

A Skeletal History of a Park Called Chosewood

By

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To acknowledge all those that have worked and will work to
make Chosewood Park a better place

A Skeletal History of the Park Called Chosewood

The Beginning: 1910 to 1927

It may not be news to many that the Chosewood Park that is now located at the end of Nolan Street and Miller Reed was not originally located there. What may be even more surprising that Chosewood Park was not even originally named Chosewood Park. Its original name was Nolan Park.

The articles below attests to the existence of Nolan Park. Although these article suggest that part of the park was located north of McDonough at the intersection of Elvira and Luther (now Miller Reed), actually the bulk of the park was located south of McDonough

Atlanta Constitution(AC) June 22, 1922

NOLAN PARK PICNIC TO BE HELD SATURDAY

Those interested in the development of the Nolan park and playground, at Luther and Elvira streets, are invited to attend a picnic at the park Saturday afternoon. Heads of the park committee request the donation of some planks and boards suitable for swings and benches. Free refreshments will be served.

AC June 25, 1922

Want City to Buy Nolan Park Place For a Playground

An effort to have the city buy Nolan park for \$6,000 and maintain it as a public park was furthered at a meeting of the Milton Avenue Community Club Friday. The park includes thirteen acres near the corner of Luther street and McDonough road. Alderman C. L. Chosewood attended the meeting and was quoted after it as favoring purchase by the city. The city has already furnished a playground director, Miss Louise Bentley, and some equipment, it was stated at the meeting.

Other subjects discussed were filling unused wells, street car service on the South Pryor street and Federal prison lines, a concrete bridge for McDonough road, gas service for McDonough road. The bridge question will be held up until August 1, it was stated, because of the present unsettled condition of railroad labor. Widening of McDonough road when it is paved was assured.

Why Nolan Park?

To understand why the park was named Nolan Park, you have to go back to the late 1850's. At that time John Miller C. Reed (JMCR) arrived in Atlanta seeking to purchase land so he and his 1st wife Sarah Ann Nolan Reed could escape the swamp like environment of Augusta, GA. That environment was affecting the health of JMCR's wife. JMCR bought 600 acres which included Chosewood Park, the GM Lakewood Plant, property in South Atlanta and Lakewood Heights down to Lethea Street. These properties also included what was to become Nolan Park. JMCR had a son named Nolan and after his 1st wife died, JMCR married again to Sara Ann Nolan's sister, Letha A. Nolan.

After JMCR died in 1880, his daughter Helen Reed took over the property and businesses of JMCR. Helen Read married S.B Turman who would become a Fulton County Commissioner and prominent real estate man of Atlanta from 1900 to 1922. In 1922, S.B. Turman also died.

The Turman-Reed family probably set aside the property that eventually became Nolan Park for the use of the surrounding community which at that time was under the leadership of the Milton Avenue Improvement Club. By 1922, Helen Reed-Turman was looking to leave the area due to the death of S.B. Turman in that year and was happy to sell the property to the City of Atlanta and all other properties JMCR had originally purchased..

For more on how Chosewood Park streets got their names please see this reference on the Chosewood Park website:
http://chosewoodpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Case_For_JMCR_History.pdf

Because either JMCR had a son named Nolan or Helen Turman-Smith mother's family name was Nolan, park was name Nolan Park.

Chosewood Park South of McDonough was popular

A reading of the Atlanta Constitution from 1910 to 1927, shows that both Nolan Park and Chosewood Park South of McDonough was popular. Many community meeting and athletic events were held there.

On August 13, 1925, the new Chosewood Park south of McDonough was opened. It is quite amazing that in 1925 the AC articles at the time state 3,000 people attended. I don't think 3,000 people attended when Boulevard Crossing Park was opened a couple of years ago.

AC August 13, 1925

CHOSEWOOD PARK OPENING DRAWS IMMENSE CROWD

With 3,000 children and parents in attendance, Chosewood playground, located on McDonough boulevard near the federal prison, was officially christened Tuesday night.

Principal speakers were Mayor Walter A. Sims, Alderman W. B. Hartfield, mayor pro tem, and Councilman Charles L. Chosewood, for whom the playground was named. Others on the program were C. P. Martin, A. W. Leake and Roy Rivers.

