanic couple, and Waco sculptor and artist James Lawrence all enjoying time at the bluff. Once a popular nighttime destination for dates and moonlight picnics the park was nearly abandoned after dark. But a nighttime excursion to the park seemed tantamount to a suicide mission to many Wacoans. With no money for rent, twenty-three-year-old Indiana native Lloyd Breeder, his wife Robin, and their friend Steve Gardner were forced to live in their car in Cameron Park for a few weeks. Breeder confided to reporter Kent Biffle that although he had lived in the Bronx for half a year, Cameron Park "'scares the hell'" out of him at night, because "muggers and rapists" infested the shadows of the park.<sup>30</sup>

Whether Wacoans' perception of Cameron Park as a dangerous place was justified remains debatable. At some level, however, perception is rooted in reality. Many Wacoans, regardless of race, felt uneasy and sometimes terrified in the park from the late 1960s to the 1980s. One of the most frightening experiences in Walter Abercrombie's life occurred one night when he and his girlfriend were at one the scenic overlooks. For reasons he cannot fully explain, Abercrombie simply could not relax and

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<sup>29</sup>Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin; "Condemned Man Retains Hope But He Fears Execution is Imminent in '80 Waco Slayings," *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1992; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>30</sup>Kent Biffle, "Lover's Leap Still Attracts Young Hearts," *Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 1984 (quotes 1 and 2); Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.



take in the beauty of the park for fear that he and his girlfriend were in danger. Whether compounded by recent criminal activity or not, the perception and distinct feeling of being unsafe kept Walter and thousands of other Wacoans from going to Cameron Park at night. Former officer Larry Simms concurs that many officers in the Waco Police Department also considered the park a dangerous place. Wacoans' fears and negative perceptions of Cameron Park at night had also transcended to the daytime. With fear's shadow engraining itself in the minds of Wacoans, the park had rapidly slipped into neglect and decay.<sup>31</sup>

In 1978 Waco Public Works Director John Philpott convinced his friend Max Robertson to leave his job in Lubbock to join the Parks and Recreation Department in Waco as Assistant Director. Robertson quickly recognized that Cameron Park faced several challenges. Many of the structures built in the 1920s and 1930s were rapidly deteriorating, but with a serious budget shortfall the Parks and Recreation Department did not possess the materials, equipment, or funds to do anything but prolong the slow demise of many of the pavilions, picnics tables, walls, and playground equipment. Unaware of the poor reputation of the park when he joined the staff, Robertson quickly learned that the most difficult challenge facing the park involved finding ways to urge Wacoans to shed their collective misgivings.<sup>32</sup>

Efforts to revitalize the park took a first step in 1981 with a \$10,000 makeover of the Cameron Park Clubhouse. An attempt to relocate the Central Texas Zoo to Cameron Park—a move touted as being a good first step toward bringing families back to the

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<sup>31</sup>Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Turner, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>32</sup>Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin; John Philpott, interview by Mark Firmin.

park—failed when a November 1983 referendum calling for a nine cent increase in the city’s tax rate to fund the development of zoo in the park met defeat. Always dependent on local philanthropy, in 1984 Cameron Park received a surprising \$100,000 gift from retired United States Congressman W.R. “Bob” Poage for the development of a wildflower preserve. Congressman Poage’s donation, the *Tribune-Herald* reported, marked the “largest single gift from a private individual in Waco history since the Cameron family gave land for Cameron Park.” Prior to the announcement of the gift, City Manager David F. Smith, Jr., had driven throughout Waco with Congressman Poage searching for the ideal spot for the nature sanctuary. The pair agreed that the land adjacent to the Cameron Park Clubhouse offered the perfect location. Congressman Poage’s mother Helen Wheeler Conger Poage—better known as “Miss Nellie”—had cherished the spot as one of her favorite “pretty places” in Waco. To honor the memory of the late Mrs. Poage, the Greater Waco Beautification Association—now known as “Keep Waco Beautiful”—suggested that the wildflower preserve be named “Miss Nellie’s Pretty Place.” Although Congressman Poage’s donation came in 1984, additional sources of funding were needed before development could commence. Congressman Poage did not live long enough to see the dedication of “Miss Nellie’s Pretty Place” on April 11, 1987, but his philanthropy, love of nature, and dedication to improving Cameron Park inspired Wacoans. The mere act of bringing something so positive and colorful to the park went a long way in helping to restore the park’s image and to rekindle Wacoans’ passion and desire to fight for the their park.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Mike Copeland, “Cameron Clubhouse Getting \$10,000 Facelift,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 1, 1981; Bob Lott, “Cameron Park Proves Worthy Zoo Site,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, January 10, 1981; Mike Copeland, “Voters Defeat Zoo Referendum,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, November 9, 1983; Bob Darden, “Bob Poage Pledges \$100,000 for Wildflowers,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 8, 1984; David

