

Chapter 6: The Village Store, A Place to Gather

The Village Store was a general store to some, a hardware store to others, and bait and tackle store to many. To most, it was one of the two places back then where one could get a good cup of fresh coffee. Mabel's Café was the other. The store was a meeting place of sorts where engineers, developers and other customers gathered to make purchases or to just shoot the breeze.

One of the customers who frequented the store was Clarence E. Duffner, Sr., a developer who had recently built 137 small frame homes at Wilshire and May in what was called The Wilshire Addition. While a modest community today, one might characterize the development at that time as an "opener" for the surrounding area.

Duffner, born February 9, 1902 in St. Louis, Missouri, was a tall, handsome man with black hair, parted in the center, with a trace of auburn. Duffner had intense hazel eyes, a firm chin of determination and the physique of an athlete. Having dropped out of school after the eighth grade, Duffner was, by all accounts, a self-made man. In 1937, the C.E. Duffner Company, a corporation privately owned by "Duff" as he was often called and his wife Mildred, was created to build homes. He built his first small frame homes in Creston Hills. Later Duffner would build homes in the Crown Heights area as well as parts of Midwest City.

It was at The Village Store that Duffner met stockbroker Leo Oppenheim and his associate Charles E. France, a local attorney. The two also happened to be co-owners of the Suburban Water Company. Through their acquaintance at The Village Store, Duffner and Oppenheim struck up both a friendship and a business partnership.

Over the course of time, Duffner learned that Oppenheim owned forty acres of undeveloped land in what is today the southwest corner of The Village, --land that Duffner had a keen interest in developing. Duffner had not actively pursued the development because it wasn't served by an existing water or sewer system. A deal was soon struck between Duffner and Oppenheim; --Duffner would buy the land and Oppenheim, with the help of Engineers Phillips and Stong, would extend water to the property.

Duffner proceeded in an expeditious manner to develop his newly acquired property. Engineers Phillips and Stong prepared the plat for a new addition to be built on the forty acre tract of land. In the meantime, back at The Village store Duffner and his associates began discussing potential names for the new addition. Alas, the name on the sign over the door fit Duffner's vision of this new, family-friendly addition to a tee, --the new addition would be called "The Village Addition."

Duffner's wife, Mildred, had English roots and in her honor Duffner decided to give the streets in the new addition English names. According to Jack Duffner, his mother Mildred found English names to use by looking at a map of England. Duffner had used English names in other subdivisions he had developed. English names had also been used extensively in neighboring Nichols Hills and West Nichols Hills and so this fit nicely into the ongoing theme. Developers who would follow would also adopt this same theme with only a few exceptions.

On April 11, 1949 the Oklahoma County Planning Commission approved the plat for Duffner's new addition to Oklahoma County. The plat was signed by Evert Stong on behalf of Phillips & Stong Engineering Company and Clarence E. and Mildred Duffner on behalf of Midland Development Corporation.

Duffner's development got off to a strong start and most of the homes in the 2100-2200 Blocks of Westchester and Brighton Avenues were built in 1949 before The Village was incorporated as a town.

"It was amazing how fast the houses went up", said Laverne Poole, who had purchased her home at 2208 Westchester Drive in July 1949. "We had to shop at 50th and May because there were no grocery stores in the area and there wasn't even a paved road from our home to Pennsylvania Avenue," recalls Poole. Long time resident, Wilma McNeil moved into her new home at 2101 Brighton in December, 1949 and recalls that Greystone was just a dirt path north of Brighton and that the only way to town was by way of Guilford Lane.