

ATHERTON'S ICONS

Celebrating Atherton's 100th Birthday

Holbrook Palmer Gift - The Dames to the Rescue



The first steering committee of the Atherton Dames (1967). Some are identified by their husband's names as customary for the time:
Front Row: Hannah Miller, Florence Eyre, Barbara Schilling, Mrs. Richard Lucas, Catherine (Katie) Leps
Back Row: Ann Lindenberger, Mrs. William Donohoe, Barbara Crittenden, Carol Del Secco, Clarice Merrill, Mrs. Frederick H. Long, Mrs. Robert S. Rogers, Mrs. David Ingram, Jr., Mrs. Richard C. Van Houten, Mrs. Phillip Rice

The Atherton City Council was in a quandary in 1958 when Olive Holbrook Palmer died giving her family estate, Elmwood, a 22-acre farm, to the Town. Although her will stipulated that her surviving husband, Silas Palmer, would continue to live on the property until his death in 1963, the Council was conflicted and hesitated to accept the gift. Controversy ensued.

The Council felt that it was beyond the responsibilities of Atherton's small-town to accept such a gift. It was a potential liability. An old farm with a large house, an old water tower, and an antique carriage house which was no longer needed in the hippie days of the 1960's!

Fortunately, the women of the Town had different opinions and came to the rescue! As members of the PTA, they had been organizing summer recreation programs for the kids, and realized how valuable this gift was to the Town. So, they went to work to convince the Council to accept the gift and turn it into a park!

With help from the Atherton Civic Interest League, which had been formed in 1946 to keep an eye on Town business, a survey was circulated in 1959 to all residents asking their opinion. Nearly two-thirds said they wanted more "recreational" facilities in the Town. Council members were astounded and persuaded to accept Olive's gift of the property. They vowed to be more responsive to the newer Atherton families in the future.

Council member Nathan Most is quoted, "We're dealing with a different community than we thought we were, and we've got to change our attitude on a number of things."

Another Council Member is quoted saying, "I can't conceive of the old council even considering having a recreation survey made."

These brave, farsighted, and civic minded women were the precursor to the Atherton Dames formed in 1967. Over the years the Dames grew in numbers and influence. They worked tirelessly, with their mission to ... "raise funds for Holbrook Palmer Park, through fund-raising events." The Dames also served as an auxiliary to the Holbrook Palmer Park Foundation, working closely with the Foundation to continue to improve the Park's facilities.

The Park and the Dames opened their doors to not only Atherton residents but to everyone from neighboring communities, regardless of where they lived or ethnic background.

The Dames have since disbanded leaving behind a rich legacy.



At left: Original Water Tower in disrepair

Above: Water Tower and Carriage House restored by the Dames
Both at Holbrook Palmer Park



Source: Under the Oaks by Pamela Gullard & Nancy Lund and the Atherton Heritage Association

Save the date! Atherton's Centennial Celebration will be on
September 24, 2023 at Town Center.