The seventy-fifth anniversary of Cameron Park in 1985 presented an opportunity for city officials and concerned citizens to seize upon the occasion to generate momentum for the effort to reassert the public's claim to Cameron Park. Parks and Recreation Director Max Robertson recognized the potential of the seventy-fifth anniversary to serve as a watershed moment in the park's history. The anniversary festivities held at Lovers' Leap attracted around seventy-five city officials and a few dozen interested citizens, including William Cameron descendents Mrs. Albert Clifton and Linda Reichenbach, who cited the need for new activities to draw people back into the park. They also urged support for renewed efforts at bringing the Waco Zoo to Cameron Park. Announcing future plans for the park, Jon Spelman, chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission, named the members of the newly formed Cameron Park Study Committee, a diverse group of concerned and enthusiastic citizens tasked with researching ways to improve the park and address its sagging image in the community. To aid the committee in its endeavor, a \$45,000 grant to fund a comprehensive plan for Cameron Park as well as the rest of Waco's park system was also announced.<sup>34</sup>

The thirteen-member Cameron Park Study Committee—chaired by Waco native and Baylor graduate Christi Breeding—quickly immersed itself in studying the problems hounding the beleaguered park. “Phase 1” of the revitalization efforts involved a dual focus of tackling the traffic and parking dilemma in Pecan Bottoms and providing

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F. Smith, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Lynn Bulmahn, “Flower Reserve Funded,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, June 17, 1985; Lynn Bulmahn, “Pretty Place Dedicated,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, April 12, 1987 (quotes 1 and 2); Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin; Johnny Appell and Beth Appell, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>34</sup>Lynn Bulmahn, “William Cameron Park Enjoys Ceremony Marking Service to City,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 19, 1985 (quote 1); Mike Copeland, “Wacoans Urged to Enjoy Park,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 20, 1985.

recommendations for improving the park's image. Encompassed by a narrow two-lane loop with Cameron Park Road to the east and West Park Drive on the west, Pecan Bottoms was a veritable nightmare of traffic congestion on weekends. With hundreds of mostly African Americans and Latinos flooding the Bottoms every Sunday, cars were parked on both sides of each road. Drivers moved at a snail's pace to flash their polished cars and wheels, and motorists often stopped their cars to holler at friends. Drivers often had to wait up to an hour to get through the Bottoms. The deplorable traffic conditions posed a safety concern, as congestion prevented police and emergency vehicles from reaching people who were ill or hurt. Preventing access to other areas in the park, congestion in Pecan Bottoms caused many frustrated Wacoans to stop visiting Cameron Park altogether.<sup>35</sup>

While members of the white community no longer felt welcome in the park and harbored racial suspicions of the massive gatherings of minority groups in the Pecan Bottoms, new parking restrictions suggested by the Cameron Park Study Committee caused members of the black community to believe that they were being targeted for removal. Blacks then leveled charges of discrimination at city officials. Delicately navigating the thin line of racial sensitivity and negative perceptions plaguing Cameron Park in the 1980s, the committee and city officials had two major tasks. On the one hand, the Parks and Recreation Department needed to convince African Americans and Latinos using Pecan Bottoms that revitalization efforts were not intended to remove them. On the other hand, city officials needed to convince families from all ethnic backgrounds that

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<sup>35</sup>Lynn Bulmahn, "Officials Mull Cameron Parking Rules," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 22, 1985; Ann Cervenka, "Officials Seek Help with Park parking," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 29, 1985; Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; Ernesto Fraga, interview by Mark Firmin; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.

