

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register Listed
7-17-2012

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Riverside Park

other names/site number KHRI: 099-186

2. Location

street & number North Oregon Street, NE corner of Oswego not for publication

city or town Oswego vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Labette code 099 zip code 67356

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

SEE FILE

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
5	1	buildings
		district
		site
5	1	structure
		object
10	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

New Deal-era Resources of Kansas

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Outdoor recreation/park

Recreation & Culture: Outdoor recreation/Park

Recreation & Culture: Outdoor recreation/

Recreation & Culture: Outdoor recreation/

Swimming Pool

Swimming Pool

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: WPA Park Style

foundation: Concrete; Stone/Limestone

walls: Stone/Limestone

roof: Wood/Shingles; Concrete

other:

Narrative Description

Summary

Riverside Park is in the northeast corner of Oswego in Labette County, Kansas. With natural boundaries created by geographic features, it rests atop a high bluff and overlooks the Neosho River and farmland to the north. Although the entire present-day park, which includes a modern fairground, encompasses about 60 acres, the historic core that is the subject of this nomination is about 17 acres in size. This area features numerous trees, plantings, and pathways, and historic New Deal-era resources include a fountain, picnic shelters, a swimming pool, and a bathhouse.

Elaboration

Riverside Park is located in Labette County 0.6 miles north of Kansas Highway 160 at the northeast edge of Oswego, a town with a population of 1,829 in 2010. Separated from the rest of the community by a hill to the west, a ravine to the south, farmland to the east, and a bluff to the north, the 17-acre historic core is actually a park within a larger 60-acre park. Except for one farmhouse across the park to the east, there are no homes or businesses in the vicinity of the historic core of the park.

Two roads provide access into the park. Oregon Street serves as the park's main entrance at the southeast corner and entrance into the park is marked roughly 0.1 mile south of the actual park boundary by two stone piers that flank the paved roadway. The roadway then crosses a small stone bridge spanning a ravine at the park's southeast corner. Oregon Street continues north into the park and follows the perimeter of the park forming a triangular pattern. The second road providing access into the park is Water Plant Road, which enters the park from the west off Xavier Road near its junction with the Neosho River, and intersects with Oregon Street near the swimming pool.

The park contains a number of historic features including a large swimming pool with a bathhouse, three picnic shelters, a fish pond, and a decommissioned fountain. More recent additions to the park include a metal-frame picnic shelter, a bluff overlook platform, replicas of historic lights, and playground equipment. An inventory of these resources is provided below. (Figure 1)

Inventory of Resources

- 1. Bathhouse (1935, contributing building, 099-188)**
Lat/Long: 37.17477 -95.10071

The bathhouse and pool are located near the center of the park where Water Plant Road enters the property. The construction of this building and pool were made possible through a 1934 issue of \$15,000 in bonds by the city. Work was completed through the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) program, and the pool was opened June 19, 1935.

Constructed of multi-colored native limestone, the bathhouse faces south toward the park entrance. The swimming pool is located on the north side of the building. The one-story building features a cross plan with a footprint that measures 72 feet by 25 feet and an entrance portico or waiting area at the front that measures 32 feet by 12 feet. Historic concrete sidewalks from the south, east, and west lead to a monumental entry porch that is flanked by two sets of exterior staircases, providing access to the flat-roof porch, which is now closed to the public. The three-foot-tall parapet walls topped with concrete coping provided an enclosed space for outdoor events. Historically, this area featured lights and was used for community dances. Adjacent to the east exterior staircase is a date stone noting the 1935 completion of the pool and bathhouse and the names of the city council members.

The east and west wings of the building include square glass-block windows placed high off the ground near the roofline. Though the window openings have been retained, these glass blocks replaced single sash six-light windows with steel muntins. The windows have steel lintels.

