

Chapter 14: Curtiss-Wright to Wiley Post to Burke Northridge Manor

Aviation in Oklahoma began in Oklahoma City on March 10, 1910 in a wheat field in the 300 block of SW 26 Street. On that windy, spring day, Charles F. Willard became the first man to fly an airplane in Oklahoma. As the story goes, Willard's 35 horsepower Curtiss pusher didn't stand a snowball's chance in Hell of overcoming the 35 mph Oklahoma wind.

If not for the encouragement Willard received from an uncompromising, tough-talking cowboy, perhaps someone else would have been first to fly in the Oklahoma skies. It seems, however, that the rough and tumble cowboy was damned sure that he was going to see a show that day. The impatient cowboy, without being coy, made certain that Willard noticed the revolver he was packing. For added encouragement, the boisterous cowpoke made no bones about the fact that his pistol would shoot 500 yards, presumably into an earthbound aviator. Willard escaped the incident without any bullet holes, but his brief flight ended in a non-fatal crash that left the Curtiss pusher seriously damaged beyond flight.

Willard's airplane was a Curtiss pusher, a biplane made by a company founded by aviation pioneer Glenn H. Curtiss. Curtiss, a competitor and rival to Orville and Wilbur Wright, joined forces with the two most famous aviation pioneers in 1929. The merger of the two companies resulted in the creation of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation, a company which dominated early aviation in the United States and which is still in existence to this day.

In 1928, the Curtiss-Wright Corporation invested \$100,000 to construct a small airfield on the outskirts of Oklahoma City at Britton and May. According to Bob Kemper, an Aerospace America organizer/participant, the 160-acre airport was heralded as "Oklahoma City's model airport". Constructed to promote and support the development of general aviation in Oklahoma and to provide an outlet for the sale and maintenance of Curtiss-Wright productions, the new facility sported an attractive art-deco hanger as well as a bevy of Curtiss-Wright airplanes. Although constructed to serve Oklahoma City, Curtiss-Wright Field, was actually built on land that many decades later (1954) would become part of the Town of The Village.

One might say that Curtiss-Wright Field was a secondary, out-of-the-way airfield, and perhaps because of this, it would become the home base for Wiley Post, one of Oklahoma's celebrated aviation pioneers, who used the hanger at Curtiss-Wright Field between 1929 and 1934. The one-eyed Post, being fearful that he could not pass the physical examination required of commercial pilots, was known to land in small towns and out of the way airports to avoid inspectors from the U.S. Department of Commerce Aeronautics Branch. Luckily for Post, he would eventually find a loophole in the law and obtain his license by means of a special waiver that was granted to experienced aviators such as himself.

On an eerie Oklahoma evening, residents now living in the area west of May today might happen to look up and see the ghostly image of Post roaring overhead pulling his Winnie Mae into a steep climb and putting the bird through her paces high in the sky above. Some of these residents might unknowingly find themselves mowing a lawn that was once a touchdown point for Post's plane. Or, perhaps while digging in a flowerbed, might unearth a relic of an era gone by, such as a strut from a biplane. In fact, Betty Quinlin, who lived with her husband Wayne, on Goshen Drive near where the old airfield was located, recalled how hard it was to make things grow. "None of the trees we planted would grow and while digging in the yard we learned why. My husband Wayne dug a part of a biplane's wing out of the ground."

It was at Curtiss-Wright Field that Wiley Post hangered and maintained his beloved Winnie Mae, the famous record-setting, globe-circling Lockheed Vega. The Winnie Mae was housed in the southwest corner of the main hanger building at the Curtiss-Wright Field during the early to mid 1930's. The famous plane now makes her home in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C.

Although Post flew the Winnie Mae, the plane was actually owned by a rich Chickasha oilman by the name of F.C. Hall. Contrary to popular belief, the plane was not named after Post's wife who, coincidentally, was also named Mae. Instead, it was named after Hall's daughter who frequently accompanied her Father on trips across mid-America. Hall, who had hired Post in the late '20's as his personal pilot, generously allowed Post to fly his plane thus making it possible for Post to engage in his renowned aviation exploits.

Post was a familiar figure at Curtiss-Wright Field as he prepared the Winnie Mae for the famed high altitude flights that ultimately led to his discovery of the jet stream. Post's high altitude flights were made possible by the use of a pressure suit, reminiscent of old-fashioned deep-sea diving gear, which Post also developed and pioneered while based at Curtiss-Wright Field.