Cameron Park was a safe place, and that the city was serious about improving the park. To assuage the fears and concerns of all sides, and to help establish a permanent, visible, and public presence in the park, the Cameron Park Study Committee suggested developing a mounted patrol by park rangers.<sup>36</sup>

Of the eighty-seven applicants for the Park Ranger program, Larry Simms was one of three chosen for the “Cameron Cavalry.” Tasked with helping to enforce new parking regulations and provide security, the unarmed Rangers were invested with authority to issue citations and, when needed, radio the Waco Police Department, which provided great support and help for the program. As a native of Waco, Simms knew the Rangers had their work cut out for them. Although Simms emphasizes that a huge majority of people in the Bottoms abided by the law, he also knew of the Bottoms’ worst aspects. As a former police officer and private citizen, Simms was well acquainted with the problems in Cameron Park, particularly in Pecan Bottoms. Prior to joining the Park Rangers, Simms noticed that traffic congestion—which he asserts was often intentional—prevented police officers from breaking up fights and illicit activities such as gambling, dog fighting, and drug use. Being on horseback, Rangers were not hampered the way police officers were. The enhanced mobility and imposing image of authority of Rangers on horseback allowed for the clearing out of criminal activity and alleviation of traffic congestion. Rangers Nora Schell, Deke Dalrymple, and Simms worked together and the Park Ranger program made an immediate impact on Cameron Park. The Rangers roamed the park checking driver’s licenses and insurance cards, and even blocked off roads to prevent people from making the loop in the Pecan Bottoms. Eventually the loop was

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<sup>36</sup>Ann Cervenka, “Officials Seek Help with Park Parking,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 29, 1985; Charlie Jaynes, interview by Dave Sikkema; Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin; Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.

removed to allow park-goers better access to the Brazos River. Within the first year and half of the Park Ranger program, police reports on offenses in Cameron Park were cut nearly in half from sixty offenses in 1986 to thirty-five in 1987.<sup>37</sup>

Reducing crime in Cameron Park, however, was only one facet of the Park Ranger program. *Tribune-Herald* reporter Mike Copeland described the Rangers as donning “two hats: one for security and one for public relations.” The Park Rangers’ proficient skills as good-will ambassadors for the city and the park proved to be the most important aspect of their daily work. Simms agrees that the main intent of the Rangers was to alter the way people viewed the park. For people who had refrained from using the park out of fear, the Rangers provided a desperately needed symbol that the park was safe and that all were welcome. Simms and Schell consistently provided reassurance to park-goers that Waco was not trying run anyone out of the park except those who engaged in criminal activities. Ultimately, the Park Rangers program was about reestablishing Cameron Park as a safe and inviting place for all Wacoans.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time the Park Rangers began rehabilitating the park’s image and alleviating traffic congestion, the second phase of Cameron Park’s revitalization efforts—providing facilities and activities to lure people back into the park—began to take shape. Equipped with a nature trail, a wading pool, small amphitheater, benches, and a myriad of wildflower and trees native to Texas, “Miss Nellie’s Pretty Place—dedicated in April 1987—brought beauty and educational opportunities to the park. On December 12, 1985,

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<sup>37</sup>Mark England, “Cameron’s Cavalry,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, December 1, 1986; Rebecca Zimmermann, “Riders Show Off Horse Sense to Apply for Park Ranger Jobs,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, January 19, 1986; Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin; Walter Abercrombie, interview by Mark Firmin; Mike Copeland, “Rangers Cut Crime at Park,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, November 19, 1987.