The bathhouse entrance porch is defined by three open bays – the center bay featuring a prominent segmental arch. The entrance bay leads to a waste-high counter and roll-up wooden windows where the public can interact with the pool staff. The staff works from this large one-room central work area, which features the original wood shelves lining the walls for storing baskets. The north (rear) side of this area faces toward the pool. The men's and women's showers and dressing rooms are on either side of the central staff area. Each dressing room contains showers, toilets, and dressing areas. The interior walls of the check room, concession room, dressing rooms, and toilet areas are constructed of steel studs and finished with metal lath and plaster.¹

2. Swimming Pool (Completed 1935, contributing structure, 099-188)
Lat/Long: 37.17496 -95.10081

The swimming pool has a rectangular footprint with rounded corners on a north-south axis and measures 61 feet by 135 feet. It is made of concrete and features a shallow end nearest the bathhouse that measures three feet in depth and gradually drops to five feet. The deep end of the pool has inward-sloping sides and is 9 feet at its deepest point. The pool originally had one high diving board and two low boards, but today only the structure of one board remains. The original lifeguard stand is still in this area.

Another renovation took place in the early 1980s to repair the surface of the pool itself, to remove underwater lighting which was beginning to have electrical problems, and to rework the pumping and filtration system. The old filtration system was located between the pool and bathhouse at the west side of the pool, and it was removed and replaced by a concrete block building and two large filtration tanks were added just outside the fenced area at the northwest end of the pool.

There is a 1960s-era wading pool located east of the pool near the bathhouse. It was built to replace the original wading pool that was much smaller and positioned between the bathhouse and the pool at the southeast edge of the pool.

3. North Shelter (Completed 1933 or 1935, contributing building, 099-191)
Lat/Long: 37.17576 -95.10084

The north shelter is north of the pool at the north edge of the park near the bluff. It generally has an east-west axis.

The one-story open-air building is constructed of concrete with multi-colored native limestone veneer walls and measures 37 feet by 22 feet, with restrooms encompassing roughly one-quarter of the space. The masonry features unique patterns of arrowheads, sun rays, and a boot. A large central rock boot in the interior west wall is the centerpiece of this building and has a date 1933.²

The building features a rectangular plan, rests on a concrete slab, and has a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. There are wide overhanging eaves. The roof is supported by large square stone columns and the building is

¹ Specifications on file at City of Oswego office.

² Although the date stone suggests this shelter was built in 1933, an interview with Walter Pape, who participated in the construction of several park structures as a 20-year-old in 1935, suggests that all buildings were built at the same time. Also, he insists that no masonry work was completed until the pool was finished because of the amount of dynamiting that had to be done during the pool construction. His recollections suggest the shelter was completed in 1935. Interview with Walter Pape by Karyn Carpenter and Bill Cunningham at Riverside Park, 20 July 2011.

partially enclosed by a three-foot-tall mortared limestone wall with concrete coping. Entrance into the shelter is through an opening in the east wall.

Restrooms are at the west end of the building. The women's restroom is accessed through an opening on the building's south elevation. A door on the building's north elevation provides access to the men's restroom. Wood privacy fences are installed in front of each restroom entrance. There are two square window openings that have been filled in with wood on the west elevation.

4. Northeast Shelter, (Completed 1935, contributing building, 099-190)
Lat/Long: 37.17604 -95.09983

The northeast shelter sits directly across from the bluff at the northeast corner of the park and has a northwest-southeast axis. This building features a similar construction to the north shelter, though no restrooms. The one-story open-air building is constructed of concrete with multi-colored native limestone veneer walls and measures 39 feet by 21 feet. It has a rectangular plan, rests on a concrete slab, and has a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. There are wide overhanging eaves. The roof is supported by large square stone columns and the building is partially enclosed by a three-foot-tall mortared limestone wall with concrete coping. There are two entrances – one each at the east and west ends.

Except for replacement of the roof this structure is unchanged since its completion. There is no date stone.

5. Concession Building, (completed 1935, contributing building, 099-189)
Lat/Long: 37.17518 -95.09988

The concession building is located just east of the bathhouse and was originally built as a pool snack bar. It generally has a north-south axis, paralleling the park road running on its east.

This building features a similar construction to aforementioned shelter buildings. The one-story open-air building is constructed of concrete with multi-colored native limestone veneer walls and measures 40 feet by 17 feet. It has a rectangular plan, rests on a concrete slab, and has a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. There are wide overhanging eaves. The roof is supported by large square stone columns and the building is partially enclosed by a three-foot-tall mortared limestone wall with concrete coping. There is wood framing situated against the stone columns to facilitate screens, which are now gone.

The north one-third of the building is partially enclosed with stone veneered walls on the east and north elevations. The north elevation includes a pair of windows situated near the roofline. This part of the building was originally used for storing and selling snacks. The south two-thirds of the building served as space for eating and relaxing.

