



Resorts and Parks at Bakersfield, 1891-1921

by Gilbert P. Gia

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Offer's Resort

Although Offer's was the biggest of the family parks, it was not the first family-friendly one. First was John Barker's hot springs opened in 1891 just east of today's Hart Park on the Kern River, but by later standards it was small and was in operation only until the flood of 1893.¹ Another predecessor, although a much larger one, was Hudnut Park on the north side of Bakersfield. Although Hudnut's accommodated thousands -- it hosted Admission Day, 1897, and the county fair of 1908 -- it was never an amusement resort in the sense that Offer's was.²

In 1898 Charles Offer³ owned a water company at San Francisco and 320 acres on the Kern Mesa by the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks about three miles east of Bakersfield. Under the half-section lay an aquifer of untested potential. If it could supply six continuous hours of flow, then the source would be considered inexhaustible and signal the next stage of development. Offer installed a great, electrical dynamo and pump that revealed an aquifer so astonishingly great that

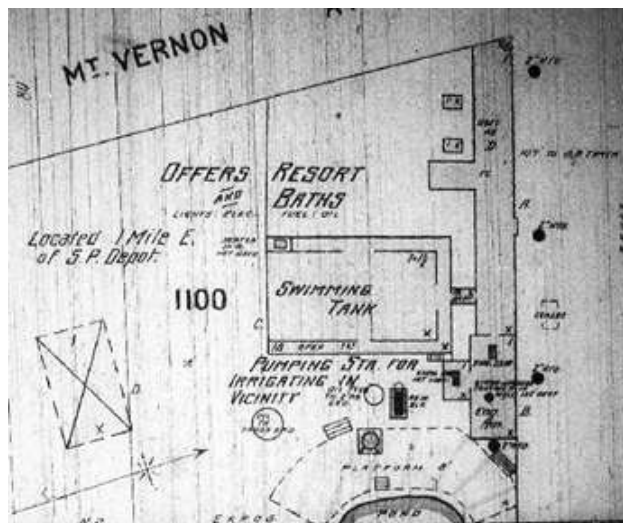
¹ See Gilbert Gia, *Fabulous Barker Springs*. The paper follows parenthetical citation guidelines of the American Language Association.

² See Gilbert Gia, *Origins of the Kern County Fair*

³ Charles Offer, born in 1851, was counted in the 1900 US Census at San Francisco as "Proprietor of Water Works." His business was the "Charles Offer Water Company" (*Municipal Engineering* 210).

it easily filled a reservoir of 3,000,000-gallons (*Daily Californian* 16 Feb, 11 Aug, 5 Sep 1899).⁴

Offer planted alfalfa and started construction of a bath house, which the *Californian* characterized as “the real end in view from the beginning” (*Daily Californian* 11 Aug, 5 Sep 1899). “The house at the proposed bath sites is about complete and has a pleasing appearance, the monotony of its 200 feet of frontage being broken by several towers, and the effect is very satisfactory. The building will when finished contain a number of apartments devoted to different uses and will include a restaurant conducted on the chop-house plan, confectionary stands, ice cream parlors and a barroom all to be for the patronage of the public, of course, and carried on in such a a manner that all privacy will be avoided. The barroom will not even contain card rooms” (*Daily Californian* 16 Feb 1898).



Sanborn Fire Map, July 1901

⁴ Water was turned into the East Side Canal in Jan 1892. The aquifer at Offer's removed the need to buy canal water or be concerned with drought. The capacity of a 3M-gallon reservoir is about the same as three football fields covered by 7 feet of water. See *Daily Californian* 13 Feb 1892 for background on the East Side Canal.



In 1898 Offer's was *"the best-lighted institution in the valley. From 300 to 400 incandescents will be employed besides one arc light of 2000 candle and ten others of 100 candle power each. Throughout the building the temperature will be regulated by electric fans, a shaft having been run the whole length of the structure for this purpose alone"* (*Daily Californian* 16 Feb 1898).⁵ Outside, Offer built an open-air pavilion seating 2,500.



Daily Californian, July 11, 1901

⁵ The building was 65 x 115-feet.

The public had little doubt about what Offer meant when he promised *"all privacy will be avoided;"* it was his guarantee that the new resort would not be like those notorious town saloons where prostitutes engaged their trade behind heavily-curtained booths.⁶ *"Mr. Offer has struck upon an ingenious method of keeping undesirable parties from patronizing him, and the place will assuredly maintain a high reputation and be reliably worthy of the support of the community. Everything is absolutely public. There are no private rooms; no nooks or corners; not even a card room. On the contrary every part of the premises is in full view of everybody and the class that delights in closed doors and turned locks will not find there those things which are to their liking"* (*Daily Californian* 7 Apr 1898).

Some days later the newspaper wrote, *"Mr. Offer informs the Californian that he will from time to time engage the finest of talent to amuse the patrons of his establishment. He will get the best or none at all"* (*ibid.*). Wolton & Garden, a high-class comedy team from the San Francisco Orpheum Theater, opened the first show at the outdoor pavilion, and for several weeks they performed each Saturday at 2 and 8 pm and the free Sunday matinee at 2 pm (*Daily Californian* 19, 22 Apr 1898). Offer also boosted patronage by establishing round-trip bus transportation from Baer's Drug store at 19th and Chester in Bakersfield (*Daily Californian* 25 Apr 1899).

The resort could have suffered a public relations setback a week after the grand opening when Offer's swim tank burst, but the *Californian* wrote otherwise:⁷ *"The band was in attendance, however, and the big crowd that went out enjoyed itself"* (6, 7 Jun 1898). Another possible blow to business came one weekend in June when

⁶ See Gilbert Gia, *Mme. Brignaudy In The Bakersfield Tenderloin*

⁷ The tank was above ground. The Sanborn Fire Map of 1912 indicated that it was 40 x 80 feet.

unruly patrons disrupted the crowd. Offer acted quickly. *"Constable Stroble will be at Offer's resort on Sunday next, and this officer will see to it that order is kept in all parts of the premises"* (*Daily Californian* 24 Jun 1898).

Constable Stroble probably did his job because a few days later Offer's trumpeted, *"There will be a great celebration at Offer's resort on the Fourth. The Bakersfield band will be in attendance from 1 p.m. until 11 p.m. to delight the public. A swimming contest will take place between the hours of 6 and 7 p.m. and the match will be under the direct supervision of Mr. Offer. The winner will receive a purse of \$2.50"* (*Daily Californian* 30 Jun 1898).

Swimming races included 100-yard dashes on the lake for men and 25-yard dashes in the plunge for boys, and those competitions were followed by a Professor Love, who *"will continue his high dive until further notice"* (*Daily Californian* 3 Aug 1898). With such use of the tank, was the water hygienic? Each day it was emptied and refilled, wrote the *Californian*, and it was *"the only plunge in the state that has facilities of doing so"* (*Daily Californian* 26 May 1899).⁸ Although the newspaper did not say as much, Offer's prolific well probably made possible for a continuous flow of fresh water into the tank.

Charles Offer next turned his attention to marketing his water in another way. In 1893 the Sumner Water Works, via its Director James Bernard,⁹ contracted with the town of Sumner¹⁰ to dig a water well at

⁸ According to Bakersfield Architect Clarence Cullimore, Jr., local health codes in 1935 required public swimming pools tested for fecal mater and coliform bacteria, but the building codes did not require water filtration or recirculation (Gilbert Gia interview with Clarence Cullimore, Jr., Feb. 2012).

