

WILL ROGERS PARK
(Will Rogers Horticultural Gardens)
3400 Northwest 36th Street
Oklahoma City
Oklahoma
Oklahoma

HALS OK-28
OK-28

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

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HALS NO. OK-28

Location: 3400 NW 36 Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.
Lat: 35.50513 Long: -97.58086

Significance: Will Rogers Park, named in honor of Oklahoma native Will Rogers, is one of the oldest park properties in Oklahoma City. Beginning in the 1930s, Henry Walters, the Parks Department's horticulturalist, began to develop the park. He worked landscape architects from the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Projects Administration to create the park's early design elements and structures that survive today. Eclectic in style, the park combines both formal and naturalistic elements. The park is a designated Oklahoma Landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

History: On land that was previously used as a dairy farm, Will Rogers Park began to take shape in 1932. Henry Walters was instrumental in the park's early development. Much of his work can still be seen in the park today. He, working with the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Projects Administration landscape architects, designed the park's early layout and planted a wide variety of native and exotic plants and trees, like roses, irises, azaleas, daylilies, junipers, oaks, and redbuds. Park plans were produced by the Oklahoma City Parks Department along with the National Parks Service. During the 1930s, Walters sought the assistance of the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Project Administration to construct essential and aesthetic structures in the park like rock arbors and lakes. The park has served as a meeting place for the Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs since 1938.

Located on 130 acres, the historic gardens are home to the Ed Lycan Conservatory, the Charles E. Sparks Rose Garden, the Margaret Annis Boys Arboretum, and the Will Rogers Garden Exhibition Center.

The Ed Lycan Conservatory, named after the first employee for the Oklahoma City Parks Department, was built in 1924 in Douglass Park. The historic greenhouse was designed by architects Lord and Burnham. In 1936, it was moved to Will Rogers Park. Today, the Conservatory is home to a sizable succulent and cacti collection that was donated in 1987 from the estate of Charles and Mary Polaski.

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The Charles E. Sparks Rose Garden was originally designed and constructed by the Oklahoma Rose Society in 1938. In 1986, the rose garden's name changed from the Oklahoma City Municipal Rose Garden to its current name in honor of

Charles E. Sparks, a longtime Oklahoma City Parks Department employee who worked in the rose gardens. The rose garden was at one time one of the largest in the United States. Today, the formal rose garden is home to a sizable collection of 85 varieties of roses with over 3000 rose bushes. There are two sculptures located within the garden. One is of a mother and daughter, said to represent a mother's struggle to delay her daughter's transition into adulthood. Munich artists Richard Aigner created the sculpture which was purchased and donated to the park in the 1930 by art collector J.J. Culberson. The other statue is of Will Rogers, which was created by Lawrence Tenny Stevens and donated in 1955.

The ten-acre Margaret Annis Boys Arboretum began under the direction of horticulturalist Henry Walters in the 1930s. It is home hundreds of different species of trees. Some of the major collections are of varieties of oak, juniper, crab apple, crape myrtle, and redbud. The collection also is home to a variety of exotic species to Oklahoma. In September 2007, the arboretum was named after Margaret Annis Boys, a local philanthropist who set up the Margaret Annis Boys Trust with a \$1.5 million donation to the Oklahoma City Community Foundation for the beautification of public spaces throughout the Oklahoma City area. The arboretum is a recipient of funds from the trust.

In addition to the winding paths and beautiful plants and trees throughout the park, the park also serves as a public meeting space for the Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs since 1938. Today, the clubs meet in the Will Rogers Garden Exhibition Center which was built in 1963.

Sources: City of Oklahoma City: Will Rogers Park,
http://www.okc.gov/Parks/will_rogers/index.html (accessed September 19, 2009).

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum, <http://www.ocgi.okstate.edu/shpo/nhrpdfs/05001000.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2009).

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View of the Ed Lycan Conservatory located in Will Rogers Park (Steve Eilers, 2009).

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View of the rose garden from across the water (Steve Eilers, 2009).