The concession building includes three entrances – one into the enclosed north bay at the northeast corner, one centered on the south elevation, and one within the center bay of the west elevation. Windows from the north "selling" end of the building opened towards the pool on the west side.

The roof of this structure has been restored and the old screens and windows, which closed for securing the selling area, have been removed. There is no date stone on this structure, but oral interviews have indicated that this was under construction when the pool was completed and was the last park structure to be finished.

6. Tool Shed, (completed 1934/1935, contributing building, 099-193)
Lat/Long: 37.17543 -95.10109

The tool shed sits directly north of the pool. This one-story building is constructed of concrete with multi-colored native limestone veneer walls and measures 21 feet by 14 feet on an east-west axis. It has a

rectangular plan, rests on a concrete slab, and has a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. There are wide overhanging eaves.

One enters the building through a double-leaf wood door on the east elevation. The south elevation includes three (approximately 2' x 2') iron-bar clad windows. The west elevation includes no fenestration, but does include a chimney centered half-way up the wall. The north elevation features two (approximately 3' x 3') iron-bar clad windows. All five of the building's windows are tucked just beneath the roofline high off the ground.

The building's roof has been replaced, but everything else is original. There is no date stone.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

7. Fish Pond/Fountain (circa 1937, contributing structure, 099-195) Lat/Long: 37.17569 -95.10109

Directly west of the north shelter and north of the tool shed is a circular, partially above-ground concrete fish pond with a fountain in the center. Although it may have been built earlier, it was likely constructed during the 1930s park improvements.

The circular pond is roughly 23 feet in diameter and includes a concrete border with a two-foot-wide flat surface that is raised roughly 18 inches off the ground. The pond contains plants and a central fountain faucet. Originally, the structure featured limestone facing, but this has been replaced with a smooth concrete surface.

Within the immediate vicinity of the fish pond are seven rectangular concrete planters located north and west of the pond. The concrete planters are generally flush with the ground.

8. Raised Fountain (circa 1937, contributing structure, 099-194) Lat/Long: 37.17477 -95.10135

Directly west of the bathhouse and at the point where Water Plant Road enters the park is a circular depression in the middle of which is a small, stone walled fountain measuring eleven feet in diameter and three feet in height. Four stone benches are equally spaced around the top of the depression. This feature was probably built in 1937 during the park improvement phase completed with labor financed by the Work Progress Administration.

This fountain is made of concrete and decorated with native limestone. Although the structure is intact and retains its integrity, the fountain no longer functions and has been converted into a large planter.

9. Walking Paths (circa date 1937, 2 contributing structures, 099-194)

Two sets of limestone paths were built at the west edge of the park. The first includes two stone paths that descend the hill at the west edge of the park, beginning at the raised fountain noted above. The southernmost path includes a switchback down the hill; the northernmost includes a deteriorated stair.

The second set of paths descends into the ravine along the very south edge of the park.

Constructed of limestone, both paths were likely built in 1937 during the park improvement phase completed with labor financed by the Work Progress Administration.

NON HISTORIC PARK FEATURES

10. River Overlook (completed 1990, non-contributing structure, 099-192) Lat/Long: 37.17602 -95.10097

Although the north edge of the park has long been the location of a scenic overlook, the current structure was built in 1990 to replace an unsafe structure. Placed at the edge of the bluff at the extreme north edge of the park (across from the north shelter), the structure has seven steps leading to a platform measuring 21 feet by 19 feet. It is enclosed by a metal guardrail. The facing of the base of the structure is veneered with limestone in designs similar to that found on the 1930s park buildings. A plaque on the base notes the date it was built and the city council members at the time. The feature allows visitors to look over the Neosho River valley seeing the river below and the farm fields to the north.

11. West Shelter Building (late 1960s, non-contributing building) Lat/Long: 37.17537 -95.10204

During the 1960s, the local Lion's Club erected an open-air shelter at the extreme northwest corner of the park. Metal poles on a concrete slab measuring 26 feet by 18 feet support a flat metal roof. A brick fireplace stands at the west end of the structure.

12. Lights

Twenty free-standing light poles were installed around the park in 2007. Donated by local citizens and businesses, they are taller replicas of lights that originally sat atop the pool bathhouse.