Following addresses Mrs. Sanders, representing the Milton Avenue Improvement club, presented Mr. Chosewood with an umbrella.

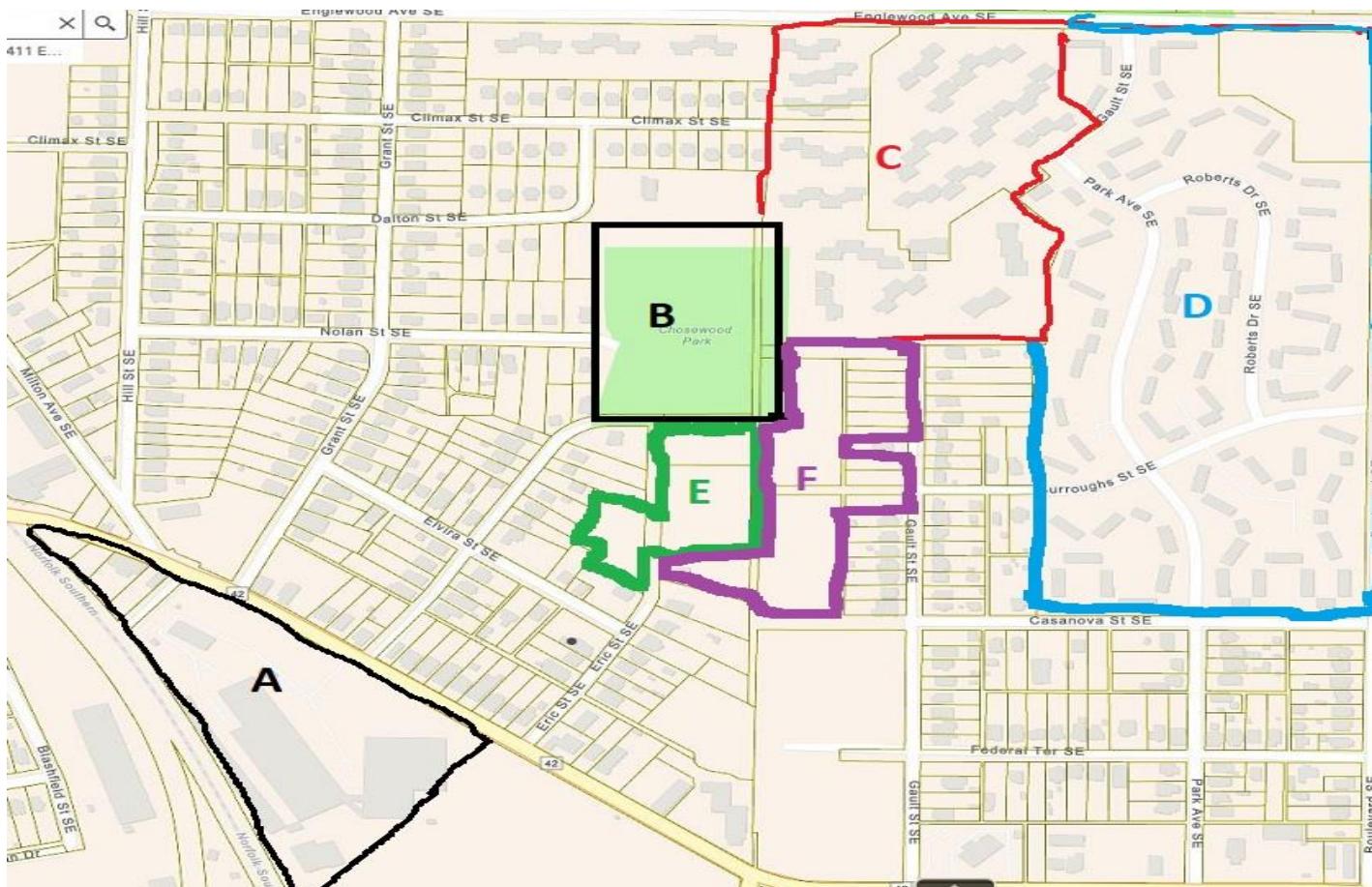
Other features of the program included a band concert, dances by playground girls, a dance by Lucile Leake and a reading by Lois Knight.