⁹ Others were Benedetto Ardizzi, John M. Keith, and Simon Wible (Boyd 34-35).

¹⁰ Now East Bakersfield

the north end of Baker Street.¹¹ Bernard mentioned a possible production of 1,500,000 gallons a day,¹² but the public focused on rumors that he would build a park and *"huge swimming bath"* around the wellhead. A newspaper speculated, *"What a pleasure it would be to take a Sunday morning stroll or jump on the electric cars and go up and take a plunge. A greater solace cannot be fancied. It is not too much to say that there is hardly a man, woman or child in Sumner or Bakersfield but would some time or other, give it their patronage"* (Sumner Standard 16 Feb 1893). Sumner Water Works did not follow up on the park or the swimming pool, but delivery of water from the well started in July, 1893 (Boyd 35). The well at north Baker appeared in the news in 1903 when residents of Kern City, formerly Sumner, petitioned the city council *"to locate a park in the vicinity of the waterworks on Baker Street, ... to secure from citizens a donation of the land necessary."* Could the council, too, convince the water company to donate water for the park (*Daily Californian* 23 May 1903)? No park was built.

The *Californian* wrote that Charles Offer Waterworks Company signed a 50-year contract with Kern City to install a circulating water system for domestic needs and fire protection and without cost for the first five years. After that period, customers would pay for service, but in return, Offer would return three percent of gross proceeds to Kern City (*Daily Californian* 7 Nov 1899, *Los Angeles Times* 23 Nov 1899). Two months later the project was still on paper, perhaps because the Offer Company incorporated (*San Francisco Call* 8 Feb 1900, *Daily Californian* 5, 23 Feb 1900), but by June it announced it would start

¹¹ The newspaper said the elevation of the well on north Baker Street was 64-feet higher than the elevation at Baker and Inyo Streets. Topographical maps suggest that the water works well was located near the intersection of Baker and Bernard Streets.

¹² Water was found at 70 feet.

laying mains to Kern City (*Los Angeles Times* 14 Jun 1900). Nothing shows that ever happened. In September 1900, the town worried that the water shortage of the prior summer would repeat itself (*Daily Californian* 17 Sep 1900), and although there was no repeat of the drought, Sumner Water Works Company scrambled for the next decade to meet the water demands of the growing community.¹³

Mr. Offer might have lived briefly here, but he was gone at the time the company incorporated.¹⁴ Charles A. Zwick was named manager of Offer's Resort, and its name was changed to Zwick's Resort and Swimming Baths (*Daily Californian* 10 Mar 1900), but Zwick stayed only a few months. His successor was William H. McEwen who understood promotion (*Daily Californian* 23 Jun 1900). McEwen reinstated the name Offer's Resort and added a bit of novelty -- "*Enjoy a swim at Offer's Resort. Bear barbecue at 5 p.m.*" (*Daily Californian* 23 June 1900). Applauding Mr. McEwen, the *Californian* wrote, "*Under new management of its new proprietor, Offer's Resort is rapidly regaining its old time popularity. Besides being thoroughly renovated and overhauled, a radical change has been made in the methods of conducting the place. Among the new features in contemplation by Mr. McEwen is the establishment of a 'Children's Day.' Beginning tomorrow and every Wednesday during the summer between the hours of 2 and 4 all school children in Bakersfield and Kern under the age of 15 will be given a free bath in the great cement swimming tank. Special attention is being given to the swimming tanks, and it is now*

¹³ See *Daily Californian* 12 Mar, 21 Jun, 1901; 2 July 1902; 14 Mar 1902; 27 Jan, 25 Mar 1903. In 1906 the town of Kern City sued the company over its water rates (*Daily Californian* 16 July 1906).

¹⁴ The 1900 US Census shows a Charles Offer, 48, at San Francisco. He died July 10, 1910 at Salt Lake City. He was survived by his wife, Leah, and children Ollivert, Elsie, Leland, Harold, Clarence, Nathan, and Kate. Pacific Lodge No. 136, F. & A. M. met on Sunday July 17 at San Francisco "to attend the funeral of their late brother, Charles Offer" (*San Francisco Call* 16 July 1910).

thoroughly cleaned and filled with pure fresh water every morning" (*Daily Californian*, 26 Jun 1900).

The Fourth of July 1900 was not publically celebrated at Bakersfield, nor at Kern City, but Offer's had a big show scheduled. The important baseball game at Bakersfield was moved forward two hours to give the public time to get out to Offer's for the entertainment. McEwen had planned a surplus of events: Bicycling, running, swimming, gentlemen's diving, a trotting race, a balloon ascension, Mexican rough-riding, cattle roping, and chicken-pulling ¹⁵ (*Daily Californian* 4 Sep 1900). Late that evening the show concluded with a dance and fireworks (*Daily Californian*, 27, 29, 30 Jun 1900).

In September, Offer's Resort was so popular that seven buses a day connected it to Bakersfield (*Daily Californian* 4 Sep 1900). Racing, aquatic sports and dancing continued in the summers 1901, 1902, and 1903, but in winter 1904 Offer's Resort introduced boxing. "*A crowd of devotees of the fistic art gathered yesterday afternoon at Offer's resort to witness a battle between Tommy Elks of Denver and George Montgomery of the Hays Valley Club of San Francisco. The affair was pulled off quickly, but those who witnessed it say it was a good mill*" (*Daily Californian* 11 Jan 1904). Fisticuffs continued through winter (*Daily Californian* 24 March 1904).¹⁶

Boxing might have kept families away, but McEwen was not around to solve the problem. His replacement was E.A. Hardison, and he reintroduced the family-friendly format (*Daily Californian* 6 Apr 1904). Hardison promised to run the place on a strictly-guaranteed,

¹⁵ Chickens were buried with only their heads and necks exposed. A rider at full gallop leaned down and while passing the bird grabbed it by the head and returned to the starting point.

¹⁶ Boxing drew large crowds here at the turn of the century. See Gilbert Gia, Aurelio Herrera, First Mexican-American Boxing Champion

first-class, orderly manner. He spruced-up the grounds, prohibited alcohol, and invited families to bring their lunches, picnic by the lake, indulge in boat rides, swim in the steam-heated plunge, take tub baths, and buy his ice cream and lemonade. Tuesday afternoons were now expressly for ladies and children, and Tuesday evenings for ladies and their escorts. An instructor taught swimming. Round-trip bus tickets from Kern City to the 8,000-square-foot resort were 25 cents, which included the admission and a free bath in the afternoon (*Daily Californian* 18 Jun 1904).

"Hundreds Gathered at Offer's Resort and Enjoyed a Dance and a Cool Plunge, " read a Californian headline of July 15, 1904. Nearly 500 visitors entered the plunge that evening, and many others, who did not care to swim, filled the dance hall. Perhaps they had little interest in antics at the swimming tank where athletic Lotharios twirled on the trapeze and rings, dove from the rafters, and elicited gasps from female spectators. "Some of the ladies, too, were swimmers, and while they did not attempt the daring dives of the male swimmers, they showed that they knew the art and were not novices. Those who could not swim found a place in the shallow end of the pool where they could practice. The slide placed at the shallow end of the pool where it could be used by all regardless of their knowledge or lack of knowledge of the art of swimming was also a source of endless fun to many and was in almost constant use by the bathers. The ladies' committee was on hand to greet all arrivals at the door and make them feel at home. The large building was ablaze with lights, and the strains of music sounded from the dancing room inviting all devotees

of Terpsichore [sic Terpsichore] ¹⁷ to partake of the pleasures of the waltz "(Daily Californian 16 Jul 1904).

