

ELOISE LUNDY PARK AND RECREATION CENTER

Norma Adams-Wade 2014 text:

ELOISE LUNDY PARK AND RECREATION CENTER

(Founded as Oak Cliff Negro Park in 1915)

In a low-lying area known as “The Bottoms,” Eloise Lundy Park is like a remote, sprawling oasis, mindful that the ever-present Trinity River runs nearby behind a fortress-like levee.

Eloise Lundy Recreation Center is a vital feature on the grounds where in decades gone by, Dallas African-American youths hit baseballs and tossed footballs on land they viewed as a place of their own. Eloise Lundy Park was originally called Oak Cliff Negro Park when Dallas voters approved a \$500,000 bond issue in 1913 that included land for seven parks for African-Americans. The original 4.68-acre site at Sabine and Cliff streets was one of the first two of those parks. Griggs Park is the other.

The community surrounding the park historically featured modest frame houses and its early residents accepted the inevitable flooding of the nearby Trinity River before levees were completed in the 1930s. Residents took care of each other when the river overran the close-knit, cloistered neighborhood.

Many youths honed their athletic skills at what was then Oak Cliff Negro Park. The city renamed the park in 1987 for Ms. Lundy. The Dallas native retired in 1974 after more than 30 years as an African-American trailblazer with the Dallas Park and Recreation Department where she rose to become district supervisor over about 45 parks. She continued to teach classes as a volunteer at the Eloise Lundy Recreation Center. She died in 1999 at age 90.

Eloise Lundy Park and Recreation Center

(Founded as Oak Cliff Negro Park in 1915)

Founded in a low-lying village of shot-gun homes, businesses and churches known as “The Bottoms,” Eloise Lundy Park originally developed as a beloved social center for Black communities west of the Trinity River. The park is adjacent to Tenth Street Historic District, one of the few intact Freedmen’s Towns remaining in the nation. Significant to Dallas civic history, the creation of this small neighborhood retreat is a testament to the courageous activism of early Dallas citizens in the face of oppression.

At the turn of the 20th century, Black citizens, who increasingly found their access to city parks more restricted, began to petition the City for a place where their children could safely play. Although the City never officially made racial segregation a law in public parks, conventions of dominant culture were rigid enough to enforce and privilege “White only” use of public facilities. The park board answered appeals from Black communities in 1915 by allocating the last funds from the 1913 bond election for a *[N]egro park east of the river and a [N]egro park west of the river*: Hall Street Negro Park (renamed A.R. Griggs in 1924) located in what is now called Uptown, and this park, Oak Cliff Negro, being the first.

In its early years, this lively green offered baseball games, May Day pageants, band concerts and more in spite of the river periodically overrunning the area. Aaron Thibadeaux “Oak Cliff T-Bone” Walker, a native of The Bottoms, made his 1929 debut recording, *Trinity River Blues*, about the inevitable and sometimes devastating flooding that occurred here before the levees were finally built in 1931.

Advocacy in the 1940s from individuals and important community organizations such as the Progressive Voters League and the Housewives Chamber of Commerce, helped to establish the first community building and pool. Some of the neighborhood’s earliest preschool and kindergarten programs, traditionally held in churches, began to make use of this building.

Children spent long summer days here, sometimes only breaking for a snack from the fruit trees that peppered the cloistered, close-knit community. Throughout the 1950s, teams from other segregated neighborhood parks participated in citywide competitions like tennis, basketball, swimming, one-act play contests, and marble tournaments. Park employees coached track and roller-skating as popular dance moves were perfected for “Friday Teen” night—weekly socials that continued well into the 1960s.

In 1987, the City rededicated the park to honor Eloise Lundy, a Dallas trailblazer. As one of the first Black park department employees, she eventually became District Supervisor of over 45 sites. Ms. Lundy retired in 1974 after 31 years of service, but continued to volunteer for many years afterward at this cherished community green space.