Chosewood Park Sold Again

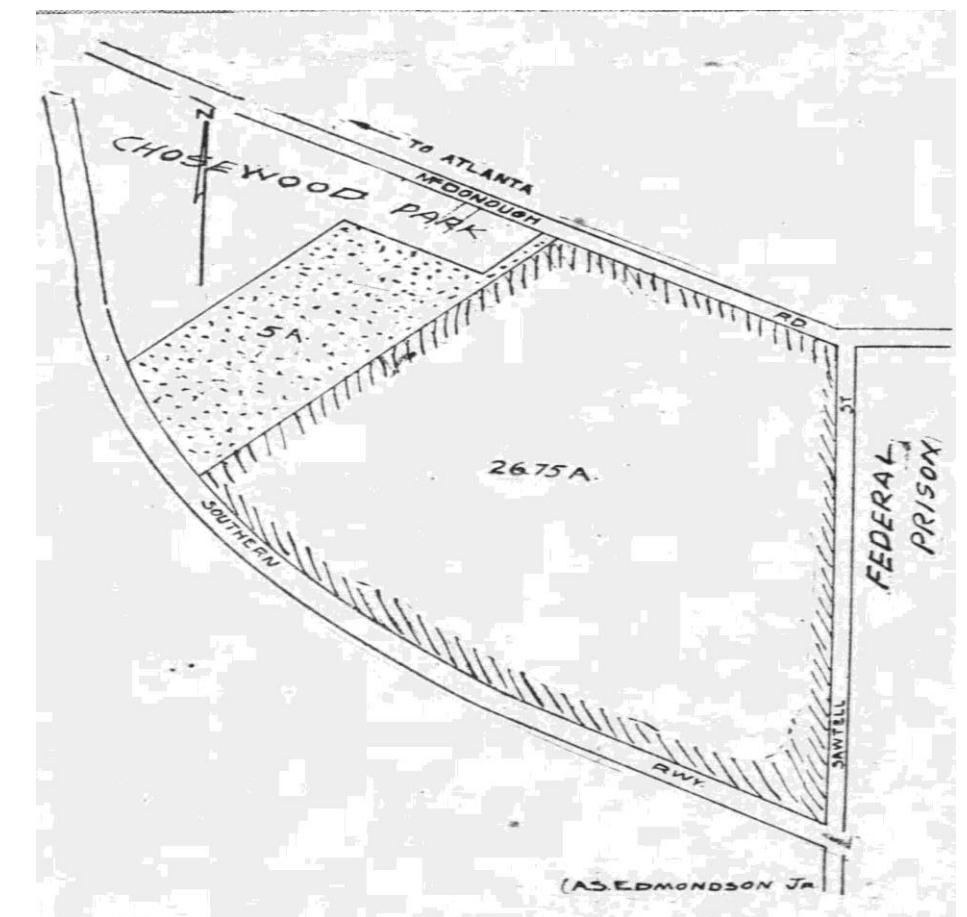
On Oct 5, 1927, it was announced in the AC that Chevrolet planned to spend \$2.25M to construct an automobile plant on 31 acres adjacent to the Federal Prison which included a 5 acres City of Atlanta park called Chosewood Park. This automobile plan became the GM Lakewood Plant.

The entire article can be found here: <http://chosewoodpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CPParkhistory.pdf>

A ->.Location of Chosewood Park South of McDonough Blvd



Location of Chosewood Park as it looked in the Oct. 27, 1927 article.