In summer, 1905, Hardison's programs attracted fraternal groups, including affiliated women with the B.L.F.,¹⁸ the O.R.C.,¹⁹ and the Ladies Auxiliary to the B.L.E.²⁰ Wrote the *Californian*, "Their parties are becoming very popular and are much enjoyed this warm weather. Refreshments are always served" (Daily Californian 12 Jul 1905). Public enthusiasm was not curbed by a painful accident in August when Miss Clara Corday careened down the slide, struck her head on the tank, and slipped under the water. Friends hastening to her rescue pulled her out unconscious. She recovered. (Daily California 5 Aug 1905).



Bakersfield Californian September 10, 1906

When Hardison closed in October, the corporation had not extended his five-year lease. He said he would not make

¹⁷ Terpsichore was one of the nine Muses of Greek mythologies. She ruled over the dance.

¹⁸ Probably Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen

¹⁹ Probably the York Rite's, Order of the Red Cross (Masonic)

²⁰ Probably the Baptist Life Association

improvements but did hope to rent the resort in the winter for dancing parties (*Daily Californian* 19 Oct 1905).

Business was good in summer 1906. In August, 400 attended a late-evening watermelon party. "*The crowd commenced arriving as early a 6:30 o'clock and from then until midnight the resort was buzzing with life and fun. The quantity of watermelons was large, but even more guests than were expected were present, and the supply fell short of the demand*" (*Daily Californian* 6 Aug 1906).²¹ The resort was busy again in the summers of 1907 and 1908, but it was permanently closed in fall 1908.²²

Because this area had no entertainment venues as large as Offer's, it was not elbowed-out by competition; a more likely reason was the change that had come to the Kern Mesa. In fall 1908 Bakersfield businessmen formed the Kern Mesa Land Tract to develop 160 acres just across the tracks from Offer's Resort (*Bakersfield Californian* 9 Oct 1908). A bit farther east that winter, Edison Land & Water Company drilled water wells and installed electric pumps. Edison was also on top an abundance of water (Morgan 150). Another company, Edison Land & Water, planted citrus in spring 1909, and by 1910, thousands of acres along both sides of Edison Road were in orange groves (Morgan 150).

In July 1909, F.W. Tegeler,²³ John Arnott, D. Hirshfeld,²⁴ J.M. Jameson, H.R. Peacock,²⁵ and other investors in Suburban Land &

²¹ Editor and owner of *The Daily Californian* Alfred Harrell changed the masthead of his newspaper to *The Bakersfield Californian* sometime between August 1906 and July 1907.

²² J.B. Cox was the last manager of Offer's Resort (*Bakersfield Californian* 8 Jul 1908).

²³ F. Tegeler was a principal owner in the Southern Hotel.

²⁴ Charles Offer, Walter Hirschfeld, and H.B. Harris were members of Unity Lodge, B'nai B'rith of San Francisco (*San Francisco Call* 13 Jun 1900). In 1892 Herman Hirshfeld and Henry Jastro were officers of Bakersfield Building & Loan (*Daily*

Water Company, bought Offer's Resort and its entire half section, but a year later, on May 30, 1910, it sold to the International Tool Company of Los Angeles (*Morning Echo* 18 Feb 1913). International's subsidiary Vyra Development announced it would subdivide and build a suburban-industrial village having sidewalks, broad streets, water mains, a sewerage system, and possibly a trolley connection to Bakersfield. The balance of the property would be a plant for manufacturing oil field pipe-clamps (*Bakersfield Californian* 3 May 1910).

Building fever set in but not because of Vyra. Ranch houses appeared here-and-there almost to Edison, and in fall 1911, six cottages were built opposite the old Offer's Resort (*Bakersfield Californian* 7 Sep 1911). But the Kern Mesa's future was in orange groves, and Vyra's ambitious plans did not get off the drawing board. Offer's Resort was used for private apartments for about seven years. In 1915, attorneys Frank P. Doherty and H. C. Borton of Los Angeles offered the site as a park to the City of Bakersfield: 145 acres for \$46,475 or 33 acres with buildings and pumping plant for \$12,000. "*The resort in addition to bath houses contains a big swimming hole and one of the best wells in the county,*" wrote the *Californian*, and lawyers agreed that improvements alone were worth the asking price (*Bakersfield Californian* 6 Nov 1915). But the city chose not to buy, and the company sub-divided for small farms (*Bakersfield Californian* 12 Jan 1916).

Californian 8 Jun 1892). Jastro's sister Minna was married to Leopold Harris of Los Angeles. Those and other family and business connections probably alerted Charles Offer to the investment opportunities of Kern County. "*The remarkable development of irrigation in California is due in a large measure to the foresight and the confidence of the late Daniel Mayer in such enterprises. He was about the only one of the early Jewish financiers who undertook other than purely commercial transactions. It is well nigh impossible to overestimate the significance of irrigation systems for the development of the State*" (*Western Jewry* 10).

²⁵ This group might have been investors in Charles Offer's first incorporation.

Six months later the resort passed into memory. *"Offer's resort one mile east of Bakersfield on Edison Highway was burned to the ground in an early morning fire started about 5:30 yesterday from an explosion of a gasoline stove in apartments occupied by the family of J.M. Arnold. The Arnold family occupied the central apartment and lost their entire belongings. Mrs. Arnold was in the yard at the time of the explosion, and the father was away from home working. Jimmy Arnold, a 10-year old boy, saved his baby sister by entering the burning apartments after others had given-up the child as lost. The baby was slightly burned. The heroic young brother entered the apartment through a window and escaped with his burden just a few moments before the roof fell and made a raging inferno"* (*Morning Echo* 18 Jul 1916).

Offer's was in the news briefly in 1918 when three aircraft from Rockwell Field flew in from Riverside on a mission to chart airmail routes between San Diego and Bakersfield. Army Air Corp Lieutenant Lawrence Weill of Bakersfield and the Kern County Board of Trade concluded that Offer's on the Edison road would be the most favorable landing site for the military aircraft, and they painted a white, 20-foot "T" to mark the field (*Morning Echo* 20 Dec 1918).

