

Lake Worth remembers "The Judge" with memorial park

by Julie Thannum

It won't be long before children will be playing amidst the tall green trees of Hodgkins Memorial Park and that's one thing that would have put a smile on The Judge's face.

He's described by his descendants as an entrepreneur — community and people oriented. he was known to most, as The Judge. Today, some of this great man's descendants are making sure that James Hodgkins' dreams come true.

The Hodgkins family has donated land on Hodgkins Road in Lake Worth for a city park. A committee has been formed to coordinate the fund-raising and development of the park before it is turned back over to the City of Lake Worth for maintenance.

Geoffrey White, along with his brothers Jim, Charles and Barry, wants to see his grandfather's dream come true. White is the chairman of the committee to develop the park, which he says will be the fulfillment of his grandfather's and his mother's desires.

In the years following the Civil War, John and Elizabeth Hodgkins and their 11-year-old son, James, settled on a farm in the small community of Birdville in eastern Tarrant County. During this time, a Tennessee family named Greer moved to the area now known as Benbrook with their daughter, Sara Elizabeth.

James and Sara were married April 11, 1891 and settled in north Fort Worth. They later invested their life savings to purchase 240 acres in rural Tarrant County. The land was located on the banks of the Trinity River, where Hodgkins built a well — the only source of fresh water in the area for years.

That well, which was a life source for many north Tarrant County families in the early 1900s, sits in the middle of the nearly three acres of park land donated to the City of Lake Worth.

White said the committee is presently working to have the Historical Commission recognize the 1906 fresh-water well with a State Historical Marker. Once the

documents are submitted, he said it could take three to six months for the Historical Commission to make a decision.

Committee member Virginia Ross said the committee envisions the park as a neighborhood park with paths to the well, a footbridge over the creek, picnic tables and playground equipment for children. The creek and numerous trees make the area a very pleasant place to relax, she said.

White said committee members are working on the first phase of the Hodgkins Memorial Park project. That includes much landscaping and preparations to secure the area. The foremost priority, White added, is to get the State Historical Marker.

In about March, White says he hopes that actual development of the park can begin. That would include installation of flower beds, playground equipment and picnic tables for park visitors. The entire process, he says, will cost about \$22,000.

"We hope to do that in a year's time," White said. "It will really depend on how much support we get."

White said the committee will rely on fund-raisers and private donations to fund the project. A tax deductible account has been set up at Shady Oaks National Bank. Since its establishment three weeks ago, the account has \$1,000 in it.

"It's really just the fulfillment of what our grandfather wanted," White said, adding he remembers his grandfather teaching him and his brothers about giving what you can back to your community.

"He instilled that in us. This is something we hope that will end a chapter in our family's lives," White said. "It was also a lifelong dream of our mother's."

White said his mother inherited the land, which was turned over to Lake Worth following her death. The idea for community development of the land, however, originated with James Hodgkins.

White describes his grandfather



A sign marks the spot of the future Hodgkins Memorial Park in Lake Worth. The land, donated to the city by the James Hodgkins family, is located on Hodgkins Road. For information about donations call the following numbers 237-0060 and 237-2690.

as the "first and foremost in law and order" in the area now known as Lake Worth. That's how he got the nickname "The Judge."

Other contributions he made to the area was operation of the Old Hodgkins Trading Post from 1915 to 1934. He rented tents, boats, fishing poles and cabins on the edge of Lake Worth and owned the area's first telephone. White said it wasn't uncommon for his grandfather to yell out into the street when someone received a call.

Hodgkins was also instrumental in developing what is now known as the Lake Worth Independent School District. He acquired a two-room building and set aside property for the first school. Hodgkins also employed the area's first school teacher and paid her salary the first year.

In 1923 the school opened with 16 students and one teacher. Today, the district has more than 1,400 students and a faculty of 123. The district's intermediate school, located on Telephone Road, has been named after the man who made it all happen — James Hodgkins.