During one harrowing flight in April of 1933, the famed Winnie Mae crashed into a peach orchard at the end of a runway south of Chickasha. But, it was not Post at the controls that day. The plane was being piloted by a veteran flier named "Red" Gray who Post had asked to test a new autopilot that Post had just installed in the plane.

Before taking off, Gray noticed that the fuel gauge indicated that there was little more than fumes left in the fuel tank. Post, who had just recently refueled the plane, persuaded Gray to ignore the indicator. Unbeknownst to Post at the time was the fact that, while parked on the tarmac, teenagers had slipped into the airport under the cover of darkness and siphoned all the gas from the plane's fuel tank. The unsuspecting Gray throttled the engine and sped down the sod runway. As the plane gained altitude, the fuel-starved engine sputtered and then suddenly quit. Down the plane went.

Fortunately, Gray had a lot of piloting experience and had logged many hours flying Vegas for Braniff Airways. That experience apparently saved the Winnie Mae that day. Although, not destroyed, Winnie Mae had been badly damaged in the crash. Post suffered a cut finger while passenger Harry G. Fredrickson broke two ribs.

The injured Post took the wounded bird to the Braniff Airways repair shop located at Curtiss-Wright Field. Braniff, an Oklahoma-Based company that began commercial passenger flights between Oklahoma City and Tulsa in 1928, made the airport home from 1932 to 1937. The small air service would later become the ill-fated and now defunct Braniff International.

Since Gray was employed by Braniff at the time of the crash, the operations manager of the company, Tom Braniff, wanted to do whatever he could do to repair the Winnie Mae. Post was unable to come up with the total amount needed to repair the plane and Braniff generously donated the time of five Braniff employees to complete the project. Braniff's help allowed Wiley to resume his preparations for his historic and record-breaking solo flight around the globe. Later that year, Post flew the Winnie Mae using his newly developed autopilot to circumnavigate the globe in seven days, 19 hours, bettering his previous record by almost a day.

Fellow Oklahoman and humorist, Will Rogers, who had become friends with Post, had become increasingly interested in Post's flights. As one of Oklahoma's most favorite sons, Rogers was known to fly off the sod runways of old Curtiss-Wright Field with Post.

Everett Stong, who in 1935 worked at Curtiss-Wright Field, remembers Post leaving from Curtiss-Wright Field to pick up Rogers in California on the first leg of their ill-fated trip to Alaska. Post and Rogers were tragically killed on August 15, 1935 when their plane piloted by Post crashed off Point Barrow.

In 1932, one of the most colorful characters in the history of The Village moved to Oklahoma to run Curtiss-Wright Field. John Q. Burke, an Ohio native, was trained as a mechanic during the early days of aviation. Burke began his career in aviation when he landed a job with the Travelair Company, the forerunner to Beechcraft. The Curtiss-Wright Corporation purchased the Travelair Company and Burke was then transferred from Wichita to Oklahoma City.

A couple of years after Burke arrived on the scene, a man by the name of Mark Kleeden started an aircraft manufacturing concern at Curtiss-Wright Field. Kleeden had acquired the design plans and a couple of partially constructed planes from Straughan Aircraft, a company based in Wichita.

Kleeden, a German-born oilman and promoter, seeing the benefit of having a world-famous pilot employed by the fledgling company, quickly hired Wiley Post as the president of the company. As part of the deal, Kleeden agreed to name all the planes built by the company in honor of Post. Post's primary responsibility as president was to fly each of the new planes from Curtiss-Wright Airport to the Oklahoma City Municipal Airport and back. The task of managing the company, however, was left up to John Burke.

Everett Stong, then a young aeronautical engineer, remembers working for Burke at Curtiss-Wright Field as an aircraft designer and helping to build the Wiley Post biplane. According to Stong, Burke was a "hell of nice guy but pretty darn wild." "He sure liked to go fast and was known to drink a bit," said Stong, adding with a grin, "but he was easy to work for." Stong would later become a partner in Phillips & Stong Engineering Company, the company that would do much of the design and development work for the developers who built The Village. Later, Stong would also serve as city engineer.