Vlasnik's Crystal Baths

In 1908 Bakersfield Councilman A.F. Stoner suggested that the city buy Mrs. Stark's 10-acre parcel north of 19th Street and west of Union Avenue for a public park (*Morning Echo* 26 Jul 1908). The city did not buy it, but in 1910, 49 year-old Joe Vlasnik acquired a slice of the Stark property (*Bakersfield Californian* 6 Jan 1910). There at 19th

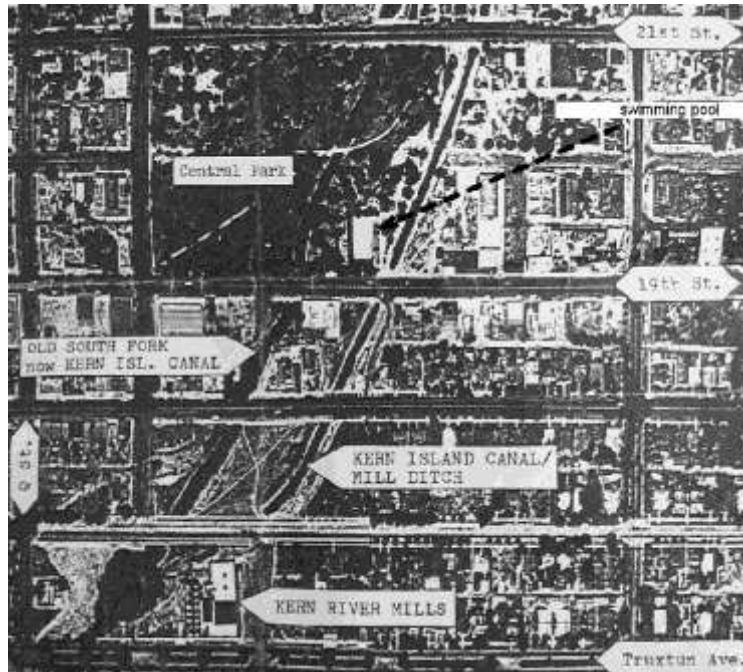
and S Streets he made plans to construct an 88 x 126-foot natatorium²⁶ facing south onto 19th Street, and he had considerable room for future expansion because the lot extended to 20th (*Bakersfield Californian* 28 Nov 1910). Excavation started immediately. Workmen poured the swimming tank floor in spring (*Bakersfield Californian* 31 Mar 1910).

Crystal Baths, which was what Vlasnik named his natatorium, welcomed its first customers on an evening in June, 1910. Awaiting were 160 private, adult dressing rooms, 40 lockers for boys, 10 restrooms, three hot-and-cold shower baths, 700 bathing suits, 700 swimming caps, stockings for women swimmers, and a special drying room for ladies' hair. Above the pool was a balcony for spectators and in the rafters 200 light bulbs (*Bakersfield Californian* 8 Jun 1910).



Vlasnik Family about 1904

Offer's Resort had been remote, but Vlasnik's Crystal Baths was literally downtown, and its location on the 19th Street trolley route meant Vlasnik had to do little more than open the doors for customers. Nevertheless, the location had its downside. It was but two blocks



Neighborhood of Vlasnik swimming pool
(1947 aerial, McGuire Local History Room, Beale Library)

from the Bakersfield Tenderloin, which in 1910 was still a raucous neighborhood. A few weeks after Vlasnik opened, 23 year-old Louis Vlasnik, Jr., happened upon a man peeping through a hole in the wall of a women's dressing room. The rogue ran, Vlasnik shot at him, and Mr. Peeping Tom shot back. After that, an officer was stationed at Crystal Baths (*Bakersfield Californian* 29 Jun 1910).

Vlasnik's ads in the fall of 1910 suggest that Crystal Baths was in full swing with club races and fancy diving contests (*Bakersfield Californian* 3 September 1910), but on the night of September 6, 1910 someone was getting ready to put Vlasnik out of business. About 10 p.m. Vlasnik and sons locked up and went home.

Around 10:30 a Miss Carmen Castro saw a man running away from the natatorium, and minutes later Fire Chief Gundlach, who happened to be talking with his father on 19th Street, noticed a glare from the pavilion. Chief Gundlach called the fire house, but by the time

the men arrived the flames were moving so quickly through the building that all they could do was protect the pump house. An hour later the pavilion was smoldering ashes. In the next morning several empty gasoline cans were found among the rubble (*Morning Echo* 6 Sep 1910).

The loss was about \$15,000, of which about two-thirds was returned from insurance. Importantly, the fire had not ruined the concrete foundation, tank, pool engine,²⁷ or pump house. The newspaper said all of Vlasnik's sons were competent mechanics, and the family would rebuild by itself. They hoped to reopen the plunge in April (*Bakersfield Californian* 28 Nov 1910).

Vlasnik did not rebuild, although another party did. In 1913, Bakersfield Builders' Exchange erected a two-story, 90-foot-wide natatorium with an outdoor skating rink and dance floor on the Vlasnik lot. The Exchange then incorporated the Bakersfield Amusement Company for the project, and Mr. and Mrs. Vlasnik joined as partners. Several days before the signing of financial arrangements, architect Wiseman's drawings were on display in the office of O.C. Schatz, the Exchange secretary. The plan showed a fireproof structure of steel and concrete (*Bakersfield Californian* 9 Jun 1911, 10 Apr 1913).

On July 12, 1913, the 40 x 90-foot plunge opened for swimmers,²⁸ although the skating rink, dance pavilion and roof garden were unfinished (*Bakersfield Californian* 23 Aug 1913). The plunge was an improvement over Offer's of 1898: A gutter encircled the rim, and the tank was refreshed by a continuously flowing stream of water that

²⁷ The engine was an electric motor. The mechanical system included a steam boiler.

²⁸ This is the site of the Federal Building at Central Park/Mill Creek Park on 19th Street.

could be heated to 85 degrees (*Bakersfield Californian* 12 Jul 1913).²⁹ Unlike Offer's, this resort was a year-around destination.

Exactly why the public avoided the plunge that summer is not known, but lack of use and lagging interest in the stock of Bakersfield Amusement Company halted further construction. For six months the building stood empty with only its outside walls and five overhead steel girders. On the 17th and 18th of January 1914 a freak windstorm swept across Kern County and turned the unfinished resort into a mass of tangled steel and splintered wood (*Bakersfield Californian* 19 Jan 1914).

Months later, Union Lumber Company took legal action to recover more than \$7,000 in materials that had been purchased on credit. Named were the Bakersfield Amusement Company, a Joseph Robrusky, and Mr. and Mrs. Vlasnik. The Vlasniks lost their property (*Bakersfield Californian* 7 Aug 1916).

Vaughn's

In 1906 Benjamin C. Vaughn's 480 acres about five or six miles west of Bakersfield had an artesian well that flowed 660-miners-inches, which meant that water poured forth in excess of 1,000-gallons a minute without pumping (Morgan 559, *Bakersfield Californian* 10 Jun 1915).³⁰ By 1910 Vaughn operated a public plunge there (*Morning Echo* 24 Jul 1910), but sometime after that he gave the

²⁹ Water entering via the 10-in. main was driven by a 25 HP pump. The abundance of electricity in 1913 might have allowed continuous use of the pump. A well on the property was the source of water (*Bakersfield Californian* 26 Jul 1921).

³⁰ The distance from Bakersfield suggests that Vaughn's was at or near today's Rosedale Highway overcrossing of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks.

management over to an Ed Grandy. *"It is the intention of Mr. Vaughn and Mr. Grandy to make the place one of the finest resorts in the lower part of the valley and patrons of the place are assured of fair treatment and first class service,"* wrote the *Californian* (*ibid.*). Grandy installed new dressing rooms, electric lighting, and towel and bathing suit stations. A pool slide was in the works.

Vaughn's became an exclusive destination. *"The fact that the plunge is the only resort of its kind in this part of the country should be an incentive for Bakersfield people,"* said the *Californian* (*ibid.*). *"A 12-inch steam of deep well water runs in at one end all day and night, while the outlet is at the extreme end. The bottom is of sand, which has a tendency to carry off any impurities that would otherwise might [sic] stay in a concrete tank"* (*ibid.*).