Text presented by Boone, Rainwater, Uptown representatives at Dallas Park Board Planning and Design Sub-committee, **January 21st, 2016 meeting**, Park Department, Dallas City Hall

Possible names:

Footprints: Remembering the Segregated Parks of Dallas

Footprints: Exploring the Segregated Parks of Dallas

Footprints: Documenting the Segregated Parks of Dallas

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Eloise Lundy Park and Recreation Center
(Founded as Oak Cliff Negro Park in 1915)

Originally named Oak Cliff Negro Park, Eloise Lundy Park and Recreation Center is one of seven parks designated for the use of African-American citizens of Dallas during the time when the city's parks were racially segregated. Purchased and opened in 1915 in the Trinity River bottoms to accommodate Dallas' growing African American population, the 4.68-acre park was reduced in size during levee construction in the late 1920s.

Lundy was a social center for blacks in an area characterized by shotgun houses, small businesses and community churches. Its amenities in early years were substandard but through such advocates as the Progressive Voters League and the Dallas Housewives League the park received significant improvements in the late 1930s and early 1940s with the addition of a pavilion, community building, and pool. During Segregation it became an important part of the community as one of the few places blacks could gather, play, host picnics, and compete in sports. The park played host to teams from other segregated parks for citywide competitions in tennis, basketball, swimming and theater, and was the site for track and roller-skating team practices as well as weekly dance socials. Since desegregation the park and recreation center has continued to be a vital neighborhood feature.

A new recreation center was built and dedicated in [1982?] and received an addition in 1999. The Dallas Park Board renamed the park in 1987 for Eloise Lundy, a black Dallas native who served for nearly 30 years as a trailblazer with the Dallas Park and Recreation Department, where she rose to the role of district supervisor of 45 city parks. In retirement she remained an active presence at the recreation center until her death at 90 in 1999.

MOORE PARK

Norma Adams-Wade 2014 text:

MOORE PARK

(Founded as Eighth Street Negro Park in 1938)

Before being renamed Moore Park, this 25-acre site, at 8th Street and Rockefeller Boulevard in Oak Cliff, was known as 8th Street Negro Park when the Dallas Park Board purchased the land in 1938. The park is situated on a portion of the estate of Ben E. Cabell, mayor of Dallas and son of General W.L. Cabell, also a mayor of Dallas. The park lacked many amenities that parks in higher income communities offered, but Moore was a vibrant site that Dallas African-Americans claimed as their own during segregation.

Families, organizations and sports teams kept the park grounds busy with athletic competitions. Baseball and softball were extremely popular with young African-American boys at that time. Moore Park teemed with ball tournaments except when the Trinity River spilled into its floodplain, inundating the neighborhoods before the levee system was completed. Football teams also practiced and played at Moore Park.

Other activities included family and organization picnics, band concerts, movies, domino games and summer scouting campouts. A modest golf course was marked out in the sand and later was expanded from six to nine holes.

The park featured some playground equipment, drinking fountains, lights, comfort stations, picnic facilities, and in the mid-1940s and early 1950s, a humble recreation building was constructed and a multiple-use area for various games.

Moore Park

(Founded as Eighth Street Negro Park in 1938)

The Oak Cliff Negro Civic League had a vision when they approached the Dallas Park Board in 1934 about this beautiful woodland of rolling hills and towering pecan and oak trees. The league envisioned an expansive green space that could accommodate sizable gatherings. A ride on the Trinity Heights streetcar or traversing the Santa Fe Freight Railroad trestle by foot provided easy access for Black Dallasites to meet in what would become the largest public park designated specifically for Black residents' use at that time.

At the turn of the 20th century, Black citizens, who increasingly found their access to city parks more restricted, began to petition the City for a place where their children could safely play. Although the City never officially made racial segregation a law in public parks, conventions of dominant culture were rigid enough to enforce and privilege "White only" use of public facilities. The park board answered appeals from Black communities beginning in 1915 by establishing two parks designated for "Negro use"-- the first being Oak Cliff Negro Park (renamed Eloise Lundy Park in 1987), just north of here, closer to the river bottoms.