<sup>38</sup>Mike Copeland, “Park Rangers Cut Crime at Park,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, November 19, 1987 (quote 1); Max Robertson, interview by Mark Firmin, Larry Simms, interview by Mark Firmin.

the Junior League of Waco, a civic organization of young adult women, announced a pledge to donate \$50,000 to the construction of a new playground near the Cameron Park Clubhouse. One of the first playgrounds in the nation to be designed with handicap-accessible features, plastic slides, and “resilient surfaces” instead of concrete, the playground afforded children of all ages with a safe and invigorating recreational experience. A covered pavilion and picnics tables were also furnished for family gatherings and birthday parties in the area. Named “Anniversary Park,” in honor of the Junior League’s fiftieth anniversary, the playground opened to the public on May 19, 1987.

Undaunted by the failure of the 1983 referendum to secure funds for relocating the Waco Zoo from near the Waco airport to Cameron Park, city officials, the Cameron Park Study Committee, and the Central Texas Zoological Society prepared to revive the issue for public debate. In an interview for the *Tribune-Herald*, study committee member Christi Breeding brilliantly articulated the reasons why many Wacoans had refused to abandon the dream of creating a new “zoological park” within the confines of Cameron Park. The zoo embodied “a community project that puts aside age and prejudice, social and economic stature and focuses attention on the whole of Cameron Park as a vital part of the river corridor development,” she said. More to the point, Breeding bluntly labeled the zoo as the “key that unlocks the total restoration of the park and underscores its use as a center for family activity.” The key rested with the people, but would they be willing to turn the lock on a door they had closed just a few years ago?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Lynn Bulmahn, “Wildlife Preserve Complex to be Dedicated in April,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 5, 1987; Lynn Bulmahn, “Junior League Presents Waco with Playground,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 19, 1987 (quote 1); “Q&A: Christi Breeding,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, January 13, 1986 (quotes 2, 3, and 4).

Unlike the 1983 referendum, the \$9.6 million bond issue presented to the public in 1988 hinged on the approval of the citizens of all of McLennan County, not merely Waco. With the decisive passage of the bond issue, work began on creating a natural habitat zoo on fifty-two acres in the Green Lake area of Cameron Park. After more than four years of planning and construction, the Cameron Park Zoo featuring “55 species and 125 specimens,” opened on July 18, 1993, to a crowd of almost ten thousand excited and thoroughly impressed people representing various age groups, ethnic groups, and towns from all over Central Texas.<sup>40</sup>

While it is hard to underestimate the importance of the zoo in the revitalization efforts of Cameron Park, the addition of an eighteen-hole disc golf course and continual expansion of hiking and mountain bike trails—which in 2009 totaled twenty miles—often do not get the recognition they deserve in providing competitive outdoor recreational activities for active park users. Completed in 1994, the disc golf course provided a low-cost, challenging activity in which people of all ages, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds could take part. Trekking from holes dispersed throughout both ends of the North and South Pecan Bottoms and through Proctor Springs near to Herring Avenue, disc golfers provide a continually visible presence in the park.<sup>41</sup>

Although more secluded than the disc golf course, the sprawling trail system quickly generated a buzz about Cameron Park in mountain biking and hiking circles across Texas. With help from Park Rangers such as Kim Jennings and Justin Sheppard, members of the Waco Bicycle Club volunteer their time to maintain and improve the

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<sup>40</sup>Samuel Adams, “A Walk on the Wilde Side,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 19, 1993 (quote 1).

<sup>41</sup>J.B. Smith, “Dangerous History, Recent Assault Obscure Truth About Cameron Park,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 25, 2007.



trails they cherish. Their hard work paid off when “*Bike Magazine* ranked Cameron Park the finest public park for cycling in the country.” In 2003 the North American Mountain Bike Association announced that Cameron Park would host the opening race of the “2004 National Mountain Bike Series,” an event that brought an estimated 8,000 cyclists and millions of dollars in revenue to the city.<sup>42</sup> Today the rugged trails in Cameron Park continue to draw a devoted and growing number of mountain bikers, hikers, and runners who are fiercely loyal and protective of the park.