Days later the seemingly staid crowd from Peerless Oil Company showed up but that evening *"put on an hilarious time"* (*Bakersfield Californian* 12, 16 Jun 1915). On a similar occasion, 100 of the staff from Hochheimer's department store boarded *"six auto trucks"* and enjoyed *"a jollification at the popular resort."* Vaughn's contribution was sandwiches, ice cream, coffee and soda pop (*Bakersfield Californian* 20 Jul 1915). Days later, nearly 400 others swam at Vaughn's (*Bakersfield Californian* 22 Jul 1915), which caused Mr. Grandy to increase the number of dressing rooms, add another diving board, improve the slide, and provide tables to seat 300. Grandy dealt-out swimsuits to the multitudes (*Bakersfield Californian* 28 Jul 1915).

White City

Back in 1910 a 27 year-old building contractor named C.D. Brown, his wife Edna Brown, and their 1-1/2 year-old daughter Bernice

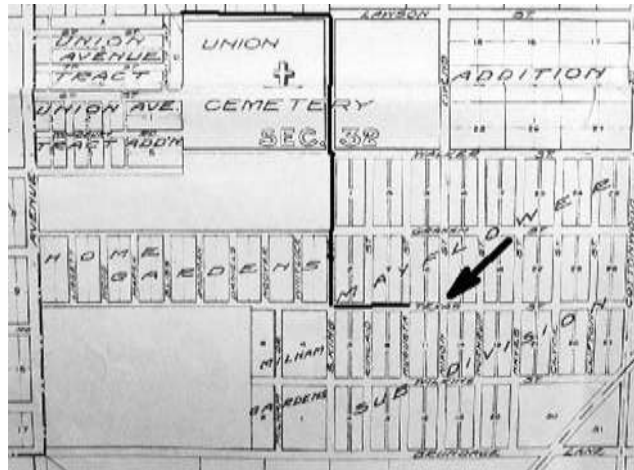
lived in a prosperous neighborhood on Orange Street about a block south of Bakersfield High School. Nearby were the homes of two other building contractors, three railroad conductors, a carpenter, an oil driller, and a doctor in general practice named Samuel F. Smith, all of which suggest that Brown was well-to-do in 1910 (US Census 1910).

About the same time, a successful New Jersey brewer named Joseph Baumgartner acquired property at Union Avenue and 24th Street and started construction on a modern brewery. Baumgartner's contractor was C.D. Brown, and he successfully completed the job in March 1912.³¹ Around the same time Brown was working on the brewery, he bought several acres about one-half mile south of California Avenue and Baker Street. In summer 1911 the city annexed the tract, named it Mayflower Addition (Kern County Hall of Records),³² and weeks later the Browns were selling residential lots (*Bakersfield Californian* 10 Jul 1911). A trade journal wrote that Brown drilled a well there. "*C.D. Brown, a well known local contractor,³³ has installed a five horsepower motor for domestic use near his bungalow in the Mayflower sub-division*" (*San Joaquin Light and Power Magazine*).

³¹ See Gilbert Gia, *Bakersfield Breweries*

³² Henry A. Jastro: "*Our present population will be doubled within a year or so more.*" Kern County was the seventh richest county in the State, according to a 1911 assessment, and showed a 25% increase over 1910 owing one-third to increased real estate values and improvements and two-thirds to the oil industry ("*Our Neighbors. Why Kern County is the Land of Opportunities*" *Los Angeles Times* 28 Jan 1912).

³³ In 1911 Brown was treasurer of Bakersfield Builders' Exchange (*Bakersfield Californian* 6 Jun 1911).



1934 map of Bakersfield, McGuire Local History Room, Beale Library
Arrow shows approximate location of C.D. Brown's property.

C.D. Brown's home in the Mayflower Addition was probably on today's Texas Street between South King and Cottonwood, and the most direct route from Bakersfield to his place was via South King Street. On today's maps the Mayflower Addition is near Union Cemetery. Why would the public buy residential lots so near? An answer shows that Union Cemetery of 1911 was inconspicuous from public roads: There was no cemetery between East 10th and East Potomac,³⁴ graves at the old cemetery were 500 feet distant from the streets, and everything east of South King Street was still fields.³⁵

In 1915 Mrs. C.D. Brown hosted dancing parties at her home, but before much longer opened them to the public. By June, the *Californian* praised her maple-floored Mayflower Dancing Pavilion (*Bakersfield Californian* 5 Feb, 6 May, 11 Jun 1915). Attendance increased, as well as boisterous behavior, which might have been why

³⁴ The cemetery west of Bessie Owens School

³⁵ The Mayflower Addition did not abut Union Cemetery until April 17, 1925 when the cemetery association acquired 28.673-acres east of South King Street (*Union Cemetery Minutes Book*).

her new ads cautioned "No Ragging"³⁶ (*Bakersfield Californian* 11 Jun, 24 May 1915).



Bakersfield Californian, December 31, 1915

"The pavilion floor which is considered the best in the county has been given special attention for the Saturday night affair, and the proprietors are assured of a good crowd. At midnight a dainty luncheon is served with real home-made cakes as dessert. No rough element is tolerated and for this reason Mr. and Mrs. Brown are assured of lasting success in their new enterprise" (*Bakersfield Californian* Jul 15, 1915). As bright as the words were, the Browns surely knew that a few miles west of them, on Union Avenue, a farmer named Roberts was well on his way to becoming a competitor.

In March 1916 a Mr. John E. Roberts was finishing a 100 x 281-foot concrete reservoir bordering on increasingly-busy State Highway 99 just south of Bakersfield. Roberts was probably aware that C.D. Brown was not only building his own concrete swimming pool but also a 150 x 200-foot artificial lake. The two, competing plunges opened

³⁶ Ragtime dancing (1910-1920) introduced hopping and fast and slow moves to dancing. One rag-time, dance form was called The Castle Walk, which was named for Irene and Vernon Castle. In 1914 they starred in a dance film called *The Whirl of Life*. Their later, short films featured rag-time dances, the names of which intimate the movements: The Animal, The Hesitation Waltz, and The Grizzly Bear. Bakersfield movie-goers would have tried those dances at Mayflower Dancing Pavilion.

within a month of one another, although Robert's got the nod for being the larger -- local newspapers called it the largest in the West.³⁷

On Saturday afternoon April 22, 1916, preceding Easter Sunday, the Browns opened Mayflower Plunge, complete with swings, spring boards, *"and everything to make an up-to-date plunge."* The pool was 50 x 200, and 2-feet at one end and 8-feet at the other. Open, too, was their 35 x 65-feet, open-air pavilion with a *"cabaret dancing floor."* The Browns had a bus that transported patrons from their cars to the park (*Bakersfield Californian* 13 Apr 1916). The following weekend somewhat more than 200 persons attended a Saturday evening dance. Mayflower Plunge grew so successful that Brown built additional springboards and added nearly 50 dressing rooms (*Bakersfield Californian* 29 Apr 1916).

"The swimming pools adjacent to the city have become important social centers these hot days and evenings, and every night parking space is at a premium, so great is the number of auto parties enjoying a cool plunge," wrote the *Californian*. *"Little supper parties, picnic dinners, and an hour or two of late dancing are fascinating follow ups of the swim which coteries of intimates find ample compensation for the discomforts of the day"* (*Bakersfield Californian* 13 Jul 1916).