The Wiley Post biplane was an open-cockpit biplane powered by a 40 horsepower, Ford Model A engine. The plane originally sold for \$990. Not equipped with wheel brakes or a tail wheel, the two-seat trainer cruised at a speed of 68 mph and sported an "L" shaped cockpit so that the pilot and passenger could almost sit side by side. Thirteen Wiley Post Biplanes, as they were called, were built at Curtiss-Wright Field before the company went bankrupt in 1935. The company was just starting to get off the ground when Post and Rogers were killed in Alaska. With only 13 biplanes produced and the height of the depression impending, times were difficult for the upstart company and production of the aircraft came to an abrupt halt.

In 1936, Curtiss-Wright Field was renamed Wiley Post Airpark in Post's memory. Burke bought the airport from Curtiss-Wright Corporation in 1940 and continued to operate the facility until 1955 when it was closed down to make way for commercial and residential development.

The Wiley Post biplane was a rare bird indeed and, fortunately, one has come home to roost at the Kirkpatrick Air and Space Science Museum in Oklahoma City. The story of how the plane ended up there is also quite fascinating.

The story begins in 1938 when Hiram Paul clothing store sponsored a contest for student pilots. The winner of the contest was to win the thirteenth and last Wiley Post biplane built. A seventeen-year-old student pilot named Johnny Bouteller won the contest and flew the historic plane during his remaining high school years.

According to Bouteller, he clinched the contest by landing his plane on the white line target. "There were 45 of us signed up in the contest, which was part written exam and part flying," Bouteller recalls.

Being an owner of the plane made Bouteller somewhat of a high school celebrity. "it was a joy to fly," he recalls. "I kept it in my backyard and my mother would help me tow it over to Western Avenue where I would take off."

Although the plane's official service ceiling was 12,500 feet, no pilot in his or her right mind would attempt to fly the underpowered plane over a 10,000-foot mountain pass. "I think the highest I ever flew the plane was 4,500 feet," Bouteller said.

After graduation, and despite his love for the plane, Bouteller and the biplane parted ways so he could pursue his education. "I needed the money for a college education," Bouteller said. "I wanted a college education so I could qualify as an Army Air Corps aviation cadet," added Bouteller.

Upon returning from pilot duty in the Second World War, Bouteller began an unsuccessful search for his old Wiley Post biplane. Much to his disappointment, Bouteller discovered that his beloved plane had been destroyed in a crash not long after he had sold it to a new owner in Altus.

Not giving up, Bouteller eventually stumbled upon the twelfth Wiley Post biplane stored in a hanger at Wiley Post Airport. Bouteller bought the dismembered plane, reassembled it and flew it for fun.

Bouteller later sold the plane to a Bloomington, Illinois farmer named M.L. McClure. "But we agreed that if he ever sold it, I'd get first chance to buy it back for a museum in Oklahoma," Bouteller said.

When the Air Space Museum at the Omniplex opened in 1980, Bouteller asked McClure to sell him the plane so he could fulfill his dream of giving it to the new museum. Instead, McClure made a visit to the museum and was so impressed with what he saw that he declined Bouteller's offer and generously donated the plane to the museum himself.

During World War II Oklahoma would play an important role in the training of pilots who would be called upon to fly missions and sorties all over the world. Under the leadership of Clarence Page, another Oklahoma aviation pioneer, a company known as the Oklahoma Air College was formed. The company would land a lucrative Army contract to train pilots in Oklahoma. Partners in the company included Page, John Burke, Ted Colbert Chief Pilot for Continental Oil Company, and Jerry Sass, an enthusiastic investor. The flying field was established at what is now known as Clarence Page Airport near Yukon.

In order to meet one of the Army requirements for obtaining the training contract, a ground school also had to be provided. Page was able to obtain the needed chairs, blackboards and other training supplies for the creation of the ground school at Wiley Post Airport, which came under John Burke's direction. The facility also had to have an adequate supply of pilots and mechanics. In order to meet this challenge, Byron Post, Wiley Post's brother, agreed to take charge of the maintenance department. Ted Colbert agreed to serve as the chief pilot by assuming responsibility for obtaining the services of other pilots who would be needed.

Late one night during the war, Burke and his wife, Thelma, remember going out, car headlights beaming, to place smudge pots out in an attempt to illuminate the dirt runway for a late returning youngster who was apparently learning to fly the hard way. "He just didn't get back in time and that's all we could do," recalled Mrs. Burke. We assume that he returned, perhaps a bit shaken, but safely.