In 1938, after several sites proposed by the park board were met with opposition from both Black and White residents for differing reasons, the board took the suggestion of the Oak Cliff Negro Civic League, and purchased twenty-five acres on this site from an early farm settlement known as Crockett Farm. Immediately, however, the board was compelled to sell three acres to a local businessman who protested a "Negro Park" existing so close to Skyline Heights--his development that was slated to be a White subdivision.

At its founding, advocacy for park improvements continued from important political organizations such as the Progressive Voters League, eventually garnering the park's most treasured amenity--a lit baseball diamond--and soon thereafter, a modest six-hole sand green course that was a first for Black residents' use. The early years saw Eighth Street Park teeming with ballgames that drew spectators from all over; the most popular being the Dallas Negro Amateur Baseball League matches. Activities such as Sunday band concerts, the annual Negro Miss Dallas competition, moving picture shows, and citywide sports competitions between other neighborhood "Negro parks," kept this green very active well into the midcentury. The residents who traveled across the city early Saturday mornings for a game of tennis doubles as well as the youth who took home both glory and ribbons from track and field meets, remember Eighth Street Park fondly for what it was envisioned to be--a vibrant place of refuge.

At the request of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce in 1940, the park was renamed to honor Will Moore, a prominent Oak Cliff citizen and community leader who was actively involved in early Dallas political organizations such as the Colored Citizens Association and the NAACP's local branch. Among other accomplishments, Mr. Moore was an early leader in campaigns to eliminate local poll taxes, a struggle that spanned decades. The festive rededication ceremony was held on Juneteenth in honor of still-living formerly enslaved community elders in attendance.

Text presented by Boone, Rainwater, Uptown representatives at Dallas Park Board Planning and Design Sub-committee, **January 21st, 2016 meeting**, Park Department, Dallas City Hall

Moore Park

(Founded as Eighth Street Negro Park in 1938)

Originally named Eighth Street Negro Park, Moore is one of seven parks designated for the use of African-American citizens of Dallas during the time when the city's parks were racially segregated. It was purchased by the City of Dallas in 1938 from land formerly belonging to the families of two Dallas mayors – John M. Crockett and William L. Cabell.

In 1940 the name was changed to Moore Park at the request of the Negro Chamber of Commerce in memory of Will Moore, an outstanding African American pioneer citizen of Oak Cliff. The park hosted large events for the city's black residents for many years and was among the few places in Dallas where blacks could gather, play, host picnics and compete in sports. While it lacked the amenities of better funded parks, Moore became a vibrant site that black residents claimed as their own during segregation. Even before flood protection was completed in 1957 the park was used extensively.

Football, baseball, and softball teams practiced and played at the park. Other activities included picnics, band concerts, movies, domino tournaments and summer scouting campouts. Playground equipment, drinking fountains, lights and bathrooms were added in the early 1940s, as well as a modest golf course that was expanded from six to nine holes. In 1953 the city built a humble recreation building and a multiple-use area for various games. In 2013 a pavilion and amphitheater were dedicated as part of the Moore Park Gateway, a link connecting the park to the Santa Fe Trestle hike and bike trail.

~~The park was used extensively, even during its years within the unprotected floodplain before the levee system completion in 1957~~

PHILLIS WHEATLEY PARK

Norma Adams-Wade 2014 text:

PHILLIS WHEATLEY PARK

(Founded as South Dallas Negro Park in 1916)

Phillis Wheatley Park came about as an amenity in Wheatley Place housing addition in South Dallas in 1916 near Oakland Cemetery. The addition served well-to-do African-American families who were excluded from other areas because of segregation.

Dallas lawyer and banker Alex Camp, whose parents owned 33 acres of land in the area, planned the addition and park. He encouraged African-American contractors to build the wood frame, craftsman-style bungalows featuring wide porches. Construction continued from 1916 through the 1930s.

Phillis Wheatley Elementary School, a popular neighborhood centerpiece, was built in 1922. The park offered basketball and tennis courts, a jungle gym, and an asphalt multi-use court for games. It was a place that neighbors could call their own.