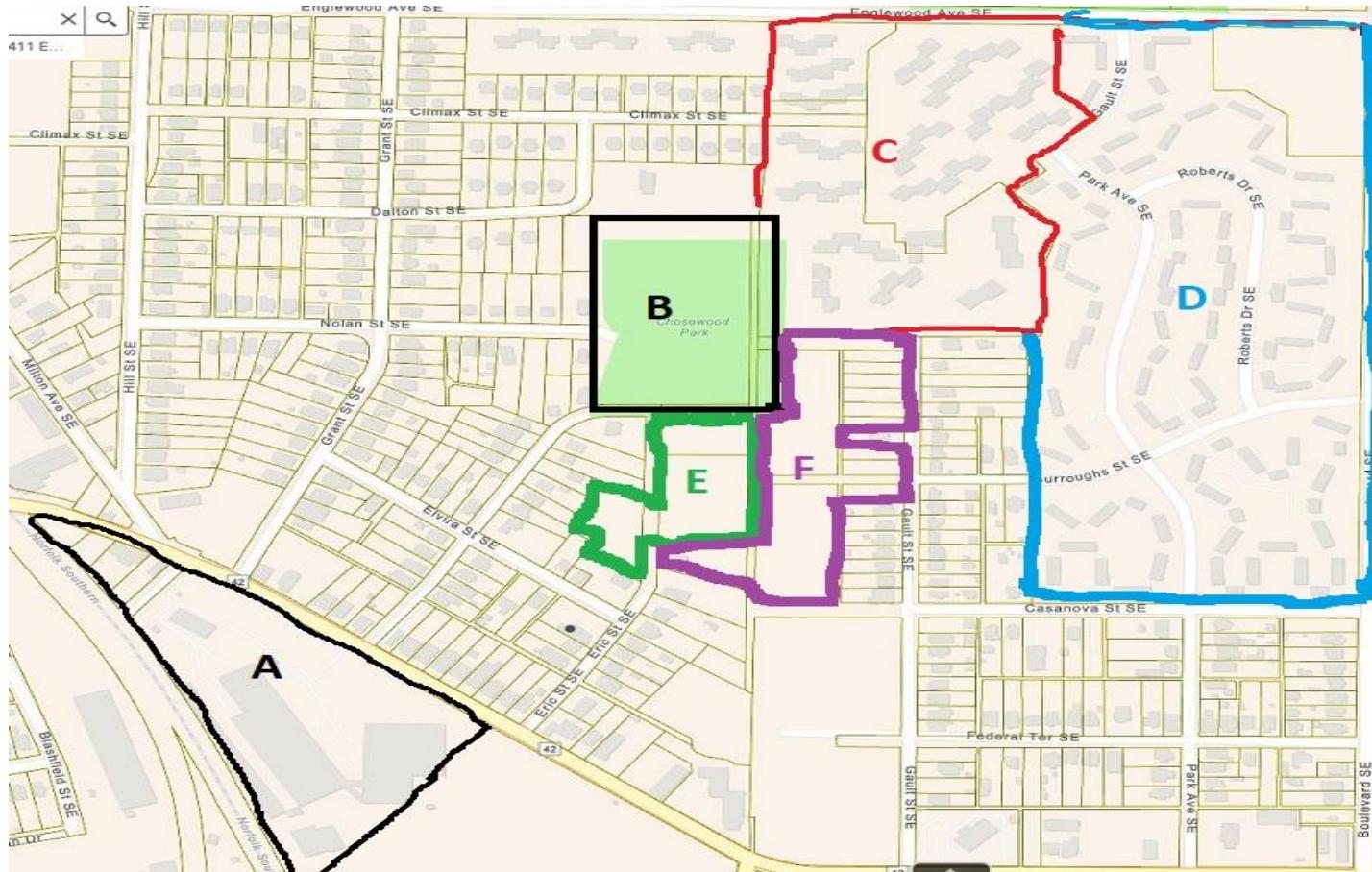


Chosewood Park South to be replaced with a new Chosewood Park of 50 acres North of McDonough