While flight schools were on going, Burke's daughter, Betty Jon, remembers frequent calls by Mrs. John A. Brown to complain about the airplanes flying over her home in Nichols Hills. It seems Mrs. Brown, wife of the prominent department store owner, was convinced that the young pilots were flying over just to get a glimpse of one her daughters who frequently sunbathed at their pool.

Old timers recall that during the years when the airport was being used for military flight training, the airplanes stored there were stood on their propellers in order to squeeze all the planes into the three hangers that existed at the time. It must have been a curious sight with their tail sections poking skyward toward the heavens as if they had unceremoniously landed on their noses.

Burke also remembered the days when Blanche Noyes flew in and out of the airfield at Britton and May. Noyes was an early female flier who became the first woman to reach one of the top slots in what was then the Civil Aeronautical Administration, the predecessor of the FAA. "She was in charge of the markings on top of hangers that let the pilots know what city they were flying over," recalled Mrs. Burke.

The Burkes also recalled fond memories of visits made by John Marshall High School students to the field for a free flying experience. According to Burke, "nearly every student took them up on the offer." According to Burke, several planes and pilots had been recruited to help make the event possible.

According to Betty Jon, Burke's daughter, her dad's Mother died when he was still a very young man. "Grandma raised all of her children as church-going Christians and would have liked dad to carry on in that tradition," said Betty Jon. "But daddy was not what you would call a real church-going guy," recalled Betty

Jon with a chuckle. "In an attempt to fulfill her wishes, Dad let upstart church congregations meet in the airport hanger," recalls Betty Jon.

Over the years, several congregations started there at old Wiley Post Airport. The Village Methodist Church, the first church formed in The Village, met in the old hanger building from March 1951 until July 1952 when the church moved to their partially-constructed new home at 9401 Village Drive. When the airport closed, the old hangar building that had once upon a time housed the Winnie Mae was enclosed by a new exterior structure which was first used as a shopping center and later converted into the Christian Center, a church and outreach center, which also got its start with Burke's help. Although not popular with local firefighters, the "building within a building" most certainly saved the historic hanger from destruction.

When the Christian Center closed its doors in the early '90's, Jackie Cooper purchased the property to expand his auto dealership. Fearing that the hanger had become a fire hazard, Cooper planned to demolish the building to make way for a modern showroom. When word got out of the imminent demise of the historic building, a group of Oklahoma City pilots prevailed on Cooper to have the hanger dismantled and stored until a suitable organization could be found to reassemble the hanger at another airport. Cooper obliged and worked with the group, at considerable personal expense, to preserve the facility. After being successfully dismantled, the hanger was stored at Oklahoma City University where it remains today. With the support of the aviation community and other corporate sponsors, plans are now being made to reconstruct the hanger on the southwest corner of the present day Wiley Post Airport.

Thanks to the efforts of the local aviation industry, the hanger is slated to serve as a proactive public facility for the promotion of general aviation in Oklahoma. According to Bob Kemper, Chairman of the Hanger Reconstruction Committee, the reconstructed hanger will house offices for Aero Space America and will provide facilities for "type" organizations to hold conventions and other educational activities and events. According to Kemper, the dedication of the hanger will be the centerpiece of Oklahoma's celebration of the 100th anniversary of manned "heavier than air" flight.

In 1952 a drive-in theatre was built on the northeast corner of Britton and May just across the street from Wiley Post Airport. The screen, which jutted skyward just enough to be of some concern to aircraft in the airport landing pattern, was located on the northeast corner of the property where the Collonade is now located. Because of concern about the height of the outdoor movie screen and the potential for interference from earthbound lights, John Burke had to give his blessings before the theatre could be built.

According to Burke's daughter, Betty Jon, "Daddy eventually gave his permission to build it, but not before getting a whole bunch of free movie passes for us kids." Long time resident, Billie Jean B'racht remembers going to the

theatre with her young children in the '50s. "They had three movies a night," recalled B'racht.

For many years, the drive-in sponsored firework displays that became a bit hit on Independence Days. The theatre remained a popular attraction in the city up until the 1970's when the theatre was closed to make way for new commercial development. In May 1972, the Twilight Gardens property was rezoned for commercial shopping. Today, Texaco, the Commerce Galleria and the Collonade occupy the former theatre location.