13. Other

Through the years, playground equipment has been added to the park for children. The equipment is scattered throughout the park area so that all shelters have play equipment nearby. In the 1980s a retired military tank was located in the park near the northeast shelter building for children to climb on.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

Period of Significance

1887-1962

Significant Dates

1933-1937

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kansas Emergency Relief Committee

Works Progress Administration

Wilson & Company, Salina, KS

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance begins in 1887 with the property's first use as a park and ends in 1962 – fifty years prior to the date of nomination. This period includes the New Deal era when much of the park development was completed with the assistance of the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee and Works Progress Administration.

Criteria Considerations (justification)

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

Oswego's Riverside Park is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and Criterion C in the area of *Architecture*. The property is nominated as part of the "New Deal-era Resources of Kansas" multiple property nomination. It is an example of the "Social and Recreational Facility" property type described in the multiple property documentation form.

Elaboration

The bluff towering over the Neosho River has long provided excellent views of the valley below and, in the mid-1800s, was frequented by both American Indians and early Euro-American settlers as a place to observe travelers and game. It also overlooked an old road that led from central Missouri through present-day southeast Kansas. The Osage Indians lived in this area, which was known as White Hair Town, named after an Osage chief. The area's first white settler – trader John Mathews – arrived in the early 1840s and settled near the bluff where he maintained a trading post that was known as Little Town. He married an Osage woman and later sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War. He participated in raids on Free State settlements in southeast Kansas and was killed during fighting in 1861.³

After Mathews' death and the Osage Indians' relocation closer to the Verdigris River, the bluff returned to its natural state. White settlers began arriving after the Civil War in 1865 and two years later they formed the Oswego Town Company, named after many settlers' hometown Oswego, New York. By 1866, enough people had settled in the area that an effort was made to create a new county. In a meeting held September 8, 1866, it was decided that the county seat would be Oswego, because a court had already been established in town.

Oswego became a thriving community with dry goods stores, newspapers, mills, churches and a grand hotel. \$340,000 in bonds insured that the town would be serviced by railroads and the first train arrived on June 6, 1870, giving Oswego an outlet for its agricultural production.⁴ With over 1,000 residents, it was officially organized as a city of the third class in 1870.⁵

During the 1870s and 1880s, Oswego residents established societies and organizations focused on community improvement and education. Examples included a literary society that maintained a reading room, a women's college established by area and regional Presbyterians, and a Ladies' Entertainment Society. The latter was established when a group of 36 women from Oswego gathered on February 12, 1887 and formed the Ladies' Entertainment Society, for the purpose of raising funds to acquire the land on the bluff overlooking the river for use as a community park. The group's organizing officers included Mary E. Perkins, president; Hettie C. Hall, vice-president; Franc Wilkin, secretary; and Anna Sharp, treasurer. Other participants included Sue Fisher, Ellen Liggett, Mary Hutchins, Sarah Reed, Louise Morrison, Luella Crum, all wives of prominent merchants and professionals of the city. The group appointed three local men – R. L. Sharp, L. L. Crum, and Col. Glass – to assist in their efforts to buy land.⁶ They raised money through 10-cent membership fees and

³ Nelson Case, *History of Labette County, Kansas, From the First Settlement to the Close of 1892* (Topeka, KS: Crane & Co., 1893), 18, 21-22. See also: *Oswego Democrat*, 20 May 1966. (Wayne O'Connell Clippings, Volume III, Oswego Public Library.)

⁴ Oswego Centennial, *Oswego Centennial 1867-1967* (Oswego, KS: Oswego Independent, 1967).

⁵ Frank Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, vol. II* (Chicago: Standard Publishing Co., 1912), 420-422. Accessed 27 February 2012 at <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1912/o/oswego.html>.