Wheatley Park, Wheatley Place housing addition, and Phillis Wheatley Elementary School blended together to give this neighborhood its distinction. Residents of this traditionally stable area largely have been descendants of original homeowners.

The addition, park, and school are named after an enslaved 18th Century poet in Boston known as the first African-American woman to have her writings published. The neighborhood's original boundaries were Lenway Street, Meadow Street, Metropolitan Avenue, and Havana Street.

Residents preserved the area's integrity, although the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the area on the list of "endangered historic places" in the mid-1990s. The community ultimately was designated a Dallas Landmark District and a National Historic District in 2000. The Dallas school district, however, permanently closed Phillis Wheatley Elementary School in May 2012 due to budget cuts.

Wheatley Park

(Founded as Booker T. Washington Park in 1920)

"...out in South Dallas, there is a beautiful plat of ground owned by the City, known as Wheatley Park, surrounded by a large number of honest, liberty-loving, quiet, progressive, struggling, [C]hristian citizens..."

--Wm. P. Vaughn, Secretary of The Wheatley Place Civic League, July 12, 1923

This small green space is nestled in a neighborhood of American Craftsman homes, businesses, and churches that comprise the Wheatley Place Historic District. An area of historical, cultural, and architectural significance, constructed between 1916 and 1939, Wheatley Place is Dallas' first "planned" community specifically created for African-American families whom, due to racial discriminatory housing practices, were prohibited from moving freely to other areas of the city. These early families created a vibrant, close-knit community in spite of larger societal oppression, and the pride for Wheatley Place was tangible, as evidenced by constant organized advocacy for neighborhood improvements. For example, the quote above is taken from a direct appeal written to the mayor and park board director by the Wheatley Place Civic League to request park lighting.

By 1919, Black South Dallas residents of both Wheatley Place and Queen City were persistently petitioning for a much needed primary school and place of leisure. Although, technically, the City of Dallas never made racial segregation a law in public parks, conventions of dominant culture were rigid enough to enforce and privilege "White only" use of public facilities. At the time, there were only two city parks that Black Dallasites, through assertive advocacy, were able to garner for their children to safely play in: Oak Cliff Negro Park (now Eloise Lundy), located southwest of here in "The Bottoms" and Hall Street Negro Park (now A.R. Griggs), located far north in the neighborhood more recently renamed Uptown.

The Dallas Park Board originally purchased a large tract of land two blocks away from here, but after a number of White residents protested, the board revoked the purchase stating that it would "cause serious friction between [W]hite and [C]olored races to the endangerment of the peace of the community." The current site, here, next to the Oakland Cemetery, was chosen and despite renewed protests, this time, from Black residents, the park board made the purchase and collaborated with the board of education to develop the land into a school and smaller "play park" than originally envisioned.

Although this park was officially dedicated as Booker T. Washington Park in July of 1920, residents referred to it as *Wheatley*, the name that continues to this day. In its early years, free moving picture shows, band concerts, and summer church revival services activated the green. The much-coveted tennis court and wading pool were amenities that were added through continued community organizing and petitioning.

The whitewashed bungalows with splashes of color in Wheatley Place, its historic school building (established in 1929), and this neighborhood park embody the same demure but distinct poetry found in works authored by the district's namesake, Phillis Wheatley. Ms. Wheatley was an 18th century poet in Boston who, despite her status as an enslaved African woman, was world-renown for her writing. She is heralded to be the first Black woman to publish a book in the United States.

Text presented by Boone, Rainwater, Uptown representatives at Dallas Park Board Planning and Design Sub-committee, **January 21st, 2016 meeting**, Park Department, Dallas City Hall

Phillis Wheatley Park

(Founded as South Dallas Negro Park in 1920)

Originally named South Dallas Negro Park, Phillis Wheatley is one of seven parks designated for the use of African-American citizens of Dallas during the time when the city's parks were racially segregated. It was purchased by the City of Dallas in 1920 and was briefly owned jointly with the Dallas Board of Education, when it was known as "Booker T. Washington Park." Both the park and its neighborhood are named for Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784), an enslaved West African who was later freed and became America's first black female poet.