By the mid-1990s it became apparent to most Wacoans that the successful revitalization efforts started in the mid 1980s had propelled Cameron Park to move far beyond the darkest chapter of its history. Even a double homicide in 1995 in Pecan Bottoms did little to dissuade throngs of Wacoans from flocking to Cameron Park in the afternoons and on weekends. John Young, *Tribune-Herald* Opinion Page Editor and staunch advocate of Cameron Park, wrote in February 1993 that he was thankful his children were blessed with an opportunity to develop “precious childhood memories of Cameron Park” together with Wacoans of “many colors.”<sup>43</sup> Young’s words ring true. Through hard work, sacrifice, and an iron will, many Wacoans conquered the fear and prejudices that prevented them from using the park in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. With each year more Wacoans recognize how lucky they are to own a beautiful natural refuge in the midst of an urban jungle. Perhaps of paramount importance, Wacoans now view

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<sup>42</sup>Marla Pierson, “More Visitors Discovering Charms of Cameron Park,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, April 18, 1997; Lanny French, interview by Dave Sikkema, July 30, 2008, in Waco, TX, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Brice Cherry, “Cameron Park Lands National Bike Races,” *Waco Tribune Herald*, October 15, 2003 (quote 1).

<sup>43</sup>Mark England, “Park’s Image a Concern,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 21, 1995; John Young, “Park of Many Colors,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 1993 (quote 1).

Cameron Park as an invaluable asset, protected and set aside by the Cameron family.

Cameron Park truly is for the pleasure of all the people.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Change and Continuity

The history of Cameron Park embodies all that Waco has experienced over the last one hundred years. From the park movement and Cameron families' philanthropy, inspired by the City Beautiful movement, to the collective willingness of Wacoans to approve a multi-million dollar improvement program in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Cameron Park has been a playground for soldiers during both world wars and an escape for Wacoans struggling through the Great Depression. Cameron Park also endured the upheaval and turmoil that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Since then Cameron Park has emerged from a period of decay to an era of revitalization as Wacoans of every age, class, and race continue to enjoy the park as much as Wacoans did a century earlier. Every year more people discover the park for the first time or rediscover it anew. Today, Wacoans are able to relax, play, and socialize in Cameron Park because of the devotion to the park demonstrated by previous generations of Wacoans.

Since the mid 1990s, Cameron Park has continued to make enormous strides in accomplishing dramatic improvements. Outdoor recreation activities such as disc golf, mountain biking, hiking, and water sports continue to soar in popularity, attracting newcomers each year. The extension of the riverwalk system through Cameron Park and across the Herring Avenue Bridge into East Waco has brought more people into the park. The completion of a \$40,000 spray park in Pecan Bottoms in July 2000 provided a welcome aquatic activity to the park. A popular and free activity, the spray park helps

parents to keep children entertained and cool throughout the blistering Texas summers. The addition of a new pavilion and needed restroom facility in Pecan Bottoms has also drawn families back into the park. On July 2, 2005, the Cameron Park Zoo opened the \$9.5 million Brazos River Country exhibit. Funded by a bond issue passed in 2000, the exhibit takes visitors through the various ecological zones along the Brazos River and features wildlife such as jaguars, black bear, mountain lions, river otters, and a 50,000-gallon sea aquarium with a host of beautifully colored fish. Opened in the summer of 2009, the Asian Forest exhibit featuring komodo dragons and orangutans enhances the already stellar reputation the Cameron Park Zoo has enjoyed since it opened in 1993.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Cameron Park has been unable to completely shed its image as an unsafe place. Supporters, however, are quick to note that the impact of the Park Ranger program and increased patrols by the Waco Police Department are clearly keeping park patrons safe. To illustrate the success in maintaining and improving park security, *Tribune-Herald* reporter J.B. Smith noted recently that “in the 30 months between January 2004 and June 2006, police reported 32 crimes,” compared to the entire year of 1986 when police filed sixty reports of crime in the park. However, the biggest safety concerns in Cameron Park are the overlooks at Lovers’ Leap and Circle Point. Between 1982 and 1987 fourteen people lost their lives falling from the cliffs. Every fatality resulted from victims climbing over the walls intended for their protection. Several deaths from 2004 through 2006 highlighted the question of safety at Lovers’ Leap and Circle Point,

