



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County,
California
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A History of Weill Park^(v.2)

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In December 1926 the city council created Bakersfield's sixth park.¹ For 15 years it was called Twenty-Sixth Street Park, and in 1941 it became Alphonse Weill Park.² Today it is just Weill Park and somewhat changed from what it was. It is next to Q Street, north of the freeway off ramp, south of the railroad tracks, and east of the paper recycling yard.³ This study traces its beginnings and how Bakersfield's growth made it smaller.

In 1924, 200 improved city lots went up for sale at Homacker Park that was laid out on both sides of Q Street between 34th and 26th. Just south of 26th Street were the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, next was James Street, and next was the property that became

¹ The others were Beale, Jastro, Central, Lowell, and Jefferson. On December 20, 1926 the city accepted from the property defined as "north of Twenty-Sixth Street between P Street and the Panama Slough." (Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Dec 11, 1926, page 111)

² Alphonse Weill (c 1853-1945) was a prominent Bakersfield merchandizer.

³ In the late 1950s the Californian State Department of Weights and Measures had a heavy-vehicle scale on the site now occupied by the paper recycling operation. The site across Q Street east of the park belonged to Hoppers, Inc. It had storage buildings on the north side and a vacant field on south. (Gilbert P. Gia interview with Don Suverkrop, Sep 2016)

Twenty-Sixth Street Park.⁴ The city got it in 1926 when the county deeded the raw land to Bakersfield.⁵

The city dug a well and trucked in shrubbery from other city parks.



The X at upper right shows site of future park next to Panama Slough (map, 1909)

The new park was not just for the Homacker Tract. Many older homes were nearby. Hawthorne School⁶ was a few hundred feet from the park, which might have been why the city council proposed that school children choose a name for it.⁷ That never happened.

In 1909 the main road between Sacramento and Los Angeles was designated a state highway, and its portion north of Bakersfield entered town via Roberts Lane, turned south on Chester Avenue, crossed the Kern River Bridge, and continued on through Bakersfield toward Los Angeles. Until 1933, Twenty-Sixth Street Park was remote from that heavy traffic.

⁴ The lots were pitched to the “modest investor” and “priced well within the means of a small income and on terms which will make the purchase an easy matter.” Buyers were exempted from interest and taxes for the first 18 months and were offered the prospect of future oil royalties. (Bakersfield Californian, Mar 3, 1928)

⁵ On December 20, 1926 the city accepted from the County of Kern property defined as “north of Twenty-Sixth Street between P Street and the Panama Slough.” (Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Dec 11, 1926, page 111)

⁶ The school was completed July 30, 1910 (Lynn Hay Rudy. *Old Bakersfield: Sites and Landmarks, 1875-1915*. Jenner, California, 2000)

⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 16, 1926.



Golden State Avenue, above, runs mid-top to lower right by SP tracks

State highway construction in 1933 departed from Roberts Lane and North Chester, and traffic for Bakersfield passed over the new Kern River bridge onto newly-built Golden State Avenue and the new traffic circle before merging with Union Avenue and south to Los Angeles. Chester Avenue no longer had state highway traffic, but Twenty-Sixth Street Park saw 24-hours-a-day traffic on Golden State Avenue.⁸

Bakersfield's population grew, and traffic congestion worsened. H Street Railroad Crossing was one problem, and another was the increasing traffic between East Bakersfield and downtown. In 1940 the city proposed an ambitious answer to the second problem: Extend Niles Street to Union Avenue and carry it straight on through to 26th Street. There it would meet an overpass spanning Golden State Avenue. If built, this plan would alleviate local congestion and also allow the National Highway traffic from Mojave to pass directly into the heart of Bakersfield.⁹

⁸ Completion of the last link of the Golden State Highway through town was celebrated on June 2 1934. The bypass's leading features were the \$500,000 Kern River Bridge, the \$50,000 Garces Traffic Circle, and the vehicle underpass next to the ice house near the Kern County fairgrounds by the Kern River. In the late 1950s the vehicle bridge was built over Garces Circle.