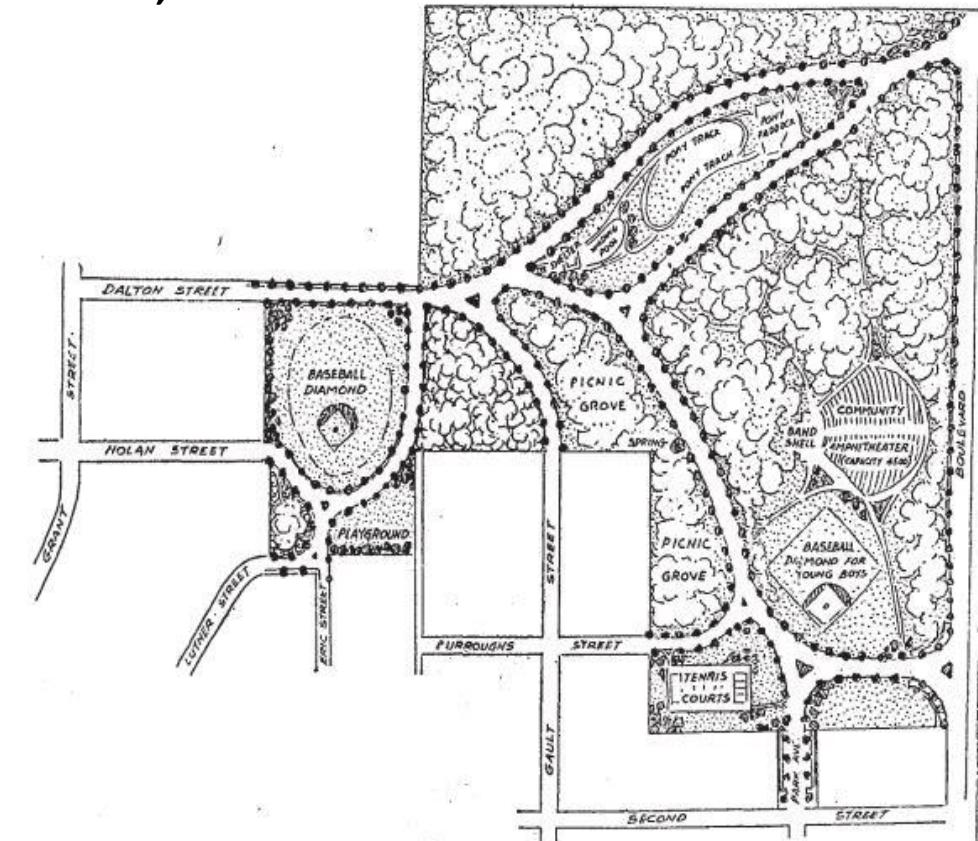
On June 4, 1928, it was announced that the old Chosewood Park south of McDonough would be replaced by a new park of 50 acres located north of McDonough Blvd. Of those 50 acres in the map below, B marks the area where 7 acres of the current park is now. The total 50 acres part include B, C and D in the map below.

The entire article can be found here: <http://chosewoodpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CPParkhistory.pdf>

B, C and D show where replacement park of 50 acres was located



The new Chosewood Park as presented in the June 4, 1928 AC article.



The Story of How The 1st Chosewood Park was sold.

In a May 4, 1930 AC article entitled 'Chosewood Park Sale Upheld in Council Probe' the details of how the deal to sell the 1st Chosewood Park came about.

Prior to the October 5, 1927 announcement of the Chosewood Park sale in the AC, Hugh C. Couch, VP of Southern Railroad, met with Mayor I. N. Ragsdale. At the meeting Mr. Couch told Mayor Ragsdale that Chevrolet Motor Company wanted to buy the A. G. Rhodes(formerly owned by JMCR) and Chosewood Park property on McDonough Blvd and build an automobile assembly plant there. However, if the city did not sell Chosewood Park to the city, the automobile plant would go to Birmingham, AL or Jacksonville, Fl.

On hearing this Mayor Ragsdale agreed to sell Chosewood Park and to put language in the resolution for sale to be sent to the City Council that the proceeds of the sale of Chosewood Park would be held in trust for the purchase of another park in the vicinity of the 1st park. The Milton Avenue Improvement Club was asked by the Mayor to select the site for the new park. This site selected was made up of 15 lots and 50 acres located at B, C and D on the Chosewood Park parcel map shown on the previous page. An earlier as October 2, 1927, an AC article stated that proceeds for the sale of Chosewood Park and the cost of park improvements would come to \$12K.

Hearing that the City of Atlanta was thinking of purchasing 15 lots in the Chosewood Park area for park replacement, business partners Rufus T. Bass and George M. Brown Jr. purchased the property from the original owners and then offered it for sale to the City of Atlanta for at first \$27.5K and then finally \$25K.

Given the way Bass and Brown purchased the property, it was alleged that City Councilman were getting a cut which Bass and Brown denied. The city did purchase the property but only paid \$10K to start with the promise to pay the rest later.

1928 To 1940 – How Chosewood Park was reduced to 7 acres

Given that the Rufus T Bass purchased the 15 lots just in time to sell it to the city to create the new Chosewood Park and the fact all City of Atlanta councilpersons were under investigation due to Clark Howell's Pulitzer Prize editorials on the 'Graft Ring', any actions taken by council members at that time were viewed with suspicion. Many grand jury investigations were opened to investigate the action taken by the City Council performed and the purchase of the 15 lots to develop Chosewood Park was one of those investigations.