⁶ *Labette Avenue*, 18 July 2001.

numerous fundraising events, from concerts to suppers and festivals. H.C. Hall, who owned a section of the property, agreed to donate \$50 to the cause and offered to sell the women three to five acres for \$40 an acre.⁷

An article on the park's history published in the July 18, 2001 edition of *The Labette Avenue* noted, "The Men had a bit of horse trading to do with Mr. Condon, but eventually, they were able to purchase 26 1/2 acres from him for \$960. The land was purchased in October 1887 with more ice cream socials and contributions needed to fund the project." In an interview with the *Parsons Sun* in 1939, Ladies' Entertainment Society member Melissa Stice recalled that "townspeople nearly 'threw a fit' when they found out about the purchase. At the time, the park was just a rabbit warren, overrun with scrub oak and bushes and fit only for rabbits and snakes."⁸

In 1902, the Ladies' Entertainment Society deeded the park to the City of Oswego for one dollar. Small park improvement projects were noted in local newspapers of the early 20th century, but there was no collective effort to fully develop the park for visitors until the 1930s. For instance, a small wooden shelterhouse was built in the northeast corner of the park in the 1920s.⁹ Below the park along the banks of the Neosho River, a pool was built in 1922. It was open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day and was supervised by two ladies of the Entertainment Society, which by that time had become the Oswego Women's Club.¹⁰ Other early 20th century historical references to the park suggest the City and townspeople had failed to develop this site to its full potential, despite the efforts of a few. For instance, a 1916 history of Oswego noted, "In recent years an earnest attempt has been made to add some very desirable ground to Riverside Park. But from failure on the part of many of our people to realize the advantage of this, and therefore from want of cooperation of our citizens, this effort failed...Of course our River Side [sic] Park as it is has the elements of as fine a park as can be found in the west. The city has not yet seen itself able to expend on its development and adornment the sums necessary to give the public anything like benefit which they should derive from such a place."¹¹

The park was largely improved in the 1930s with the assistance of the Federal New Deal aid programs. Between 1933 and 1937, the City erected picnic shelters and swimming facilities with the aid of the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

The KERC was a non-partisan state relief agency that dispersed the funds of the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA). It was the job of the KERC and its director, John Stutz, "to certify that the employees of the federal programs were eligible participants. The KERC certified Kansans who participated in the Civilian Conservation Corps and in the programs of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration...[and] by 1935, over 25 distinct federal and state programs were under the jurisdiction of the KERC."¹²

An executive order issued May 6, 1935 created the WPA and was initially intended as a temporary measure with funding renewed annually as needed. The program was intended to employ large numbers of people through locally sponsored projects as well as through projects for state and federal agencies. The WPA funded the construction of many outdoor recreation facilities in Kansas, including pools, stadiums, playgrounds, fairgrounds, and athletic fields. Specifically, WPA labor contributed to the development of 91 parks. At its peak, the WPA employed 3.3 million workers throughout the United States.¹³

⁷ Minutes of the meetings of the Ladies Entertainment Society, on file at the Oswego Historical Museum; also, Case, *History of Labette County, Kansas*, 167-168.

⁸ *Parsons Sun*, 15 July 1939.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Labette Avenue*, 18 July 2001.

¹¹ *Semi-Centennial Celebration, 1866-1916: Founding of Oswego, Kansas* (Oswego, KS: Independent Print, 1916), 31.

¹² Elizabeth Rosin, et. al., "New Deal-Era Resources of Kansas" National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2002), E-9.

¹³ Rosin, E-19.

On April 1, 1934, the City of Oswego applied to the KERC for funds to construct a pool and bathhouse, and that application was approved on May 17. A bond election was held August 7, and local residents voted to issue bonds in the amount of \$15,000 “for the purpose of improvement of Riverside Park and erection of buildings thereon, necessary and incident to the construction of a swimming pool.”¹⁴ Two weeks later, on August 27, the City entered into a contract with Wilson Engineering Company of Salina, Kansas, for the design and supervision of the building of the swimming pool.¹⁵ That same year, application was made to the WPA for funding for “improvements” to the park, though those improvements are not specified in available documentation.¹⁶

The *Oswego Democrat* covered seemingly every detail of the pool’s construction. Just prior to the grand opening, for instance, the newspaper noted, “Grassy sod has been placed so as to terrace the building from the front or south, and on the west where it slopes to the roadway. The east or higher side, has been filled with crushed rock so that cars can line up and park facing the pool. Plenty of parking space has been provided and two roadways make access to the pool easy. A new drive on the west side of the park is also being constructed so as to give additional parking space.”¹⁷

