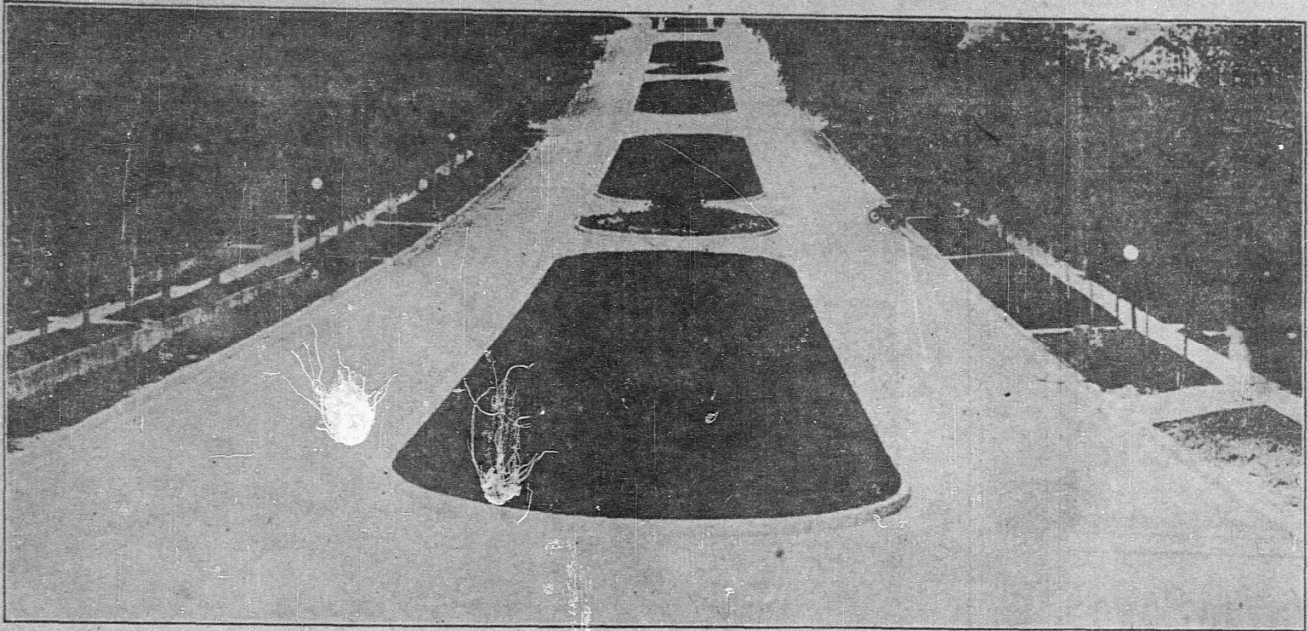


1911 — Detail showing the inner Oak Cliff Boulevard loop first proposed in George E. Kessler's "Plan for Dallas"

THIS IS THE PLAN FOR KESSLER BOULEVARD TO ENCIRCLE OAK CLIFF.



KESSLER BOULEVARD.

One of the most ambitious plans for city beautification that has been evolved in the movement to improve the city of Dallas is that conceived by moving spirits of Oak Cliff in their plans for a broad boulevard to encircle that section and at the same time make a connection from the viaduct to the Dallas-Fort Worth pike. This is a section of the boulevard as planned and discussed in the meeting held last night in Oak Cliff, which was attended by many of the men who are in the front of the effort to make the city plan of Dallas the best city plan possible.

The Dallas Morning News: 12th of June 1921, page 13—showing a segment of Oak Cliff Boulevard south of Jefferson

Kessler Parkway and Kessler Boulevard

Jim Barnes

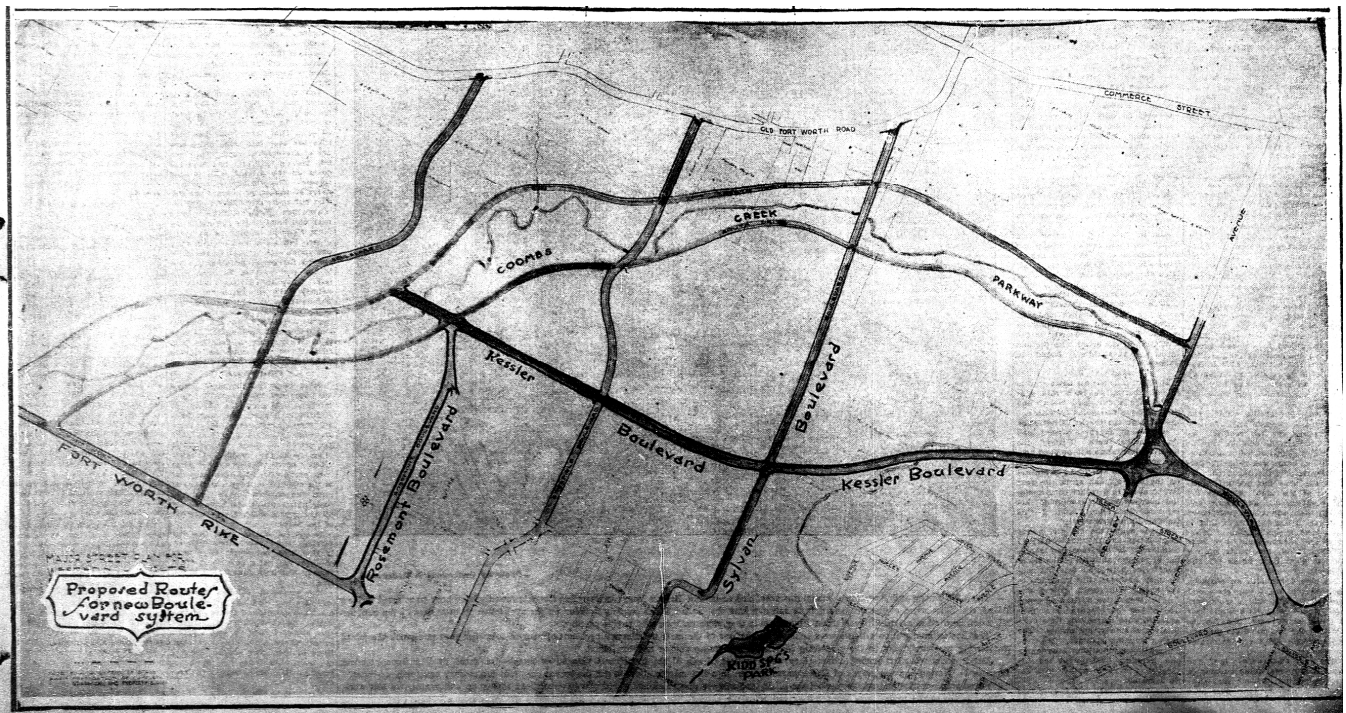
20 February 2008 , with pictures added and minor revisions, 6th may 2017