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<sup>1</sup>Larry Groth, interview by Mark Firmin, July 6, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Sharon Fuller, interview by Mark Firmin, June 5, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Michelle Hillen, “Spray Hit: Glitch Delays Park Opening,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 8, 2009; Barbara Elmore, “Cameron Park Zoo’s New Exhibit Ready to Toll,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, June 30, 2005; “Zoo Exhibit Gets an Expert’s Take,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, June 26, 2005; Star De La Cruz, “Zoobilee: Apes and Dragons—Oh My!,” *Waco Tribune-Herald*, May 26, 2009.

bringing the issue back into the public eye. Unfortunately, we live in an age of excessive litigation, and people seem less willing to take personal responsibility for their own actions. As a result, the City of Waco suffered lawsuits from family members of victims who ignored the posted signs warning them of the danger of venturing beyond the walls. In 2008 the city decided to replace the weathered walls at Lovers' Leap, Circle Point, and Emmons Cliff and began construction of new fences.<sup>2</sup> The new fences—completed in 2009—together with the removal of many unsightly cedar trees improve the wonderful views from atop the bluffs.

Despite the impressive progress made in improving the facilities, image, and security in the park, Wacoans refuse to be complacent. In 2007 they approved a \$60 million bond issue which included \$11.7 million for upgrades for parks throughout Waco. Cameron Park received a \$6.9 million portion to fund the first phase of an estimated \$19 million in improvements needed or desired in the park. The successful passage of the bond proves that Wacoans are willing to commit the necessary time and money needed to maintain and improve the park.

The main impetus behind the massive improvement project is the centennial anniversary of Cameron Park in 2010. Sharon Fuller, Park Planner for the City of Waco, first realized that the milestone in the park's history was rapidly approaching. Since the passage of the bonds, Fuller and Parks and Recreation Director Rusty Black have immersed themselves in planning and logistics for a host of improvements. Conceptual

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<sup>2</sup>J.B. Smith, "Dangerous History, Recent Assault Obscure Truth About Cameron Park," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 25, 2007 (quote 1); Cindy Szelag, "Cameron Crime," *The Lariat*, November 21, 1997; "Quandary over Lover's Leap," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 12, 2005; Tim Woods, "Park Safety Examined," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 16, 2006; Tommy Witherspoon, "Woman Sues City in Fatal Cliff Fall," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 8, 2005; Kelsie Hahn, "Fences for Cameron Cliffs: \$605k," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, July 16, 2009.

designs by EDAW, a prominent landscape architecture firm, were presented to the public in 2008 with a revised version in April 2009. The public greeted the concepts with a myriad of responses. Some of the most avid supporters of park improvements also emerged as some of the most vocal critics of EDAW's designs. Several critics felt that the "fundamental issues" of "how the park is policed and maintained" were not being properly addressed. Others argued that Wacoans should understand that crime and accidents can occur anywhere. Park Ranger Lanny French pointed out that police respond to more calls at Richland Mall than Cameron Park. With relatively little crime in Cameron Park, it would be foolish for police to increase the number of patrols in the park when many other areas of Waco need attention. Other critics expressed concerns about preserving the park's natural beauty. Moreover, they worried that city officials would ignore their input. In an effort to assuage the public's concerns and provide a forum for all the make suggestions, Parks and Recreation Rusty Black and Park Planner Sharon Fuller held several public meetings. The meetings also provided regular updates on the progress of park improvements funded by the 2007 bond issue.<sup>3</sup>

A contract with Barsh Construction to start work on the improvement plans was secured in April 2009 at a cost of \$4 million—\$2 million less than expected. Construction projects will require that parts of the park be closed to the public throughout 2009 and into 2010. All improvements should be completed in time for the centennial celebration, beginning in May 2010. Improvements include "restrooms, pavilions, and roads at Lovers' Leap and Mouth of the Bosque; a pavilion and overlook at Circle Point;