The pool was to be managed by C.A. Novak of Ottawa, who also managed pools in Ottawa and Chanute. During a speaking engagement with a local organization, Novak boasted this pool ranked “among the top in sanitation,” noting “the water in your pool will at all times meet the most rigid inspection as to purity, and I can say that it will be more pure than the water you drink...the pool is swept each morning with huge brushes towards the deep end, where a vacuum cleaner takes all of this sediment out before going to the filter.” Additionally, he added that a new sanitary innovation included “the foot bath which is entered just after passing through the compulsory showers.”¹⁸

The swimming pool grand opening was held June 19, 1935, and some 2,500 people attended the festivities, which included swimming and diving demonstrations and a high school band concert. Mayor W. A. Blair was the master of ceremonies and former Governor Clyde Reed of Parsons spoke briefly. In his remarks, Mayor Blair credited the Walter J. Lindstrom Post of the American Legion for first bringing the idea of constructing a pool to the local government. He also credited former county engineer Joe Jarboe for his assistance in the early development of the pool site. Also in attendance was the only surviving member of the Ladies’ Entertainment Society from when the park was first established – 94-year-old Melissa Stice.

At the time of its construction, it was the second largest public pool to be built in southeast Kansas. The larger communities of Parsons, Pittsburg, Independence, and Columbus, for example, did not have public pools. Only Chanute, 57 miles away, had a similar public pool. It was estimated that the Oswego pool would draw swimmers from a radius of 40 miles around Oswego and would pull from a population base of about 100,000 people.¹⁹

The swimming pool was a major draw for visitors, but the park was used for other entertainment functions. The park was the location for weekly community band concerts outside the pool and numerous family and community picnics, many of which were noted and advertised in the local newspaper. Just a year after the opening of the swimming pool, arrangements were made to show movies in the park. The *Oswego Democrat* credited Mr. Neale Gordon²⁰ of Parsons with coining the phrase “Parksho,” which was described as a new

¹⁴ City Records, on file at Oswego City Hall.

¹⁵ In 1936, the KERC produced a film highlighting projects including the Oswego swimming pool and bathhouse. Accessed online 27 February 2012 at <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/204928>.

¹⁶ Works Progress Administration, Central Office Reference Card Location Project File. Microfilm copies on file at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

¹⁷ *Oswego Democrat*, 14 June 1935.

¹⁸ *Oswego Democrat*, 21 June 1935.

¹⁹ These statistics were included in “A Preliminary Report on a Swimming Pool at Oswego, Kansas” by Wilson Engineering Company to the City of Oswego. City Records, on file at Oswego City Hall.

²⁰ The 1930 U.S. Census lists Neil Gordon as a 29-year-old theater manager.

form of entertainment “where-in the patrons view the show from the comfortable luxury of their own motor cars in the cool open air.” The cost was a 25-cent parking fee.²¹ The first two shows were silent films, and the third was a talkie entitled *His First Command*. These films were shown during July 1936, just three years after the world’s first drive-in theater opened on June 6, 1933 in Camden, New Jersey.²² Research has not yet determined how such an event was staged and no obvious physical remnants remain from the property’s Parksho days.

The Parksho phenomenon reinforces the importance of the automobile in the development of the park in the 1930s, and that both beauty and convenience were factors in the planning and design of Riverside Park. The park’s circular drive was connected to two city streets that provide convenient access in and out of the park. Additionally, the pool was designed with ample space for parking, which was specifically noted in the 1930s newspapers.²³

The majority of major improvements to the park were completed by 1940, although maintenance and small projects were ongoing. It is not known when some features were added to the park, including the fountains and stone paths, but they appear historic and may have been added along with the other 1930s features, but records do not confirm specific construction details. Playground equipment in the park could date back to the 1940s and more equipment has been added since then.

Prior to the improvements of the 1930s a concrete slab was built over the bluff, and an outhouse placed on it. With the installation of flush toilets in 1935, that was removed and a concrete slab installed to facilitate better viewing of the river. That, too, was replaced in 1990 with a larger, elevated and safer overlook.

In the 1960s, the small wading pool – or foot bath as C.A. Novak called it in 1935 – was removed from its location just north of the bathhouse and a larger one was built just outside the pool fence, to the northeast of the bathhouse. Another pool renovation took place during the early 1980s, in which cracks were repaired, underwater lights removed and the struggling and aging filtration system was replaced and moved outside the pool boundaries at the northwest edge of the pool.

