



This is the 1926 plat of the entire Stevens Park Estates, showing the original "play circles". Subsequent platting alterations removed four of the "play circles" along Marydale.

History of the Circular “Play Parks” by Jim Barnes; 14 May 2006 (picture added 9th May 2017)

So many of the innovations pioneered in the Stevens Park area, such as curvilinear streets, parkland open spaces, and deed restrictions became commonplace to later Dallas residential additions that it is hard to detect flaws in our neighborhood’s original planning. But the small circular Play Parks in the interior of Stevens Park Estates was one innovation that wasn’t copied elsewhere. It doesn’t seem to have been particularly well thought-out here in the first place.

Stevens Park Estates was still outside the City limits on August 8th of 1925, when the first plat for lots in two “blocks” was filed (*Dallas County: plat map volume 3, pages 433-444*). That plat, signed by Annie L. Stevens, stated:

“I hereby dedicate the streets and walkways on said plat to the use of the public forever, and I dedicate as parks those parcels of land on said plat designated as “Park” for the exclusive use of the owners of the lots in said subdivision, until such time as same shall have been taken into the corporate limits of a municipality, whereupon the title to and the control of such park tracks shall vest in such municipality for park uses and purposes.”

Oddly, neither the word “Park” nor outlines of any play area appear on the plat map drawing itself; the Play Park idea must have been added after the drawing was commissioned. With the help of City Archivist, John Slate, I have looked through the records for the Stevens Park area and I found nothing that indicates that the City of Dallas ever asked for or accepted these tiny interior Play Parks as gifts. Several years ago, when we showed the plat map to Parks & Recreation Department personnel, they were surprised to know that such places even existed. They quickly pointed out that they had no access for maintenance and that rules prohibited their operating any “park” not open to the public.

A second plat of the entire Stevens Park Estates area was filed on the 10th of August, 1926 (*Dallas County: plat map volume 4, page 116*). It is illustrated here. The text accompanying this new plat, again signed by Annie L. Stevens, started with a declaration that this new plat was “to be and constitute a substitution of and for that certain plat filed in ... 1925”. It further stated:

“I hereby dedicate the streets and walkways on said foregoing plat to the use of the public forever, and I dedicate as parks those parcels of land on said forgoing plat designated as “Play-Park” for the exclusive use of the owners of the lots in said subdivision abutting on and against said respective play parks.”

Mention of City ownership had been dropped. A third deed establishing ten foot wide utility easements, dated September 28th, 1926 (*Deed Records Dallas County: volume 1356, page 57*) stated:

“...it is agreed that neither I nor my successors heirs or assigns shall place any buildings fences or other obstructions upon the said easement strips, and no trees or other foliage shall be planted so that it will interfere with the proper construction, operation maintenance and repair of the said public utilities on, over and under the said easement strips: except that in the spaces marked on said map as “Play Parks” no trees or shrubbery shall be disturbed or destroyed by any of the said grantees herein unless absolutely necessary for the proper construction maintenance or operation of their respective utilities.”

Though later re-platting omitted four Play Parks from the north side of the subdivision, what is shown above was the state of entitlement left by Miss Stevens. I know of no further covenants or deed restrictions specifying how the remaining twelve Parks are supposed to be used, managed, or maintained. Please note that my studies have not been exhaustive title record searches of any of the Play Parks. It is possible that adverse claims or re-plats were later filed on specific locations. I hope that this helps current land-owners encircling each little parcel to understand their legal predicament so that, if or when appropriate, they may redesign their little Play Park’s unique future.

Miss Stevens’ love of children is legendary, but I suspect that the Play Parks were primarily added as geometric devices to eliminate awkward bundles of sharp corners at the convergence of wedge-shaped lots. I don’t believe the Stevens family foresaw the difficulties that have ensued; rather I imagine that they envisioned our subdivision as becoming a continuously open landscape with only minimal fencing – a peaceful country life of unleashed dogs and swimming in the creek.

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