White said his grandfather died Oct. 29, 1942 — even before the City of Lake Worth received its charter. Folks in this area, however, know who the "Father of Lake Worth is." The local legend is buried in a family cemetery not far from the site of the Hodgkins Memorial Park.

Citizens or businesses wishing to make a contribution to the Hodgkins Memorial Park fund should call 237-0060 or 237-2690.

"I think it would make him feel proud," White said of his

grandfather's reaction if children played in the park. "He sacrificed a lot for others and for his community. I think it would be a fulfillment of his dream. I really think he was a man ahead of his time."

Today, a sign stands in the center of the future park as a reminder that the citizens of Lake Worth have not forgotten The Judge.

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Hodgkins Park to be a nice complement to Lake Worth

by Don Rogers

Construction of Hodgkins Memorial Park, fronting along the 4200 block of Hodgkins Road in Fort Worth is moving forward nicely. Featured in the park are a number of huge oak and pecan trees, some of them six to eight feet in diameter at the base. With wide-spread tops they form a shade ideal for the picnic tables and barbecue pits that will soon dot the landscape, according to Park Committee member Geoffrey White. An attractive stucco wall with the name, "Hodgkins Memorial Park" outlined attractively on it, stretches 70 feet across the front entryway to the park.

The development of Hodgkins Memorial Park is under the supervision of park committee members Virginia Ross, Mary Lou Reddick, Barry White, Tom Collins, Glen Steffens and Geoffrey White. The committee was appointed and chartered by the Lake Worth City Council in July, 1990. This committee is coordinating the fund-raising and development of the park before it is turned back over to the city of Lake Worth for maintenance.

Mrs. Vivian Hodgkins White, daughter of James Hodgkins, donated the land to the city of Lake Worth in 1986, designated to be used as a city

park. This project, when completed, will be the fulfillment of his grandfather's and his mother's dreams and desires, said Geoffrey White.

The White brothers Geoffrey, Jim, Charles and Barry, have recently completed the first phase of the fence that will eventually encircle the perimeter of the park. They say that the work done thus far is due to the efforts of the park committee and about 15 or so other concerned citizens who recognize the need for such a park within the city of Lake Worth. "It will not be long," said Barry White, "until we will see children playing in this park." Plans are made for the installation of swing sets, slides, and other playground equipment so that the children can play in the park.

According to Ross and Reddick, they envision a park that includes not only a picnic area and playground, but also a footbridge over the creek, an enclosed fresh water well built in 1906 (hopefully to be designated as a State Historical Site), paths throughout the park and log fences separating the parking area from the park itself.

Tom Collins, city street superintendent, and city crews have completed the parking lot and some of the log fences that will be used through-

out the park.

Due to the sluggish economy donations have slowed somewhat, thereby slowing the work. "We have a number of people who have volunteered to help with the park work. But materials are purchased as we get the funds, and this has slowed to a trickle," said Geoffrey White. "Fund raisers and donations are our only two sources of funds," he said.

"We hope soon to begin a community-wide donation seeking effort to complete the construction of the park." A tax deductible account has been set up at the Shady Oaks National Bank, and committee member Glen Steffens will soon be organizing a fund-raising effort to solicit funds from both the private and business sectors of Lake Worth. All wishing to make a donation to this park fund should call 237-0060.

"We feel that the completion of this park and its use by the citizenry would have made our grandfather very proud," said the White brothers. "He sacrificed a lot for others and for his community. This park will be the fulfillment of his dream of long ago, and will be his legacy to the city of Lake Worth."



Looking over the new park

J. T. Hinkle, Paul Harmon and Geoffrey White check out the newly completed wall fronting Hodgkins Park in Lake Worth. While a grand opening date has not yet been set for the new park, work is progressing nicely. Hodgkins Park, when completed, will offer another recreational opportunity to the citizens of Lake Worth.