Over time, and particularly in the mid- and later 20th century, the City accumulated additional tracts of land surrounding the park for continued recreational development. Today, outside the park’s historic core, there are ball fields, fair grounds, a stadium, 4-H camp, and RV campground.

With a focus on maintaining, preserving, and developing Riverside Park, the Oswego Parks and Community Foundation was established in 2003. The foundation has raised funds to maintain and beautify the park in numerous ways. Ornamental and shade trees have been planted throughout the park, donated by family members and marked with the names of loved ones. To honor Oswego’s Native American history, the Oswego Arts Club donated a metal figure of a Native American on horseback, which was placed at the edge of the bluff in 2000. The Parks Foundation later added several buffalo figures.

A concrete fence made to look like wood was added along the edge of the bluff in 2004-2005. This replaced a metal post-and-wire fence, which had replaced a split-rail fence

Lighting was added to the park in 2007 with the installation of lamps that replicated those originally found a top the bathhouse. The lights were purchased for \$2,500 each and funded through donations of businesses and families and the donors’ names are noted on a plaque at the base of “their” light pole. Twenty lights are within the nominated park boundaries and another half-dozen illuminate the drive into the park.

²¹ *Oswego Democrat*, 3 July 1936.

²² Kerry Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1992), 4.

²³ *Oswego Democrat*, 14 June 1935.

In 2011, three of the original lamps were repaired. Two were placed near the entrance just outside the park, and one was placed east of the swimming pool at its north edge and honors the members of the Ladies' Entertainment Society.

Architecture & Integrity

The park has been well maintained since the major improvements of the 1930s, and, as a result, it retains a high degree of integrity of setting, association, and feeling. Key to the significance and integrity of New Deal-era social and recreational resources is the collection and configuration of elements.

The New Deal-era buildings and structures themselves also retain a high degree of integrity – specifically regarding design, materials, and workmanship. Masonry materials dominate the construction within Riverside Park, which is common among New Deal resources. The park's built resources reflect a rustic park architecture that emphasizes natural, local building materials. Many of the buildings feature stone laid in whimsical patterns of starbursts and arrowheads. This, in particular, reflects the labor-intensiveness common with New Deal projects. Walkways were commonly made of stone, brick, or concrete, as is the case in Riverside Park. Concrete was the material of choice for engineered structures financed by New Deal programs.

Summary

Just as it did historically, Riverside Park remains an integral part of Oswego. It is the site of the city's annual fall festival – The Oswegofest – and comes alive with booths, games, contests and entertainment. This place remains in the memories of those who have lived in Oswego. Prior to river flooding controls with dams above Oswego on the Neosho River, locals spent hours atop the bluff watching historical floods that damaged crops, killed livestock, and drove people from their homes in the bottomlands below. "I recall the flood of 1952, we came out and watched people take the family out of their home through their attic window right over there," old-timers recall. And, during the early 1960s when the coal shovel "Big Brutus" was brought to the nearby mining village of West Mineral, area residents would go to the overlook in Riverside Park and watch the shovel, well lit at night, working away some 10 to 15 miles in the distance. And, citizens have flocked to the bluff to watch and photograph severe weather, most recently the storm that became the tornado that destroyed much of Joplin on May 22, 2011.

One visiting Oswego's Riverside Park could well believe they have driven into the 1930s as only minor changes and upgrades have taken place during the past 80 years. Most of the changes made have been done with an eye on preserving the integrity of the beautiful old structures.

Riverside Park is nominated to the National Register under Criteria A and C for its local significance in the areas of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Architecture*. It is nominated as part of the "New Deal-era Resources of Kansas" multiple property nomination.