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<sup>3</sup>"Waco's Keepsake," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 5, 2008; J.B. Smith, "Parts of Cameron Park Closed for Repairs: Projects Likely Won't be Completed Until 2010," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, October 5, 2008 (quote 1); Larry Sims, interview by Mark Firmin, May 13, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

fountains, plazas, and clubhouse renovations at Anniversary Park; restoration of Jacob's Ladder; remodeling of the Rock Shelter; and replacement of the Redwood Shelter." The Proctor Springs area will also see the replacement of the dilapidated pavilion and pedestrian bridge at Wilson's Creek replaced. Wacoans were already reaping the benefits of bond projects in Cameron Park in 2008, when a brand new playground was opened adjacent to the spray park in Pecan Bottoms.<sup>4</sup>

With the \$2 million surplus, Sharon Fuller plans to initiate a study of how best to improve the retaining walls and walkways surrounding Proctor Springs. A Cameron Park Centennial Committee composed of enthusiastic Wacoans began work in 2009 to develop a series of events to commemorate the centennial, which will begin on May 1, 2010, with a reenactment of the 1910 dedication parade christened and claimed Cameron Park for the people of Waco.<sup>5</sup>

Wacoans can view the 100 year history of Cameron Park as a century of continuity and change. Cameron Park has been a perpetual favorite gathering place for an unlimited number of social, civic, and recreational activities. Over the course of those one hundred years Cameron Park has expanded its embrace to include not only whites, but all ethnic groups in Waco. The 100 acres donated by the Cameron family in 1910 has grown to 416 acres in 2010. Cameron Park has retained its natural character including its famed oak, cedar, pecan trees and beautiful vistas while enduring an invasion of non-native plants such as Asian bamboo and Japanese honeysuckle. The metal playgrounds

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<sup>4</sup>J.B. Smith, "Council Oks \$4M upgrade to Cameron Park," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, April 22, 2009 (quote 1); Alex Maxell, "Cameron Park Prepares for 100-Year Anniversary," *The Lariat*, December 2, 2008; Sharon Fuller, interview by Mark Firmin.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Firmin, "Picture Cameron at 100," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, June 14, 2008; Sharon Fuller, interview by Mark Firmin; Ernesto Fraga, interview by Mark Firmin, March 26, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quote 1).

of swings, slides, and teeter-totters at Wilson's Creek have been replaced by the handicap-accessible playgrounds consisting of elaborate plastic structures including slides and swings in Pecan Bottoms and Anniversary Park. The graveled drives in Cameron Park that supported horses and buggies and Model Ts are now modern paved roads.<sup>6</sup>

Outdoor recreation in Cameron Park reflects continuity and change, but also innovation. Aquatic activities in Cameron Park remain popular, but the wading pools and fountains at the Rose Garden and Proctor Springs have been replaced by the spray park in Pecan Bottoms. Fishing along the Brazos and Bosque Rivers remains a popular pastime and the additions of wakeboarding and kayaking have helped the rivers become an even more integral part of the park. Bicycles, although still evident, have largely been replaced by mountain bikes. Three tennis courts have been replaced by an eighteen-hole of disc golf course.

The governance and preservation of Cameron Park have steadily evolved as well. Instead of being maintained and developed by an autonomous board of commissioners, a parks and recreation department that includes a director, rangers and a park planner oversee the improvements to the park. The backbone of Cameron Park remains the foremen and laborers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to preserve and maintain the park's beauty, relying not on mule drawn wagons to carry water and tools, but trucks, tree spades, electric tools, and massive, self-propelled lawn mowers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>J.B. Smith, "Plant Peril Hits Park," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, June 10, 2006.

<sup>7</sup>Dorothy Head Powell and Frank Curre, Jr., interview by Mark Firmin, January 28, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX; Alva Stem, interview by Mark Firmin, January 9, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University Waco, TX.