The Browns were clearly successful; why did they buy quizzical newspaper ads that asked, "Where Is The One Bright Spot?" *"The secret's out,"* said an ad. *"The whereabouts of that mysterious amusement resort, White City, has been divulged. And Bakersfield is at last going to have a summer park--a place where mother, father, sister and the kiddies may visit and have the time of their lives. The*

³⁷ See Gilbert Gia, *Union Avenue Plunge 1916-93*

management has arranged for the appearance on that day of Minyhn Onstott Baker, the champion woman swimmer of the pacific coast and one of the most graceful aquatic experts in America.³⁸ There will be no admission fee. The whole she-bang will be as free as the air you breathe. White City will have its own motor train. The train will accommodate 26 passengers and the fare will be 10 cents each way. Cabaret Hall will be in full blossom, Crystal Plunge will provide fun and recreation for everybody, and music from the \$2000 orchestra will entertain the crowds throughout the afternoon and evening” (*Bakersfield Californian* 15 Jun 1916). The One Bright Spot was the

Bakersfield's Only
Amusement Resort
OPENS SUNDAY
STAYS OPEN

Everybody Welcome.
Admission **FREE**
COME EARLY
STAY LATE

WHITE CITY

"The One Bright Spot"
(Formerly Mayflower Park)

CRYSTAL PLUNGE
The Finest Swimming Tank
in Kern County. Pure, sparkling
water from a 200-foot
well; always fresh and clean.

Added Attraction
MINYHN
ONSTOTT
BAKER
California's Greatest
Woman Swimmer
She Swam the
GOLDEN GATE
See Her
at
2:30 p. m.
and
8:00 p. m.
FREE

CABARET HALL
The Gayest Spot in Town.
Hear the \$2000 Orchestra.
Eat, Drink, Dance, Be Merry.

MAYFLOWER HALL
The Home of the Popular
Saturday Night Dances. Good
Music Supper; Ladies Free.

HONEYMOON BRIDGE
—the Crossing of Which
Brings You to the Cabaret
Hall, Where Music and Fun
Await Your Supreme.

Kiddies! See the live
Ostriches. Play in the
sand.

Girls! Ask the Managers
About Mrs. Baker's
Summer Classes.
Learn How to Swim
Right.

Motor Train Leaves 19th
Street and Chester Avenue
Every Half Hour. One
Way Tickets Ten Cents.

Motorists: Go East on 19th
to Baker Street. Turn to the
Right and Follow Our Signs
Direct to **WHITE CITY**.

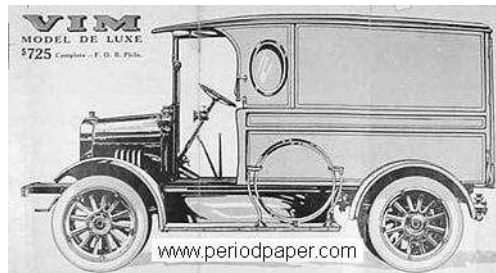
Bakersfield Californian, June 15, 1916

³⁸ Possibly an exaggeration. Her name appears in the digital *Bakersfield Californian*, but it does not appear in other online, digital collections of historical, Californian newspapers.

Mayflower plunge and pavilion. The Browns had merely renamed everything. The swimming pool became Crystal Plunge, and the entire resort was now White City.

The ad did not give the exact location of White City because everybody already knew where it was. Plain, though, was the fact that for ten-cents the public could catch a bus at 19th and Chester and three miles later see champion woman swimmer Minyhon Onstott Baker perform at the Crystal Plunge.³⁹

From 1 p.m. on, a stream of automobiles filed onto the grounds. Hundreds who came to swim had no place to change because Brown's dressing rooms were never vacant. Cabaret Hall was also packed to capacity, and Mayflower Hall, which had been thrown open for free, was overflowing. Later in the afternoon a small boy fell from the diving tower into the water and was rescued by Minyhon Onstott Baker, and it so thrilled onlookers that she repeated her performance that evening before an even larger crowd (*Bakersfield Californian* Jun 19, 1916).



1916 VIM

About a week later C.D. Brown took delivery of a 12 passenger VIM bus from Moulinot & Barnett to use in transporting patrons to and

³⁹ *Bakersfield Californian* 16 Jun 1916

from White City.⁴⁰ *"The windows drop on all sides and rear so the coach will always be cool and comfortable even on the hottest days. The car is electrically lighted and provided with a signal so that the driver can be notified when stops are desired. C.S. Moulinot drove the VIM bus up from Los Angeles yesterday in six hours and 15 minutes and also established a record for fuel consumption covering the entire distance on six gallons of gasoline which is an average of better than 20 miles to the gallon and one quart of oil. Two pints of water filled the radiator upon arriving at the East Side garage. Five passengers and their luggage made the trip over the Ridge route"* (Bakersfield Californian 28 Jun 1916).

One Saturday around midnight, violence flared at White City when a man slashed another's face. *"The victim went to Mercy Hospital and the other to the county jail. They had been quarrelling over auburn haired, 22 year-old, Rose Wilkins of 1820 Maple Avenue, Bakersfield"* (Bakersfield Californian 25 Jul 1916). The incident did not affect attendance. In September, Brown announced he would hold evening dances on each of the four nights of the Bakersfield rodeo and said they *"will last until the we' sma' hours and a big free supper will be served at midnight "* (Bakersfield Californian 31 Aug 1916).

The theme of the last dance was the cowboys themselves. Wrote the Californian, *"It is seldom the privilege of the city folks to attend a real cowboy dance. On Monday night, September 4th, the White City celebration will be brought to a close with a grand masquerade ball that will be White City's official Labor Day celebration. Costumes may be secured from Ergo, the tailor, in the Fish building, who has some*

⁴⁰ In 1914 Gerlincier Motor Company, predecessor of the Kenworth Truck Company, sold cars and trucks at Portland, Oregon. One of their small delivery trucks was the VIM ("Forest Industries, Oct 1990).

special costumes in stock for this big affair" (*Bakersfield Californian* 31 Aug 1916).

White City closed in October, and Brown brought in crews to remodel Cabaret Hall, enlarge the dressing rooms and showers, remodel the sanitary plumbing, deepen and finish the pool, and install an 80-feet high-dive. He planted shade trees, added swings, and built additional summer houses.⁴¹

The formal opening of the 1917 swimming season was on Sunday, April 15, 1917. New that day was Bob Sheridan, who for several seasons had coached the University of California swim team. Sheridan's professed goal was to develop the sport of swimming here, and to that end he arranged a program that included Larry Lindale, whom the *Californian* regarded as one of the best swimmers on the coast. Lindale, according to the newspaper, promised to bring-in a corps of swimming experts later that summer (*Bakersfield Californian* 8 Mar, 1 Jun 1917).

Bob Sheridan discovered promotional material in the Browns' own back yard: Their two children, little eight-year old Bernice and her brother, Ray. The coach commented they were "*two of the best child swimmers in the state,*" and he planned to include them in swimming programs (*Bakersfield Californian* Apr 26, 5 May 1917).

The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, and on Tuesday June 5, 1917, Bakersfield planned to observe Registration Day. A few days prior, on June 2nd, Brown organized an aquatic show and military ball [dance]. "*A feature of the evening's program will be the spectacular high dive to be made by Manuel Larios, who will dive from an 80 foot platform in a flaming bathing suit, saturated with*

⁴¹ Probably lightly-constructed, screened shelters

gasoline.⁴² *The special prize events of the evening will be races as follows: Races for men, ladies, boys under sixteen, girls under sixteen and a fat man's race"* (*Bakersfield Californian* 2 Jun 1917). The military ball finished the evening.