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Blackmar, Frank. *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, vol. II*. Chicago: Standard Publishing Co., 1912. Accessed 27 February 2012 at <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1912/o/oswego.html>.
- Case, Nelson. *History of Labette County, Kansas, From the First Settlement to the Close of 1892*. Topeka, KS: Crane & Co., 1893.
- Kansas Emergency Relief Commission. *They Worked for Public Aid in Kansas: A Pictorial Review of Work Relief Accomplishments in Kansas*. Topeka, KS: KERK, 1936. Film accessed online 27 February 2012 at <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/204928>.
- Labette Avenue*, 18 July 2001.
- O'Connell, Wayne. *Reference Clippings, Volume III*. Oswego Public Library.
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- Oswego Centennial. *Oswego Centennial 1867-1967*. Oswego, KS: Oswego Independent, 1967.
- Ladies Entertainment Society, Meeting Minutes Journal, Oswego Historical Museum.
- Labette Avenue, July 18, 2001, "Riverside Park is Still Popular Place", by Marie Horner
- Pape, Walter. Interviewed by Karyn Carpenter and Bill Cunningham. 20 July 2011 at Riverside Park. Transcript on file at the Oswego Historical Museum and Oswego City Hall.
- Parsons Sun*, 15 July 1939.
- Rosin, Elizabeth. "New Deal-Era Resources of Kansas" National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2002.
- Segrave, Kerry. *Drive-In Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1992.
- Semi-Centennial Celebration, 1866-1916: Founding of Oswego, Kansas*. Oswego, KS: Independent Print, 1916.
- Wilson Engineering Company. "A Preliminary Report on a Swimming Pool at Oswego, Kansas." February 1934. On file at Oswego City Hall.
- Works Progress Administration. Central Office Reference Card Location Project File. Microfilm copies on file at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: City of Oswego; Oswego Historical Society; Oswego Public Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 17 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Lat/Long: See Figure 1

1 N/A
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

Oswego's Riverside Park is located at the northeast edge of town on land overlooking the Neosho River. According to Labette County property records, the entire parcel totals 47.3 acres, which is described as follows: S15 , T33 , R21: ALL OF GOVT LT 3 EXC BEG 2170' W SE/C NW1/4 W248' N60' E248' S TO POB & EXC BEG 100'E & 120 'N SW/C NW1/4 E300' N100' >.

However, the nominated area includes the smaller 17-acre historic core of the park, which is generally bordered by Oregon Street to the east, a steep bluff along the north, a deep ravine along the south and a hill and ravine at its west edge. The 17-acre core is noted in Figure 1.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nomination boundaries include the historic core of the present-day park. Natural features and roadways provide obvious and logical boundaries and encompass the historic section of the park.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Karyn L. Carpenter, Oswego Parks and Community Foundation Board Member

organization For City of Oswego date December 2011

street & number 703 5th Street telephone 620-795-4433

city or town Oswego state KS zip code 67356

e-mail _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Historic images, maps, etc.)

Photographs:

Name of Property: Riverside Park
City or Vicinity: Oswego
County/State: Labette County, KS
Photographer: Sarah Martin
Date of Photos: August 31, 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 20 North Oregon Street entrance to the park, showing concession building in center of photo, facing NW
- 2 of 20 Roadway in the northeast corner of park, showing northeast shelter at center of photo and overlook staircase at right, facing W
- 3 of 20 Roadway in the west part of park, showing non-contributing west shelter at left and tool shed at center of photo, facing E
- 4 of 20 Pool and bathhouse, with tool shed at right, facing S
- 5 of 20 Southwest corner of bathhouse, facing NE
- 6 of 20 South (front) elevation of bathhouse, facing N
- 7 of 20 East (side) elevation of bathhouse, facing W
- 8 of 20 North elevation of bathhouse, facing S
- 9 of 20 View from atop bathhouse showing pool and center of park, facing N
- 10 of 20 Northwest corner of North shelter, facing SE
- 11 of 20 Southeast corner of North shelter, facing NW
- 12 of 20 Interior wall of North shelter, facing W
- 13 of 20 North elevation of Northeast shelter, facing SE
- 14 of 20 East elevation of Concession building, facing W
- 15 of 20 Southwest corner of Tool Shed, facing NE
- 16 of 20 Fish pond in the foreground and raised planters in the background, facing NW
- 17 of 20 Raised fountain in foreground with bathhouse at left in background, facing SE
- 18 of 20 Representative stone path at southwest portion of park, facing W
- 19 of 20 Representative stone path at southwest portion of park, facing W
- 20 of 20 View of Neosho River from park overlook, facing NW

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name City of Oswego
street & number PO Box 210 telephone _____
city or town Oswego state KS zip code 67356

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Figure 1: Nomination Boundary (Google.com aerial image)



Lat/Long Coordinates

- A. 37.17556 -95.10316
- B. 37.17638 -95.09943
- C. 37.17362 -95.09935
- D. 37.17425 -95.10115