Perhaps most importantly, for one hundred years Wacoans have continually renewed their commitment to remain the custodians of Cameron Park. The passage of the bond issue in 2007 represents the latest example of Wacoans reaffirming their dedication to Cameron Park. The enthusiasm generated by the centennial must be sustained past 2010 through its own momentum.

In a deeper sense Cameron Park has served as a microcosm of Waco, exhibiting a century long cycle of development, decline, and renewal. A reflection of the resiliency of Wacoans, Cameron Park stands as an example of compassion, ingenuity, civic pride, and determination. Without these qualities, Cameron Park might well have become a residential district or remained a haven for crime. Instead, Cameron Park serves as a refuge from the busy urban landscape. A place where people can reconnect with nature and with one another, Cameron Park provides exciting recreation as well as serenity and relaxation. A classroom for students of all ages, it offers lessons in history, geology, biology, ecology, and sociology. Cameron Park can be whatever Wacoans want it to be so long as they are willing to preserve and improve it for future generations.

With the centennial anniversary in 2010, Wacoans are being presented with an opportunity similar to achieve a defining moment. We can wax nostalgic, hold grudges of bygone times, or offer great platitudes for the vision we have for the park, but nostalgia is not always accurate, grudges are a hindrance, and platitudes do not move Waco forward. It is time for Wacoans to join together and fully cultivate the potential that Cameron Park holds. Ernesto Fraga, Waco native and publisher of the bilingual newspaper *Tiempo*, views the impending centennial celebration as a chance for Wacoans

to show “that we are not necessarily a melting pot, but a very healthy looking salad that shows all of our differences and yet we are all in it together.”

Indeed, the park gains its vitality and character from the people who use it. Memories of Cameron Park are memories of our collective experiences there. Let us put differences aside and focus on a common ground upon which all can rally—Cameron Park. When Wacoans united in accepting the gift of Cameron Park in 1910, the city entered into a perpetual covenant to protect and improve the park. One hundred years later, Wacoans are still called to be not only beneficiaries of the park, but to serve as custodians and guardians of Cameron Park. Every Wacoan has a stake in the park’s continued maintenance and development. If properly nurtured, Cameron Park can provide a boon for Waco and foster a healthier, more active, and educated citizenry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ernesto Fraga, interview by Mark Firmin, March 26, 2009, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX (quote 1).

## APPENDIX

## Photographs of Cameron Park



Dr. Armstrong pontificating for Baylor students at Emmons Cliff in Cameron Park, 1928. Photo courtesy of The Texas Collection Baylor University.



Minnie Craven (top right) and a bunch of her friends playing on the observation tower at Emmons Cliff in the 1920s. Photo provided by Tommye Toler.



A view of the Fourth Street and Herring Avenue entrance to Cameron Park with the gates donated by the Cameron family in 1930. Photo courtesy of City of Waco Parks and Recreation Department.



The parade that preceded the dedication ceremony at Cameron Park, May 27, 1910, included infantry soldiers and automobiles carrying young children, such as Eleanor Cameron's car pictured here. Photo courtesy of The Texas Collection Baylor University.





Waco photographer Fred A. Gildersleeve's photograph of a field in Cameron Park covered with bluebonnets. Photo courtesy of The Texas Collection Baylor University.



Left: Bobby Joe Nickols and Margaret Smith at the Rose Garden, February 1945. Photo provided by Margaret Smith Pauling. Right: Ellen and Dorothy Martin cooling off in the wading pool at the Rose Garden, 1940. Photo provided by Mary Ellen Rodgers Wright.





Two Gildersleeve photos of Proctor Springs (top) and Pecan Bottoms (bottom) after the first phase of development of Cameron Park in the 1910s. Photos courtesy of The Texas Collection Baylor University.





Top Right: John Guldemon, Tom Corbett, and Paul Foster hanging out on top of the wall at Lovers' Leap, 1943. Top Left: John Guldemon places "bunny ears" behind the heads of Tom Corbett and Marinelle Kellner, 1943. Bottom: Norman Conover wins a Coke from Margret Smith by throwing a rock across the Brazos River, 1942. Photos courtesy of Margaret Smith Pauling.



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