

Ancient Edgerton

featuring news from 100 years ago

Compiled by Ruth Pickering

One hundred years ago this month, the City of Edgerton Parks board started to re-develop the old Driving Park into an athletic park, now known as Racetrack Park. The city had recently purchased the Driving Park as well as land for Central Park and was starting to develop both parks.

From the April 8, 1921, issue of the Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter:

"The Park board is now at work upon the development of the Edgerton Driving Park property. The old barns and shed out there are to be taken down, the old fences torn up, and the ground cleared of rubbish and made tidy and attractive. The athletic field will be fitted up directly in front of the grand stand, and features added for the enjoyment of the public. The water mains were laid to the park gates last fall, and the Park board is going to connect there and take the water onto the grounds. This improvement alone is half of the life of the park. It is not going to cost a great deal of money to make this one of the finest athletic fields in these parts. Perhaps the rear of the grand stand could be built in for locker and dressing rooms for the men

who take part in the games.

"The Central park will be developed slowly. The board had Miss Wright of Milwaukee, landscape architect, here last Monday for further conference upon the plans and how to handle them. The large plantings will go in this season, but the ornamental shrub and flower decorations may not go in until later. No band concerts are planned for the park this summer, as the streets leading past will be torn up for paving. Miss Wright is enthusiastic about the possibilities of this park but admits that it will take considerable money to have it developed according to the plans adopted."

In 1919, the city started thinking about land for city parks. From the June 27, 1919, Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter: "At the council meeting Monday night a committee from the council and the city attorney were appointed to investigate the possibility of acquiring more land for park purposes than was originally planned by the Chamber of Commerce. It is the opinion of some that enough land should be secured at this time to provide a park for athletic sports in connection with a central city park. The probabilities are that land will



Horse races were held in Edgerton on Aug. 5, 1908, during the Irish Picnic at the Driving Park on Stoughton Road. Now known as Racetrack Park, the area has a baseball diamond where the track was once located. Thousands of dollars were won and lost at the races until World War I.

File photo / Text from the book, "Images of America: Edgerton," by Mark Scarborough

never be cheaper and now is the time to buy." In November 1919, the city council approved a resolution to issue a bond to raise money for the purchase of park lands, a street flusher, a fire truck and a city hall site. A special election was held on December 9, 1919, for voter approval of issuing a bond for each item. The election results showed all four bonds were approved. The bond to purchase the Driving Park for \$5,200 was approved by a vote of 99 to 69.

In January, 1920, the city proposed an ordinance authorizing the issue of bonds, and the ordinances were adopted at the February 13, 1920, city council meeting. In June, 1920, the city council instructed the city clerk to complete the purchase of the Driving Park property.

By May, 1921, the new athletic field was ready, and Edgerton's baseball team played their first game on the new field. From the May 13, 1921, issue of the Reporter: "On May 15, which is next Sunday, at 2:30 in the afternoon, on the new field at the Driving Park, Edgerton will cross bats with Cambridge in the first game of the season on home grounds. Have you been up to the Driving Park since the new baseball field was put into shape? Next Sunday will be your chance. The field is directly in front of the grand stand. Every player and every play may be distinctly seen from any part of the grand stand. Moreover, you need not worry about wild balls and fouls—the stand is properly screened, and it is going to be a

comfort to sit and watch that ball; it will not land on you no matter where else it may land. The Edgerton Concert band will play a program before the opening of the game. Edgerton is in to win." That summer the park became known as "Athletic Park."

The Driving Park was known for horse races in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although, similar to today, other activities occurred there when it was the Driving Park and later when it became Athletic Park. The annual 4th of July activities were held there, club picnics, family reunions, and sports—including football, baseball and track. In May, 1921, an airplane even landed there. From the May 20, 1921, Reporter: "Mr. Williams of Beloit came to Edgerton in an airplane last

Monday. It was his intention to get some birdseye views of our city. He landed out at the Athletic park, but too late to get the pictures that day. Tuesday's rain prevented successful work, and he returned to Beloit."

When Mayor Joseph Leary left office in April, 1922, he reflected on his four years in office and was proud of how they all worked together to make improvements in the city, including the parks. From his letter in the April 21, 1922, issue of the reporter: "We purchased the land for Central park and also for Athletic park. Some improvements have been made in these two parks and no doubt more improvements will be made each year until the city will possess two of the most beautiful parks to be found in southern Wisconsin."

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