⁹ Bakersfield Californian, May 7, 1940

Both sides of town needed traffic relief, but money was short, and the city council was stalled on which would get the new construction. ¹⁰ But the threat of war in Europe ended the debate. Golden State Avenue Bridge was not built, and Twenty-Sixth Street Park was left untouched. ¹¹

In December 1940 the city council approved Councilman M.D. Marmaduke's motion permitting the planning commission to rename Twenty-Sixth Street Park. ¹² Exactly when that happened has yet to be discovered, but in June 1941 the North Bakersfield Improvement Club invited residents living between 24th Street and the Kern River to join the club in its first wiener bake and potluck supper. The site for that picnic was "Weill's Park." ¹³



Wading pool, 1963

¹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Nov 14, 1940, Dec 18, 1940

¹¹ City engineer Joe Holfelder was unable to give an accurate estimate of costs because coast steel mills demanded payment, upon delivery, based on current market costs. "Observers pointed out that quick action is needed on plans regarding the two traffic outlets because the effect of a war economy on domestic steel, concrete and lumber purchases may be of great significance during the months to come." (Bakersfield Californian, Dec 20, 1940)

¹² Bakersfield Californian, Dec 10, 1940

¹³ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 30, 1941. Alphonse Weill died in 1945.

In the mid-1960s State Route 99 no longer entering Bakersfield and instead followed a westside alignment that paralleled Oak Street.¹⁴

In 1963 the Bakersfield Californian reported that the 24th Street off-ramp was attracting scores of new visitors to Beach Park¹⁵ but “city operated Weill Park at Twenty-Sixth and Golden State Avenue has experienced a drop-off. It used to attract hundreds of motorists who wanted a few minutes rest away from the traffic. Today the park is practically empty.”¹⁶

At that time, planning was underway for the East Side Freeway -- now called 178. A major construction challenge was the location for an overcrossing of the Southern Pacific tracks near Weill Park,¹⁷ but that was solved when the state appropriated about a half acre of 26th Street that was just south of the park.

The Californian wrote in 1963, “The sale of the land to the state will not adversely affect the wading pool or other park facilities.”¹⁸ That was not entirely true. After the overcrossing was completed in summer 1966, access to the park was limited to its frontage on Q Street and James Street, and James Street dead-ended just past the park.¹⁹

In 1963 the state paid Bakersfield \$46,240 severance damage for the off-ramp property,²⁰ and with money in hand, the city council reviewed a proposal from the planning commission that Weill Park be

¹⁴ In the late 1970s, through traffic between Northern California and Southern Californian on Interstate 5 bypassed Bakersfield by 20 miles.

¹⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 8, 1963

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 12, 1965

¹⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 14, 1963. How much of the park was taken by the state is not clear. In 1926 the Californian said the park was 1.5 acres. (Bakersfield Californian, Dec 16, 1926) After the state took “the south side of Weill Park” for the freeway off ramp, Public Works Director Harold Bergen said the park contained 1.72 acres. (Bakersfield Californian, Mar 14, 1963). Today the park is reported as 1.8 acres. (City of Bakersfield, *Recreation & Parks 2016 Fall Brochure*). It is possible that most of the property the state acquired for the off ramp was mostly the half acre of 26th Street.

¹⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 22, 1963, Feb 2, 1966

²⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 21, 1963

closed and a one-and-a-quarter acre playground be built in Homacker Tract.²¹

But a new location for the park was not found, and Weill Park, now mostly hidden from view, became a crime area.²² Its reduced importance to the city was demonstrated in 1970 when the city removed a monumental stone there and installed it at Jastro Park.²³ Weill Park's amenities today are its grass, trash cans and a few light posts.²⁴ It is a small park but not the smallest or the least visited.



Weill Park mid left, Joshua Park at arrow

In 1995 seven year-old Joshua O. McMorris²⁵ was murdered, stuffed in a sleeping bag, and dumped in a vacant field about 1,000 feet northeast of Weill Park.²⁶ In memory of the little boy, the city dedicated a park of 0.6-acres near where his body was found. Joshua Park, Green and tidy, is surrounded on two sides by dirt fields and on the others by apartments in an easy-to-overlook residential enclave. Sole access is via Homacker Place east of Q Street. Joshua Park is

²¹ Bakersfield Californian Jun 18, 1963

²² Two strong-armed robberies occurred in the men's restroom. (Bakersfield Californian, Dec 15, 1969). A girl was murdered at the park. (Bakersfield Californian, Jul 13, 1975)

²³ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 4, 1970. See Gilbert P. Gia, *Henry A. Jastro, Commodore of Kern County, Biography, Kinships, Politics, 1848-1925*, <http://www.gilbertgia.com/articlePages/business1.html>

²⁴ City of Bakersfield, *Recreation & Parks 2016 Fall Brochure*

²⁵ Oct 8, 1987- Sep 10, 1995. Newspaper accounts say Joshua died on September 8.

²⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 1, 1997

lighted and has a drinking fountain but no parking. It is mostly for neighbors.