As early as May of 1953 residents of The Village had already begun to complain about air traffic patterns at Wiley Post Airport, especially the planes taking off in a southeasterly direction over the areas of the community that existed at that time. The town trustees, concerned about the issue but lacking jurisdiction, referred the matter to the CAA for advisement.

Then In October of '54, the town moved to bring the airport and its surrounding property into the corporate limits of the growing town. As residential development began to edge closer and closer to Wiley Post Airport, the complaints became more severe and more frequent. According to Betty Jon Burke, "Daddy never really wanted to close the airport, but he felt compelled to due to the encroachment of more and more residential development." Finally, in 1955, Burke shut the airport down and the operation moved to a new location at 50th and Rockwell where it remains in existence to this day.

As the airport faded into history, Burke turned his attention toward developing the airport land and the surrounding acreage that he owned west of May. Originally owned by homesteader Ulysses Kennedy, the 160 acres of land was developed by Burke in several phases between 1955 and 1959.

Burke too had set his sights on building a home in the area to the west of the old airport site. But Oklahoma City had other plans for the property, and much to Burke's chagrin, moved to condemn his land to make way for the construction of the Lake Hefner road. Burke did not give up without a fight.

"Daddy was furious over it," recalled Betty Jon. "In fact, he was so furious, daddy drove a car in front of the bulldozers to block their way." But, it was MY car he was driving," added Betty Jon as if not the least bit amused by her Father's desperate actions.

One of the major hurdles facing Burke as he embarked on the development of Burke's Northridge Manor was providing water for the new homes. Initially, Burke set out to provide his own water system to serve the development. In so doing, Burke entered a partnership with a company by the name of Fredrickson & Parks to build a water tower and to drill a well at Lakeside and May. *(Editor's Note: It is not known whether Fredrickson was the same*

businessman who previously had close ties to Wiley Post, but given the known associations, it is highly likely.)

The issue was controversial and was opposed by nearby residents who turned out in force to protest the issuance of a special permit to build the tower. The citizens argued that Oklahoma City had a water line nearby that could easily serve the addition and the protesters implored the Board of Trustees to pursue that option first. The trustees, being in no mood to delay progress, responded that Oklahoma City had generally been opposed to extending their water lines to communities outside their jurisdiction and that the tower would be necessary if additional development were to take place.

Despite vehement objections by concerned citizens, the Board of Trustees moved to approve the issuance of a special permit to build the tower in August of '55. The tower was built and the well was sunk. The well, according to Ed Coon who served as town engineer at the time, "was a good one, producing something like 200 gallons per minute." Somewhere in the interim, however, Burke managed to get Oklahoma City to provide water to his development and not a drop of water was ever pumped from the new facilities.

According to Coon, Burke never paid Fredrickson & Parks a penny for the tower or well, and for more than two decades the abandoned tower served little purpose other than to provide a place for the pigeons to roost. The concrete monolith could be seen clearly for miles starkly protruding above the surrounding area and perhaps serving as a guide for those who might have lost their way on the vast prairies of suburban Oklahoma City.

The tower did have its detractors and was criticized by some as being somewhat suggestive of a phallic symbol. Perhaps because of that unfortunate resemblance, an adventuresome single guy seriously investigated the possibility of converting the tower into a one-of-a-kind bachelor pad. The plan called for an elevator to be installed. Not surprisingly, the deal fell through. Eventually, the property was purchased by local businessman Bill Shdeed, who bought the property on the stipulation that the unsightly tower be demolished.

Somewhat of a furor was created when nearby residents learned of the plan to demolish the structure. It seems that pigeons roosting on the tower had shamelessly used their perch to deposit plentiful amounts of pigeon guano. Concerns were raised that the pigeon droppings might carry histoplasmosis, a fungus that could cause paralysis and even death in humans. The citizens were calmly assured that the likelihood of anyone ingesting infected particles of pigeon poop was remote at best.

Despite the public outcry, the tower finally met its doom in 1977 when it succumbed to a thrashing delved out at the hands of a wrecking ball. As the jarring sound of metal crunched against the concrete, the pillar began to give way

and topple. Bit by bit, pieces of the tower crashed to the earth raising copious clouds of dust and debris. No ill effects were ever reported, except for the tower itself, of course.