10% War Tax, *Bakersfield Californian*, April 4, 1918

Bolstered with success, the occasional stumbling block did not affect the Browns. On a Saturday evening the bath house and dressing rooms burned; the Browns rebuilt immediately (*Bakersfield Californian* 18 Jun 1917). Although fire could not slow White City, the war did. In June, Wheeler Bayless's Orchestra played a dance, and another was held just before Christmas (*Bakersfield Californian* 18 Jun, 24 Dec 1917),⁴³ but the next was not until April 4, 1918. White City advertised dances for the next three years, but its last ad appeared August 5, 1921.⁴⁴

White City stood vacant about six months. In June, a Mr. Thomas and partners who were building a dance hall and amusement center at Fellows bought the Browns' old dance pavilion. *"The building is now being moved in sections from Bakersfield. It having been known*

⁴² The article said Manuel Larios was the noted high diver who in 1913 at Ocean Park jumped 125-feet from an airplane for the Universal Film Company. It also said that in 1914, at Venice, Larios made a dive of 95 feet.

⁴³ The ad of December 24, 1917 said "under new management."

⁴⁴ In fall 1921 the Kern County Board of Supervisors bought 338 acres for a park just northeast of Bakersfield along the Kern River (Kern County Board of Supervisors, Minutes 4 Oct, 7 Nov 1921). The purchase became Hart Park, although improvements did not begin there until the later 1920s. See Gilbert Gia, *100 Years at Old Hart Park*

formerly as the Mayflower Pavilion. The new amusement center will be ready in time for a Fourth of July dance" (Bakersfield Californian 27 Jun 1922). Thomas moved the first half, but he did not get a chance to move the rest. One night it burned to ashes ⁴⁵ (Bakersfield Californian 7 Jul 1922).

Town Parks

City parks were late in coming and never approached the grander scale of Offer's, Vaughn's, Vlasnik's, or Brown's. In 1886 the *Californian* wrote, "*Visalia's swimming baths were to be opened to the public Saturday evening, but after the large tank was filled, a leak was discovered which will prevent the use of the baths for a couple of days until repairs are made. The Visalia project was only broached about thirty days ago and is already a reality. Some different from the way things are done here*" (*Daily Californian* 10 Aug 1896).

Little had changed by 1893 when the *Californian* asked why Bakersfield did not have a swimming pool. "*Every day, news items are telegraphed about the drowning of men, women and children. Every inland city, however small, should have its swimming tank and school if there is no convenient river where this graceful and useful physical accomplishment may be acquired. Beside that, those who do not know how to swim have no idea how much pleasure they miss out of their lives. A good swim will chase away the blues and bring one back to joy and a fine love of life when he is on the verge of suicide. Learn to swim* " (*Daily Californian* 18 May 1893).

Was it a water shortage problem? By 1897 Bakersfield had built out in all directions, and all the new neighborhoods needed water service. For unknown reasons the water company showed little interest

⁴⁵ A White City poultry farm operated at Wasco (*Bakersfield Californian* 3 Nov 1922).

in supplying water to nearby properties of the Kern County Land Company.⁴⁶ In response, KCLC installed its own water wells and electrical pumps and offered the public its water (*Daily Californian* 13 May, 13 Jul 1897), which meant Bakersfield's dusty streets could be sprinkled (*Daily Californian* 2 Aug 1897), and worrisome concerns over water shortages and fire suppression were put to rest (*Daily Californian* 18 Jun 1896).

At this juncture, two men came before the KCLC and requested that it construct a natatorium. If KCLC built it, said the applicants, they would organize a private swim club of 100 members and guarantee \$900 a year back to the land company. Namely, their proposal was for a 30 x 60-feet, above-ground "swimming bath" of brick and concrete with adjoining dressing rooms -- all under one roof. Estimated construction cost was \$2,500 (which in 2012 was equal to about \$70,000), and, they asked, would the company build it somewhere between the county hospital and the land company office?⁴⁷ (*Daily Californian* 30 Jul 1897). KCLC rejected the entire proposition.

Before Bakersfield incorporated in 1898, public improvement was at the pleasure of the Kern County Board of Supervisors, which had funded the county courthouse, jail, schools, and major streets but not much other infrastructure. The growth of population in the 1890s brought calls for incorporation, and that would allow taxation for city improvements and laws to rein-in undesirable activities -- such as

⁴⁶ Miller & Lux also owned several parcels in and around Bakersfield. Some of those holdings are described in "\$150,000 Miller & Lux Land Sold" (*Bakersfield Californian* 11 May 1922).

⁴⁷ In 1895 Kern County Hospital was built at 19th and Oak Streets. The KCLC Building was built in 1893 at 1712 19th Street.

noise, dumping, flagrant prostitution,⁴⁸ and horse racing on town streets.

In 1902 there still was no park, but that year Kern County Land Company Chairman Henry A. Jastro⁴⁹ offered the city 30 acres in the vicinity of 18th and Oak Streets. The council dawdled, and in 1907 the land company withdrew the offer. About that time Truxtun Beale offered the city five acres for a public park south of Californian Avenue. The council at first thought the location too remote from downtown (*Bakersfield Californian* Jun, Nov 1908, Lynn Hay Rudy 120) but after some consideration accepted the gift. It became Bakersfield's first park and was dedicated in May, 1908. Beale also funded improvements to it, and by December, Cottage Green (soon to be called Beale Park)⁵⁰ boasted a cinder track, four tennis courts, a bathhouse and a small swimming tank (*Bakersfield Californian* 11 May 1907, 8 Dec 1908).

The 30 acres forfeited in 1902 galled the *Californian*, and it accused the city council of shortsightedness. "*If we only had that 30 acre park now! About 5,000 people would be visitors there on Sunday nights. But we haven't that nor any other park*"⁵¹ (*Bakersfield Californian* 17, 19 Jul 1909). The newspaper's ire recalled that tangled undergrowth of jungle called Oak Street Park, which had been laboriously cleared with scythe, axe, and rake in preparation for the Eagles' July Fourth picnic of two weeks earlier (*Bakersfield Californian* 3 Jul 1909). But on the same day the newspaper goaded the City

⁴⁸ See Gilbert Gia, *Mme. Brignaudy*

⁴⁹ See Gilbert Gia, *Henry A. Jastro, Commodore Of Kern County*

⁵⁰ In 1909 the names Cottage Green and Beale Park were used interchangeably ("*Plans for Beale Park*," *Bakersfield Californian* 21 Jan 1909).

⁵¹ Bakersfield had no city park that could accommodate large crowds.

Council, Jastro offered park land again – but this time only two city blocks. The city council accepted (*Bakersfield Californian*, 19 Jul 1909).