Wheatley Park was an amenity in the Wheatley Place housing addition, a planned African American residential community of American Craftsman bungalows established in 1916. The park served the families of the area, including local religious and business leaders, who were excluded from other areas because of segregation. It was among the few places in Dallas where blacks could gather, play, host picnics, and compete in sports.

In the 1920s, the Wheatley Place Civic League advocated to the Mayor and the Park Board to bring lighting and safety features to the park. Tennis courts and a children's pool were later added.

The Wheatley community, including the park, was designated a National Historic District in 1995 and a City of Dallas Historic District in 2000.

JUANITA CRAFT PARK AND RECREATION CENTER

Norma Adams-Wade 2014 text:

JUANITA CRAFT PARK AND RECREATION CENTER

(Founded as Wahoo Park in 1924)

When African-Americans in South Dallas/Fair Park talk about the old Wahoo Lake and its surrounding park, the listener can sense the nostalgia and fondness of the memories that still dance in their heads.

The New City Cotton Mill, opened in 1902, and the short-lived Mill City affordable housing development, opened in 1908, were also area landmarks developed by urban industrialist Joseph Edwin "Joe E" Wiley Sr.

Wahoo Park, at Spring Avenue and Foreman Street, was designated for African-Americans in 1935. The park and lake (now dry) were extremely popular gathering places for African-Americans prior to the mid-1950s. The site was a place of their own away from their daily troubles. The lake, once known as Buzzard Springs, teemed with fish, and community people gathered for fishing and Juneteenth picnics featuring rented carnival rides. Couples came a-courting on Sunday evening and meandered around the lake.

Wahoo Park featured a stone recreation center where youth in the area played games, held dances, and presented plays often tied to nearby Julia C. Frazier Elementary School. Later a more modern recreation center was built. It was renamed the Juanita Jewel Craft Recreation Center in 1974 honoring a beloved Dallas civil rights leader who was elected to the Dallas City Council in 1975 at age 73 and served two terms. She died in 1985 at age 83. A federal post office on Grand Avenue in South Dallas/Fair Park also bears her name.

Juanita Craft Park and Recreation Center

(Founded as Wah Hoo Lake Park in 1924)

Those who remember this park in earlier times, exclaim “Wah Hoo Lake!” with tangible nostalgia. Historically, Wah Hoo Lake Park was a vibrant retreat where Black communities experienced the serenity of a lake and its surroundings in the heart of South Dallas at the nexus of Mill City, Magnolia Park, Hunnicut, Covens Camps, and Skeltons neighborhoods.

At the turn of the 20th century, before becoming a public park, this land, once known as Buzzard Springs, was originally developed into the privately owned Wah Hoo Club resort. The City of Dallas purchased the property from the racially segregated White recreation club in 1924, rendering the exclusive space a public city park. Soon after, more Dallas residents began to patronize Wah Hoo—including the growing Black community of Mill City.

Although the City of Dallas never officially made racial segregation a law in parks, conventions of dominant culture were rigid enough to enforce and privilege “White only” use of public facilities; and so, it appears that an invisible line in the middle of the lake demarcated racial recreational boundaries: Blacks utilized the east side of the lake adjacent to their homes and Whites accessed the lake from the west side. By the late 1920s, there were only three City parks that, through advocacy, Black residents were able to garner and have designated specifically for their safe use: Oak Cliff Negro Park (now Eloise Lundy), located south of here, near the river bottoms, Hall Street Negro Park (now A.R. Griggs) in what is now called Uptown, and the nearby Wheatley Park.

Access to Wah Hoo Park promised an amenity that these other three parks could not boast: a beautiful 12-acre lake with a variety of game fish to catch. As White residents objected to the pseudo integration of public space that was occurring, The Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce organized a petition in 1928, signed by 600 “citizens and taxpayers,” urging the City to designate the green-space a Negro park in the manner of earlier parks. Because of plans to create a new nearby park for area White residents and funding released to improve White Rock Lake, the park board moved to designate Wah Hoo a Negro park in 1931. The question of who had “right” to use the park continued to surface for a few years, however, with some, both Black and White advocating to “leave the park as is” with racially segregated use of the lake banks. Others--the majority of Black residents, and some of their White allies--continued to assert the need for the park to be not only reserved, but designated for Black communities. By 1938, the potential for racial conflict pressed the board to proclaim a second time that Wah Hoo was, in fact, a Negro park. Integration would not come for another 35 years.

