

BRIEF HISTORY OF NOBLE PARK and PGC'S INVOLVEMENT

According to Fred Neuman's, The Story of Paducah, published in 1927, Noble Park was created when commissioners bought acreage on Hinkleville Road on February 4, 1915, to develop a new recreational area for the spreading city after the popular Wallace Park, originally named LaBelle Park, was destined to become a residential site.

The large wooded area lay unimproved for a decade until Captain Robert Noble donated \$10,000 toward its improvement with the understanding that the city match the gift. Acceptance of Captain Noble's gift followed with the Board of Park Commissioners renaming the grounds "Bob Noble Park."

Originally the park was called Forest Park because of its dense woods. It was also known as Monkey Wrench Park because of its outlaw and moonshine activity causing visitors who entered the park to carry a wrench for protection.

Following Captain Noble's donation, a 5-acre lake was created in 1936 along with additional improvements in the mid-1930's using federal funding from the New Deal. W.P.A. workers constructed a stone wall and ornamental entrance fronting the Hinkleville Road entrance. The entrance still stands although the stone wall was demolished in the 1960's when US Highway 60 West was widened.

Further additions in the ensuing years included an amphitheater where a moonshine still stood, a swimming pool which was once a holding pen for cows and hogs waiting to be slaughtered, a golf course close to the current ball diamonds, a nature trail which provided an escape route for "outlaws," and The Baumer Brothers Dairy which was relocated after the Illinois Central Railroad shops purchased the dairy's property on

Kentucky Avenue. Later additions were tennis courts, the Funland amusement center, concessions, a covered croquet court, lighting, picnic areas, children's playgrounds and a music park.

One interesting fact is that Noble Park was a 'whites only' park. Stuart Nelson Park, half a mile west on US 60, was in existence in the early 1900's but was used as a sanitarium for people with communicable diseases such as small pox. Only doctors or authorized persons were allowed entrance. The sanitarium was torn down in the 1930's and made into a recreational area named for Dr. Stuart Nelson, a black doctor, who practiced many years in Paducah. The park was dedicated to honor Dr. Nelson and his son, also Dr. Stuart Nelson, in the 1940's, and to celebrate the creation of a 'black' park.

After researching the PGC Archives, it appears that Paducah Garden Club's involvement with Noble Park began during the 1990-1992 presidency of Mary Dyer. The city created a planning committee to renovate the park and Mary was named to the committee. She called a Board Meeting on June 28, 1990 to discuss the following recommendations:

1. Lower the Kentucky limestone wall on H. C. Mathis Drive built by WKTech students.
2. Maintain the original natural look
3. Design signage
4. Use uniform colors throughout the park
5. Substitute evergreens for magnolia
6. Resurface the road
7. Upgrade playground and equipment near picnic areas
8. Move the Indian

9. Install speed bumps
10. Promote field trips for children
11. Label trees
12. Install gates

In January 1991 at a meeting with Joe Clark, a Lexington landscape architect, "Town Lift" was the main agenda item, which included discussion about the appearance of the entrance at Noble Park.

A week later, on January 16, during Gerry Montgomery's term as Mayor, Mary was contacted by Gayle Frye, who was in charge of grants and matching funds for the Noble Park project. Gayle asked PGC for a \$2,000 donation to complete "a nature jogging trail accessible to the handicapped." The trail was to be planted with native plants and wild flowers and fully accessible to the handicapped. PGC members Eloise Habacker and Virginia Young recommended that "we pledge \$2,000 as requested for the woodland nature jogging trail." The membership approved the recommendation at its January 18 meeting.

Also at the January 18 meeting, Mr. Clark spoke about the image of Paducah. He suggested improvements in various areas, two being the planting of native and hardy trees and the development of parks.

PGC minutes mention no further discussion about Noble Park until April 1993 when "it was reported that plans are drawn for the Trail but the Trail has not been installed and the funds given by PGC have not yet been spent."

In November 1993, Mary Dyer stated that "after three or four years of urging the City to begin refurbishment of Noble Park, something may be about to happen." Gayle Frye was appointed the park director, Nature Trail was finished except for planting, and PGC's "donation may go for the

purchase and planting of viburnum to provide a hedge-like area,” according to Mary.

Key points of Mary’s report to PGC were:

1. The entrance of park is being designed.
2. The playground is funded.
3. A mixture of trees on Park Avenue perimeter will be planted.
4. A tree grant is available for 200 trees for the park.
5. Funds may be available for dealing with the lake.

PGC received a letter from Gayle Frye on March 5, 1995, thanking the club for its \$2,000 donation for the planting project at the entrance to NP. Gayle further stated, “We hope that the results will exceed your expectations.”

At the March 15, 1995, PGC meeting, President Diane Lengsfeld asked if more funds might be needed for Noble Park. As a result the membership voted to make an additional \$2,000 donation for planting the entrance.

At the September 15, 1995 meeting, Mary reported that NP is “looking great, but work still needs to be done.” Then at the November 1995 meeting, Mary reported that the city had won a First Place Award at the Kentucky Forestry Leadership Convention for Noble Park’s Nature Trail. The seed money for a Matching Fund Grant was donated by PGC and a wildflower garden was to be developed using seeds given to our delegates at the GCA’s Virginia Beach Zone VII Meeting.

In the spring of 1997, additional work to improve the appearance of the park continued. Roses and cobblestones at the front entrance were added and the Garden Club of Noble Park was formed with Mary Dyer as

PGC representative. PGC donated an additional \$500 for landscaping the entrance on H. C. Mathis Drive.

The 1997-98 PGC budget included the Garden Club of Noble Park for the first time and allowed \$500 for additional planting. "A day in the park" was proposed for all garden clubs to gather and have a work/lunch day. On April 20 the first planting day was held to plant wildflowers with another on May 5.

On June 9, Mary stated that PGC has "claimed the front entrance." She moved and Bertha Wenzel seconded that PGC be responsible for the physical and financial development of the park entrance. Also a line item of \$500, to be reviewed yearly, was to be placed in the budget for development of a wild flower garden.

In February 1999 a \$500 donation from Gene Katterjohn was received in memory of his wife, Carolyn, for PGC to use for NP. The club decided to use the donation toward a sprinkler system for the entrance and to have three plantings a year - pansies, petunias, and marigolds. Also the \$500 for GC of NP was continued.

Further minutes for the next twenty-five years report a schedule of routine maintenance and plantings, except for November 2000 when many of our plantings from the Nature Trail were dug up and stolen. Luckily some trillium, bluebells, and trout lilies did spring up the next April. Pruning of trees and plantings at the front entrance has been undertaken by PGC members since that time.

PGC's dedication to Noble Park continues to be one of our major club projects.

Jeane Framptom, Feb. 2026