In 1912 a massive park (although not a public one) was created when the Bakersfield Development Association bought W.S. Tevis' 106-acre race track north of town and made it a sports center and permanent home for the Kern County Fair. That "*playground of Bakersfield*" (*Bakersfield Californian* 10 Jan 1913) is today the Kern County Museum and Metropolitan Recreational Center on Chester Avenue north of Garces Circle.⁵²

In 1913 Bakersfield still had two city parks, Beale and Jastro, but it needed more. *"Now if a square could be added devoted to park purposes where a grandstand could be erected, Bakersfield's civic center would indeed be complete. We must come to recognize that in communities where warm summers prevail, the public square is far more serviceable to the people than a park that is remote from the centers. Those who can reach a park readily can also enjoy the pleasure of motoring or riding along shady roads. It is those who have no means of locomotion, the majority of the people, who are the first concern, and for that reason easily accessible small parks, a number of them have been shown to be of greater service [to the people] than a larger park more remote from the center"* (*Bakersfield Californian* 13 Jun 1913).

⁵² See Gilbert Gia, *Origins of the Kern County Fair*



Beale Park Greek Theater, 1920s postcard

Bakersfield used its parks well in summer 1915. Dancers twirled at Beale Park's Greek Theater, and swimmers splashed in the new plunge. Festivities that July honored Truxtun Beale, who had also funded Beale Library and the Bakersfield Clock Tower. Beale himself was not present (he sent a letter of thanks), but Ira Hochheimer spoke on the city's need for parks "*from the merchant's point of view*," Assemblyman Witten W. Harris spoke on the need from the laboring-man's point of view, and the Bakersfield city manager delivered a speech entitled "*The City Beautiful*" (*Bakersfield Californian* 29 Jul 1915).

In summer 1917, Bakersfield was actively seeking other park sites, and one prospect was the Stark Tract on 19th Street next to the Mill Ditch (*Bakersfield Californian* 24 Jul 1917).⁵³ On April 20, 1920, the city bought the entire Stark Tract of 9-1/2-acres for \$40,000, with payments on time through 1925.⁵⁴ At the same time the city was trying to buy 1-1/2 other acres that extended into the Stark Tract (*Bakersfield Californian* 20 Apr 1920). The empty plunge between Mill Ditch and Drain Canal had been Vlasnik's property until the lawsuit of

⁵³ Mill Ditch, built in 1874 to power the flouring mill at Truxtun and R, was filled-in by 1950.

⁵⁴ Owners were Virginia A. Brundage, Lida S. Reed, Frances S. Packard, Ella Stoner, and May Stark Fox.

1917 when the court awarded the land to Union Lumber Company. The lot now was assessed at \$7,075 and the old swimming plunge at \$975. The city offered \$8,000 and got title (*Bakersfield Californian* 4 May 1920).

Bakersfield City Council named it Stark Park. Within months the Parent Teacher Association asked the city to rescind its vote, but in a 3-2 decision the council said No (*City Council Minutes* 7 Mar 1921 650). Meanwhile, the city accepted the bid of San Francisco engineer Donald McLaren of McLarie, McLaren & Company to draw detailed landscaping plans for the new park and determine the cost to convert the old swimming pool into a modern plunge (*Bakersfield Californian* 21, 24 May 1921, 22 Feb 1981 "*Interesting Story Behind Central Park*" Camille Gavin). ⁵⁵

In fall, Councilman C.A. Griffith surprised the Council by insisting that the park deserved a more euphonious name and that it should be changed soon. Councilman Renfro, a leader in acquisition of the property, opposed the idea (*Bakersfield Californian* 9 Aug 1921), but weeks later the council voted unanimously in favor of naming it Central Park (*City Council Minutes* Resolution 14-21, 17 Sep 1921).

At the dedication of the new plunge, "*in reality the Old Nineteenth street natatorium remodeled,*" City Manager F.S. Benson announced, "*This will be one of the first municipally owned plunges in the state. Next year another plunge will be built in East Side park*" (*Bakersfield Californian* 28 Jun 1922).

⁵⁵ The first year, the city paid McLarie, McLaren & Company \$17,000 for landscaping. McLaren estimated the cost to remodel the plunge at \$3,048 (*Bakersfield Californian* 26 Jul 1921). Equivalent material and labor cost of \$17,000 today is about \$800,000, and \$3,048 is about \$30,000.



View north from 18th Street to new Federal Building under construction on 19th at site of old Central Park swimming pool. Black lines show approximate path of former Mill Ditch.
(2012 Photo, Gilbert Gia)

When Central Park Plunge opened, the city was completing arrangements to buy another site for a park. The City Council had authorized Clerk Van Riper to sell a small park on Baker between Kentucky and Lake Streets and set aside the proceeds (\$8,000 expected) to help in the purchase of land from the Bernard estate. Although residents nearby protested, in May 1921 Bakersfield was owner of two parcels of 8 acres, just north of Jefferson School. The former owners were Edith M. Bernard and E.C. O'Boyle (*Bakersfield Californian* 21, 22 May 1921). Popularly called East Side Park, the site was named Jefferson Park -- and this time without public protest. Later that summer the city said it could not fund two swimming pools in the same year (*Bakersfield Californian* 18 Oct 1921). In late winter 1923 the city accepted Dean & Stroble's bid to build a swimming

plunge just north of Jefferson School playground (Bakersfield Californian 13 Mar, 23 Jun 1923).⁵⁶



Millie Giddings, neighbor, Bernie Giddings, Jefferson Park plunge, 1928
Gilbert Gia Family Album

When park designer Donald McLaren first visited Bakersfield in 1921 he praised the town's tree-shaded neighborhoods, the wisdom of its founders, and its action in creating new parks. McLaren: *"A man prescribing space for a park must be an optimist; he must look 25 or 50 years hence and anticipate and provide for future city growth. The community is in the business to produce the greatest practicable amount of health, happiness and security for its individual members and for all of them. Translated into terms of parks, this means the number, size and kind of parks that will produce the amount of fresh air and recreation and the kind of happiness that none other but open spaces kept for beauty and other uses can bring. We can not have too many parks provided for – we may not be able to develop them all this year, next year, nor even during the next decade, but the land will always be there and will never be as cheap again as it is at the present time. So I say to you, acquire all the land you possibly can now—right now – and let the people of the future who are to enjoy the heritage*

⁵⁶ The pool was condemned and filled-in before 1935 (Bakersfield Californian 11 Nov 1935). Today's tennis courts occupy the site.

you are leaving them and who will feel the need of these open space far more than you do, develop and adorn the land as they are able" (Bakersfield Californian 11 May 1921).

Our public parks have gradually grown more numerous, although those great, private resorts are gone. Less apparent today is a much greater loss to society. Said McLaren in 1921, *"The community is in the business to produce the greatest practicable amount of health, happiness and security for its individual members and for all of them."*

Paralysis in governance today suggests that we have lost the scruples of 1921; politicians and their moneyed interests no longer work for the public welfare. *"Morality,"* wrote a columnist in 2012, *"involves taking into account the interests of others, but hard times threaten to turn us inward, away from the common good and toward self-interest. Our plight demands a new understanding of the social contract whereby governments have obligations to their citizens and citizens have responsibilities to society."*⁵⁷

Timeline

- 1891 Barker's Resort
- 1899 Offer's Resort
- 1908 Beale Park
- 1909 Jastro Park
- 1910 Vaughn's

⁵⁷ William B. Dickinson, *Bakersfield Californian* 19 Feb 2012. William B. Dickinson, *"Society's Uncivil Slide" The Social Contract*, Winter 2009-2010

- 1910 Crystal Baths
- 1912 Fairgrounds on Chester
- 1915 White City
- 1920 Central Park
- 1921 Jefferson Park

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