Emancipation Day celebrations, band concerts, theatrical performances, and city-wide sports competitions energized the green. Couples courted on Sunday evenings, meandering around the lake. Notably, in 1934, Wahoo hosted the first Boy Scouts of America training school ever held in the Southwest for Black camp leaders. Civic groups such as The Christian Workers Mission, who regularly sponsored dinners for elders who were formerly enslaved, as well as fraternal organizations like the Colored Knights of Pythias and Courts of Calenthia activated the 1938, WPA-era, fieldstone community center.

After Wah Hoo Lake was filled in, the City rededicated the park in 1974 to honor Juanita Craft, a beloved Dallas civil rights leader best known for her work to help integrate the public school system, who, at the age of 73, served two terms on the Dallas City Council.

Text presented by Boone, Rainwater, Uptown representatives at Dallas Park Board Planning and Design Sub-committee, **January 21st, 2016 meeting**, Park Department, Dallas City Hall

Juanita Craft Park and Recreation Center
(Founded as Wahoo Park in 1924)

Originally named Wahoo Park, Juanita Craft is one of seven parks designated for the use of African-American citizens of Dallas during the time when the city's parks were racially segregated. It was purchased by the City of Dallas in 1924 from a private, whites-only club and was designated for black residents in 1935. The park and its 12-acre lake (now dry) fed by Buzzard Springs was a popular site for fishing, Juneteenth picnics, carnival rides and strolls. Like other segregated parks, it was among the few places in Dallas where blacks could gather, play, host picnics and compete in sports.

A wading pool and comfort station were built in the early 1930s, and a stone community building was built by the Works Progress Administration in 1936-38 where youth in the area played games, held dances, and presented plays often tied to nearby Julia C. Frazier Elementary School. The park's acreage was expanded in the mid-1960s and a new pool was dedicated in 1978. A new recreation center was opened in 1966, and the community building was renovated and re-opened in 1990 as the Senior Citizen Building. The renovated recreation center features wellness programs, a fitness center, large and small meeting rooms, and a full gymnasium.

The park and recreation center were renamed for Juanita Jewel Craft in 1974, honoring the beloved Dallas civil rights leader who spent over 50 years fighting for social justice in Texas and served on the Dallas City Council 1975-1979.

WILLIAM "BILL" BLAIR JR. PARK

Norma Adams-Wade 2014 text:

WILLIAM "BILL" BLAIR JR. PARK

(Founded as Rochester Park in 1945)

When visiting the Rochester Park community, also called "BonTon" and Lincoln Manor, many people see only an isolated, impoverished neighborhood at a dead-end road, surrounded by woods, a river, railroad tracks and a freeway. The neighborhood park was also named Rochester Park.

A 1945 bond program approved \$2.5 million for the Park Department to buy park land for African-Americans. The department purchased Rochester Park land in 1954. By 1974, the park had grown from less than eight acres to almost one thousand acres making it one of the city's largest parks. The park has a fishing pond, picnic areas, rolling meadows, groves of trees and natural surface hiking trails. The park has been a place of their own for neighbors; and environmentalists laud it for its proximity to the Trinity River woodlands and trails.

The community has a history of struggle and property decay after decades of flooding from the confluence of the nearby Trinity River and White Rock Creek. Residents were heartened when the city completed a protective \$13.5 million levee in November 1992 for the community that was platted in 1944.