Even so, the core 7 acres which is part of Chosewood Park today and the 50 acres park then, continued to function as a park. As a result, between 1928 and 1940, baseball and football scores are reported from Chosewood Park teams in the AC.

On April 16, 1940, an Atlanta City Council made a resolution that empowered Mayor Hartsfield to write an end to the City's agreement to buy 50 acres from R. T. Bass and quit claimed 43 of the 50 acres back to Mr. Bass. The city of Atlanta would continue to use the remaining as 7 acres as Chosewood Park.

The original 1927 agreement was that the city would buy 50 acres from Mr. Bass for \$24.7K, pay \$10K down and pay the rest on an installment basis. The transaction was attacked in the courts and it was ruled that municipalities could not buy property on an installment plan and no installment payments were made thus holding up the deal.

The \$10K that was initially paid for Chosewood was sufficient to allow the City of Atlanta to claim the last 7 acres as city park property.

Chosewood Park 1940 to the Present

From 1940 to 1980, there were at least 4 articles published where residents of the area came together to ask why was Chosewood Park so neglected. Don't have time to detail that here. For the remainder of this story, I will just list out significant events as listed in the AC or can be found in the legislation passed by the Atlanta City Council.

1. The first is the in the 1950's the Boy Scouts purchased land in what is now the Chosewood Park Urban Forest below where the tennis courts are now. These Boy Scout events happened in 1945 and 1947 respectively

Lion Charity To Continue

During 1945, the Atlanta Lions Club spent approximately \$7,500 on charity projects, according to Harry Cooper, chairman of public relations, and the club intends to

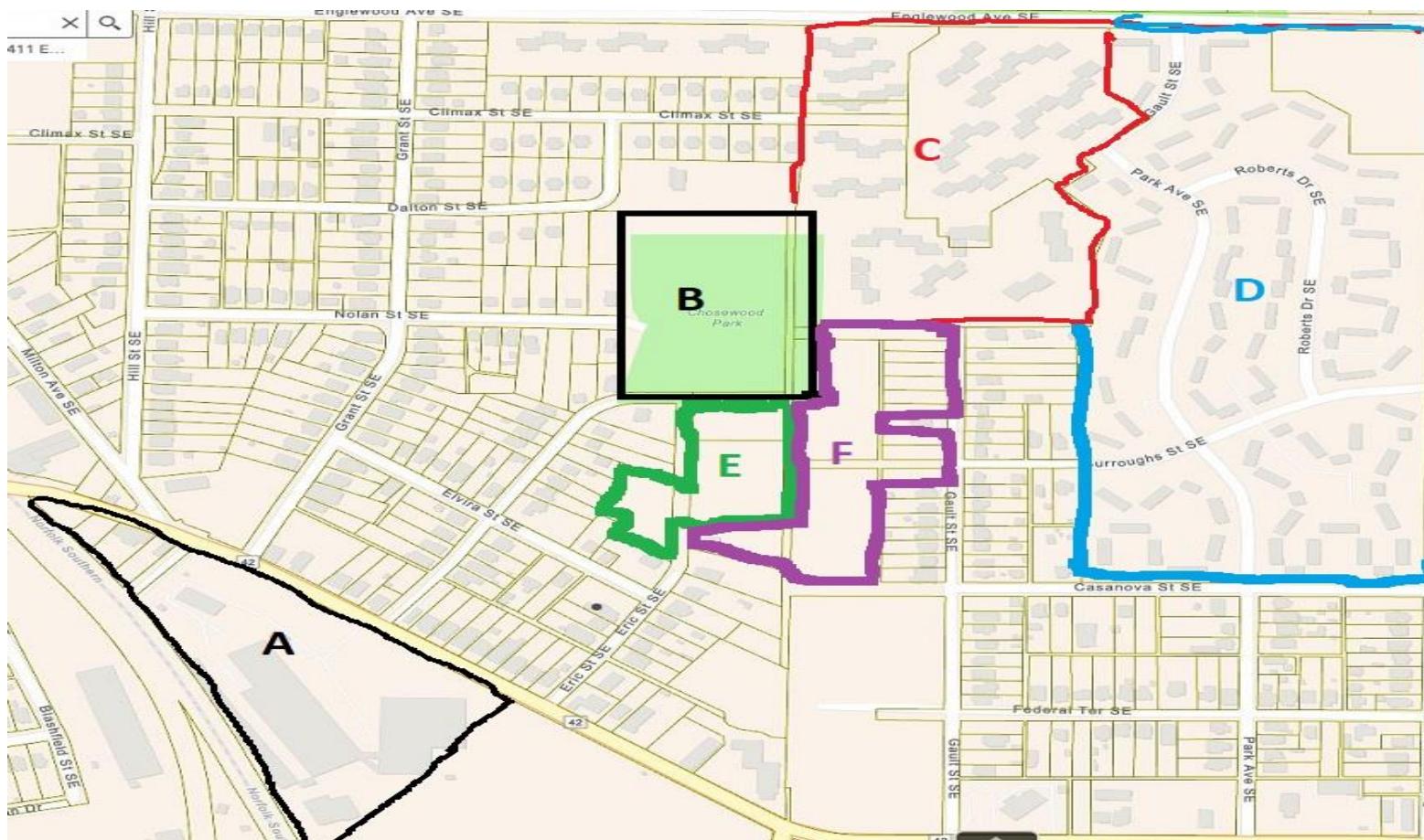
continue the programs this year. Two of the biggest projects undertaken included a contribution of \$1,800 to buy milk for underprivileged tubercular children of Atlanta. The Lions also spent \$2,500 for land and construction of a Boy Scout hut at Chosewood park, for Troop 12 in the Lakewood area. The club also sponsored and opened the Atlanta Teen Age Tavern for boys and girls on the second floor of the Atlanta Boys' Club.