To a great extent the Kessler-Stevens district was created in three rapid steps taken between 1921 and 1925. First, a Boulevard and Parkway were routed; then, two golf courses were opened; and third, four residential subdivisions named “Kessler” and “Stevens” were platted. Though major traffic arteries were added later, and newer subdivisions have opened in each succeeding decade, the basic character of the lower Coombes Creek valley was established during this relatively brief period.

The “Kessler Boulevard” (now called “Colorado Boulevard”) and “The Kessler Memorial Parkway” were invented by famed landscape architect George E. Kessler. They were proposed conceptually in 1911, and more specific routes were mapped during the spring of 1921. After Kessler’s sudden death in 1923, a frenzy of deification-by-newsprint accelerated development. The new residential district, situated along the scenic traffic corridors Kessler had conceived, opened by 1925.

In his comprehensive 1911 plan for the entire city of Dallas, George Kessler proposed a gigantic boulevard loop around all of Oak Cliff. It was described in brief verbiage with an accompanying illustration. The only segment actually built was the stately Oak Cliff Boulevard heading south from Sunset High School then turning east at Burlington, grand wide easements that today have no apparent reason. The loop “parkway boulevard” was a planning device Kessler had employed quite successfully in his 1893 design for Kansas City. It was widely published and much sought-after, repeated in many cities.

In 1918 Kessler returned to Dallas and spent several years working on implementation of the larger facets of his 1911 plan. During that period he was hired to design the path, between Beckley Avenue and Davis, for his Coombes Creek boulevard and parkways. Though directly across the Trinity from downtown Dallas, the Coombes Creek valley was then still covered by primeval woods along its slopes. West of Beckley the only roads ran along Sylvan, Edgefield, and Wheatland Road (modern Plymouth and North Oak Cliff Boulevard). It was a peninsula of green surrounded by expanding urbanization. In June of 1921 Kessler, accompanied by the entire Board of Commissioners, two civil engineers, and L.A. Stemmons, formed an automobile caravan and crossed the concrete Houston Street Viaduct to explore Kessler's proposed routes. They were able to drive only about a mile west into the forest along the route Kessler proposed for his "boulevard", traveling up what is now Greenbriar Avenue. "The Dallas Morning News" reported that the routes for two "parkways", running along both sides of Coombes Creek, were impassable to their cars. The district was repeatedly cited as being one of the most scenic landscapes in Dallas County. Kessler exhorted the public that the time to act was at hand, that the natural beauty of the area might well be lost forever if lands were not quickly set aside for preservation. Shortly after Kessler's death, the City and the landowners initiated action.



The Dallas Morning News, 3rd of July 1921—showing George E. Kessler's revised plan for the Boulevard and Parkways

Half of what Kessler proposed in 1921 was never built. A never-built "Stevens Parkway" running from Beckley along the north side of the Coombes Creek and entering the Stevens Park Estates along a 100 foot wide right-of-way now demarked as Atlantic Avenue was promoted in a newspaper map of 1929. In the late 1950s most of that north creek bank was finally procured by the Dallas Fort-Worth Turnpike (Interstate 30). The great boulevard loop proposed in 1911 circling grandly up Coombes Creek and back down Cedar Creek (past the Zoo), was discussed for decades but never completed. Proposed fragments show up on ancient neighborhood plats like Elmwood's and Wynnewood's. Efforts seem to have ceased after the extension and widening of Hampton Road and the sudden creation of the Fort Worth Cut-Off (State Highway 1B now called "Fort Worth Avenue") during the 1930s. Just prior, Kessler Parkway had been proposed as the link to the new Commerce Street Viaduct, an effort to provide a beautiful automotive shortcut into downtown for the western transcontinental highway then entering Dallas along Davis Street (US 180). Obsolete were the sedate carriage traffic of an 1893 Kansas City parkway and the 15 mile per hour Sunday drives in the automobiles of the 1911 Dallas elite. Nothing in Kessler's vision had anticipated the unnatural character of future high-speed roadways.