As Burke proceeded to develop Northridge Manor, he was required, as all developers were required to do at that time, to set aside a small percentage of the land for us as a public park. In November of 1959, Burke appeared before the town trustees to offer the town 4.4 acres of land for a park. After considerable debate, however, the trustees rejected the offer with the hope of obtaining land more suitable to their liking. Burke returned to the next meeting and agreed to find another site with the stipulation that the deed for the original proposal be placed in escrow for a period of one year. The trustees agreed.

Two years past and the city still had no deed. Finally, John Burke asked the Council to meet to secure a final decision relative to the dedication of land for a public park. The Council obliged and scheduled a special meeting on the morning of February 25, 1961. Burke, however, didn't show. In his stead, Burke sent his attorney, Harry Johnson, -- not a good sign of things to follow.

As the meeting got under way, City Attorney Wayne Quinlan startled the Council with some unexpected news. Quinlan, advised the Council that Ray Green of American First Title and Trust Company, with whom the original deed and escrow agreement had been (or were supposed to have been) filed could not be located. Whether Mr. Green had been lost along with the deed was not clear but one thing was certain, --there was no deed. The possibility that there never had been deed at all might have crossed the minds of a few red-faced officials that day.

Mayor Clark Horton, perhaps feeling a bit duped at that point, asked Harry Johnson if his client intended to comply with the ordinances and voluntarily give the city a deed for a park. The answer was blunt and to the point, --Burke did not intend to voluntarily comply with the ordinance. What a surprising and inauspicious turn of events this was indeed! One can imagine the Council sitting there momentarily in stunned silence. Empty-handed and embarrassed, the City Council then promptly directed the city attorney to seek whatever remedies necessary to secure compliance with the ordinance.

It is not known what, if any, legal actions were subsequently taken to enforce the ordinance, but Ed Coon who served as city engineer at that time added a bit of insight to the question of why Burke was not forced to comply with the ordinance.

"About this time there were some court cases that considered the requirement to donate land as a 'taking' and therefore unconstitutional", said Coon, who quickly added, "That probably prevented the town from pursuing the matter further."

The failure to secure recreational land for the residents west of May Avenue ultimately led the Council to lease land from Oklahoma City for a park in 1964. The 11.5 acres of land was leased for a dollar a year and was located on Britton Road immediately to the west of the old two-lane Lake Hefner Road. In the early '90's, The Village Park, as it was unimaginatively named, was abandoned to make way for the construction of the Lake Hefner Parkway. The old park site is now paved with six lanes of concrete highway.

The loss of this leased land rekindled the debate regarding the need for a park for residents west of May Avenue. At the urging of Councilman Roy Carmack, the city reopened the issue of the lost deed by initiating dialog with Burke's daughter, Betty Jon Hood, who had inherited the land from her deceased parents. The city's strategy was to persuade Betty Jon to donate the 4.4 acres of land originally offered by her Father to the city for a new park. The decision was made to go to Santa Fe to make the case face to face with Betty Jon.

Making the trip to Santa Fe, were City Manager Bruce Stone, City Attorney Stephen Reel and Ward 2 Councilman, Roy Carmack. Carmack had long sought to establish a park west of May Avenue and wanted to represent the City Council on this matter.

Upon arriving in Santa Fe, Betty Jon agreed to join the delegation for lunch in the restaurant of the La Fonda Hotel. Unfortunately, the city could do very little other than to appeal to Betty Jon's generosity. As meager enticement, the city proposed to name the park in honor of Betty Jon's late Father. As the delegation made the city's case over lunch, it quickly became evident that Betty Jon was not impressed with the city's offer. Then, as if to pull the rug completely out from under the delegation's feet, Betty Jon dropped a few subtle hints that she had been less than enamored with her late Father, anyway.

What this was all about would be pure speculation. An educated guess would be that Burke's reputation as somewhat of a philanderer lay at the core of this apparent resentment. As discussions progressed, Betty Jon all but slammed the door by making it abundantly clear that the land was her only inheritance and that she was simply not in a financial position to donate the land to the city and would not be inclined to do so.

Despite the cordial discussions, the city returned from Santa Fe empty-handed. A year or so later, the city agreed to purchase the land from Betty Jon at a price of \$75,000 to be made in installments over a two-year period. Having failed in the mission to get the land donated, city leaders did not feel compelled to bestow any honors on Burke and decided to call the park Lakeshore Park. Given the history of this part of The Village, the park perhaps would have been more aptly named in honor of Wiley Post.