To fill up the charity fund, the club is sponsoring a show by Dunninger, the mind reader, at 8:30 p. m. Thursday, May 10, at the city auditorium. Tickets are being sold by individual Lions, at the Lions office in the William-Oliver building, and at Muse's.

SCOUT HUT DEDICATION—
Dedication ceremonies tonight will mark official completion of a two-story brick Scout hut for the use of Boy Scout Troop 212 of Southeast Atlanta. The building, a project of the Atlanta Lions Club, is set in the middle of a wooded tract owned by the Lions, adjoining Chosewood Park just off Miller Reed Avenue, S. E.

Chosewood Park 1940 to the Present Continued.

2. In 1991, Chosewood Park was expanded by 3 acres due to donation property owned by the Boy Scouts Property and E. A. Isakson(Johnnie Isakson father). This donation was achieved by Paul McMurray getting the Boy Scouts and E.A. Isakson to write letters to the then Mayor Maynard Jackson asking to donate their property to the city. Then councilperson Debbie McCarty helped to facilitate this transaction. Area E is where that property was located on the map below.

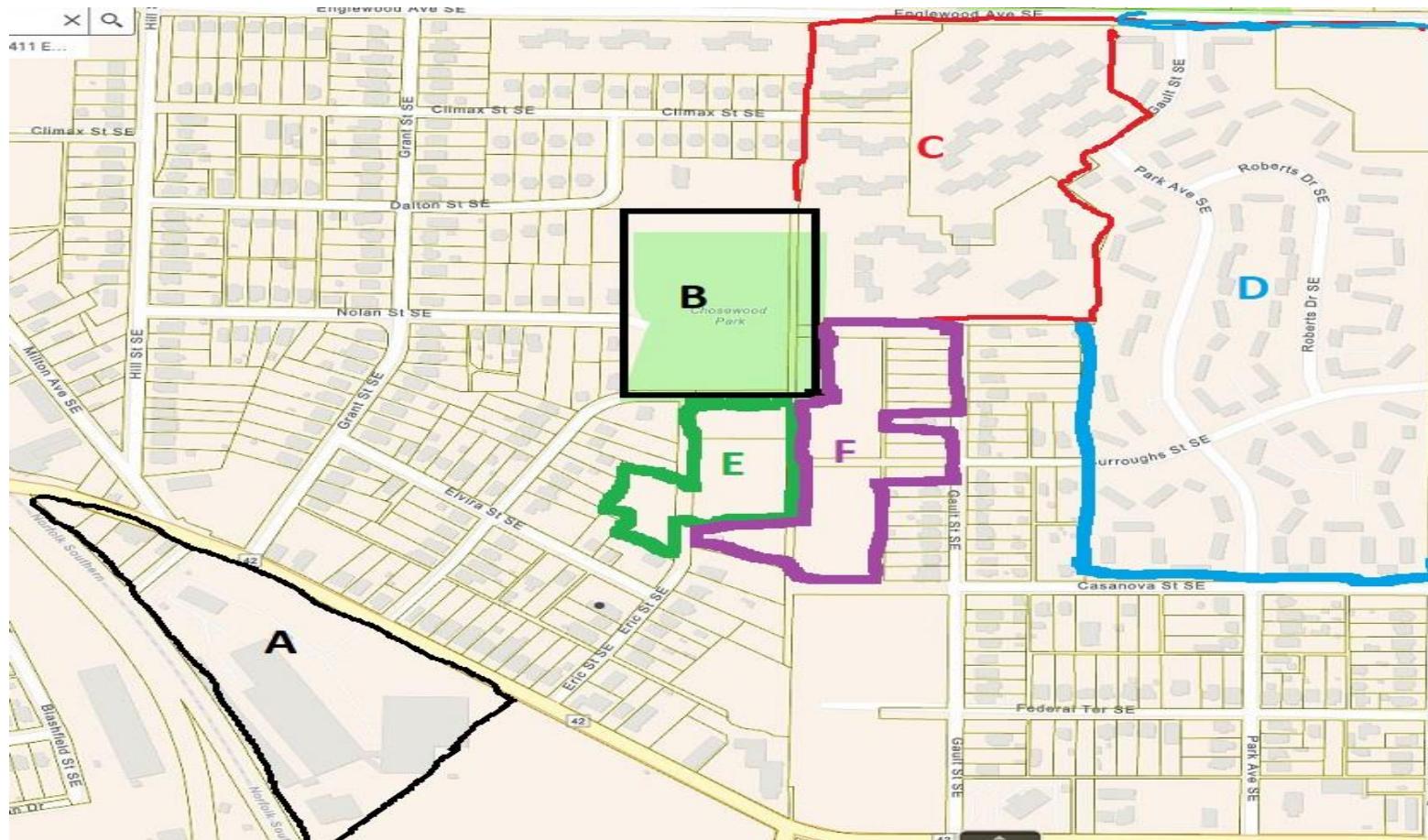


Chosewood Park 1940 to the Present Continued.

3. In 2007, the Arthur Blank Foundation through the City of Atlanta granted \$385K for park improvements in Chosewood Park. These improvements were (1) resurfacing the playground to be more durable and user-friendly; (2) installing pillars and gates to create a more defined park entrance; 3) improving the parking lot to provide better park access and (4) installing new walkways, sidewalks and steps throughout the park.