In 2011 the park was renamed William "Bill" Blair Jr. Park. Blair, a former pitcher with the Indianapolis Clowns and a local newspaper publisher founded the popular annual Elite News Martin Luther King Jr. Parade, the Elite News Religious Hall of Fame, and was a strong supporter of the Negro Leagues Baseball museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

William “Bill” Blair, Jr. Park

(Founded as Rochester Park in 1945)

Boasting over 900 acres of rolling meadows, fishing ponds, hiking trails, hardwood groves, and the treasured, “Blue Lake,” William Blair Park is one of Dallas’ largest and most ecologically remarkable public parks. This green space is a central part of a South Dallas community that includes the historic H.S. Thompson School and century-old churches and housing developments such as Mosely Chapel CME and Lincoln Manor, Elite and Ideal subdivisions.

This area, sometimes referred to as “Bon Ton,” a popular French expression connoting *high society* or *fashionable tastes*, developed as the Black population sought relief from the overcrowded, racially segregated, housing crisis existing closer to the city’s center. Despite existing on a flood plain, notices in the historic newspaper, The Dallas Express, advertised plots of land in Lincoln Manor, “a strictly high class, *bon ton* residence addition,” to Black Dallasites and newcomers who dreamed of being able to afford modern homes of their own. The moniker stuck, although it shifted meaning throughout the years, and over time, “Bon Ton” transformed from farmland into affordable single family domiciles.

Long before the City purchased this land to create an official public park, this part of the Great Trinity Forest was a place of leisure forged by the surrounding community. Children constructed swings out of grapevines, seesaws from repurposed materials, and hewed out space for a baseball diamond. On Sundays, after-church picnics, family sports competitions, and swimming and fishing at the lake kept the green-space active.

Early area residents resiliently survived decades of entrenched poverty, municipal neglect, and property decay, all of which were worsened by the habitual Trinity River floods. Citizen groups like the Lincoln Manor Improvement League and the Civic Committee of the Interdenominational Ministers Alliance of South Dallas constantly asserted their rights as taxpaying citizens to have amenities for their neighborhood, including a municipal park.

The City of Dallas never officially made racial segregation a law in public parks, however, conventions of dominant culture were rigid enough to enforce and privilege “White only” use of public facilities. For decades, beginning with the establishment of the first “Negro Parks” in 1915, Black Dallasites persistently advocated for and *garnered* designated public parks where their children could safely play. After many years of petitioning from *Bon Ton* residents, the park board, in 1945, purchased seven acres from the developer of Rochester Addition and established Rochester Park. Over time, the board added more acreage to the green and consistent community organizing ensured continued development of public amenities for the neighborhood including the desperately needed levee in 1992. In 2011, the City rededicated Rochester Park to honor the beloved community leader, William “Bill” Blair, Jr., a *no-hitter* Negro Baseball League pitcher, founder of the Elite News weekly newspaper, and creator of the city’s largest MLK parade.

William "Bill" Blair, Jr. Park
(Founded as Rochester Park in 1945)

Originally named Rochester Park, William "Bill" Blair, Jr. Park is one of seven designated for the use of African-American citizens of Dallas during the time when the city's parks were racially segregated. Before it grew to be one of the city's largest parks with 983 acres of picnic areas, rolling meadows, groves of trees, natural surface hiking trails and a fishing pond, it was established in 1945 on seven acres adjacent to the Bonton neighborhood. Further additions of land were made in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Through the decades community leaders advocated for the park, which was among the few places in Dallas where blacks could gather, play, picnic, or compete in sports.

Starting in the 1950s it included a lighted regulation baseball diamond, playground equipment, a lighted picnic area, and toilet facilities. While its amenities were not fully equal to its white counterparts, the park was a treasure of the community as a site for church picnics, family sporting events, and water activities such as swimming and fishing. Later improvements include athletic fields and courts, modern playground, fishing piers, an events pavilion, and public art. The park is valued by environmentalists and nature lovers for its Texas Buckeye Trail and proximity to the Trinity River woodlands and trails.

The park and the local community suffered from lack of flood protection and decades of neglect but turned around after the city completed a \$13.5 million protective levee in 1992. In 2011 the park was renamed for civic leader William "Bill" Blair, Jr. (1922 – 2014), a former pitcher with the historic Negro league baseball team the Indianapolis Clowns and publisher of the local newspaper *The Elite News*.