Developing a new park in an existing neighborhood would present some interesting challenges for city officials. As it would happen, the city's acquisition of the park would coincide with the construction of the Lake Hefner Parkway, which today is situated just to the west of the park. Across the street from the park lived an architect by the name of Tom Glover. Glover approached the city with a novel idea to obtain excavated dirt from the highway construction for use in landscaping the new park. Glover envisioned the creation of berms which would allow park users to get a panoramic view of Lake Hefner and which would, as added benefit, transform the landscape into something bold and unique. According to Glover, the berms would also provide a sound barrier from the noise that was sure to be generated by traffic on the highway after its completion.

The idea caught on and public hearings were held to provide public input on the park development plan. The hearings went without a hitch and the plans were set, --or so it seemed.

A few weeks later, truckloads of dirt began to arrive at the site. With each load of dirt, the berms inched higher and higher. Residents living adjacent to the park suddenly started to take notice as their treasured view of Lake Hefner began to slowly vanish before their eyes.

At the next council meeting, an assemblage of irate citizens appeared before the Council demanding that "their" view of the lake be restored. Some agitated residents disdainfully referred to the twenty-foot tall mound of dirt as the "berm-uda triangle". In a not-so-subtle reference to its main proponent, others disparagingly called the unsightly heap of earth "Mount St. Glover". However they referred to it, one thing was abundantly clear, --they did not want it.

The Council debated the issue and sought to find a reasonable solution. After considerable and lively discussion, a decision was made: The berms would be lowered to a height where City Engineer Lloyd Waggener could see Lake Hefner while standing at a point in the intersection of Kerry Lane and Lakeshore Drive.

These were not your everyday, run-of-the-mill engineering plans. Yet, as simple as these instructions seemed and however unusual they were, it became a formidable task to carry them out. Literally thousands of yards of dirt had to be moved. In what must have seemed to them as a dizzied frenzy, city workers diligently made pass upon endless pass with a box blade. Eventually, the goal was met. The city engineer could see the lake from his designated spot. The mission had been accomplished. The city had succeeded in making a molehill out of a mountain!

Lakeshore Park had earned the dubious distinction of being cursed with bad Karma. And in keeping with their prior proclivities, adjacent residents, some more curmudgeonly than others, made it a point to resist every effort to make

improvements to the park. Yet, as long as the improvements did not encumber anyone's coveted view of Lake Hefner, they would be grudgingly tolerated, --or so the sophistry went.

Several months after the berm fiasco, the city received a grant from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture to plant trees in the new park. When the time came to plant the trees, the public works director and city manager meticulously, and with considerable trepidation, planned the plantings.

Wooden stakes showing the proposed location of the trees were painstakingly placed in strategic locations throughout the park ever so mindful of the wrath that would be incurred if a sacred vista were to be breached. Low and behold, the stakes remained in place for several days without a single objection! Everything seemed in order. Then came the pre-planting inspection.

As fate would have it, the Department of Agriculture inspector assigned to oversee the grant, although highly knowledgeable and conscientious, was quite a stickler for detail and somewhat inflexible in the interpretation of the grant regulations. Sensing a potential for conflict, the city manager felt it incumbent to brief the inspector about the sensitivities of the neighboring residents. Hopefully, the subtle appeal for leniency and understanding would not fall on deaf ears.

As the survey progressed, the inspector noted that two of the stakes appeared to be too close together. Without hesitation or contemplation of the potential consequences, the inspector seized one of the stakes and promptly relocated it a few feet away.

Within an instant, a perspicacious neighbor who had been watching from his picture window with uncanny radar-like alacrity, bolted out the door as if shot out of a cannon. Running towards the park with arms flailing, the indignant resident shouted to the inspector to immediately put that “*&^%\$” stake back where she got it and making it clear that, if she didn't, he might just put that stake someplace uncomfortable. It's not clear exactly what that location might have been but they say the sun never shines there.

Negotiations ensued. The ramifications (pun intended) of an impasse would be serious, and possibly painful to boot. Thankfully, diplomacy prevailed and a compromise location was agreed upon. The plantings proceeded several days later without further tumult. Today, the park remains relatively undeveloped compared to other parks in The Village. Lingering apprehension of a wooden stake or some other playground accouterment being rammed into an unbecoming official orifice is perhaps partially to blame.