4. In 2011 Park Pride Visioning plan for Chosewood Park is completed. Ideas for playground improvement and a Gateway Bridge from Gault Street to the park are detailed here and many other ideas.
The visioning plan can be found here: [chosewoodvisioningbooksmall.pdf \(chosewoodpark.org\)](http://chosewoodvisioningbooksmall.pdf)
5. Around 2011, Matthew Wingler is named the first chair of the Friends of Chosewood Park.
6. In 2016 (I believe), Jim Williamson as head of Friends of Chosewood Park obtained a \$60K grant through Trees Atlanta to designate and maintain Chosewood Park as an Urban Forest. Chosewood Park was one of the few parks in the nation to receive such a grant.

Chosewood Park 1940 to the Present Continued.

7. In 2009, through the City of Atlanta, Chosewood Park obtained \$747K from the Atlanta Empowerment Zone, \$300K from the Arthur Blank Family Foundation and other moneys for a total of \$1.231M to purchase 6.2 acres of land known to the community as the 'Danner Property'. Jessica Toral was responsible for writing the request to obtain the Empowerment Zone money. This property is labelled F on the map below.



Chosewood Park 1940 to the Present Conclusion.

There is so much to write about the history of our park. I don't know how anyone can document all the individuals or volunteer groups that participated in the making of the Chosewood Park of today.

Or who helped plan activities like John Moores or were responsible for actions that expanded the park in area and activities offered.

It is for them that I have taken time to write this too brief and imperfect history of Chosewood Park. I write it with the hope that those that take on the task of making Chosewood Park a better place in the future, will remember and respect the efforts of those that came before them.