Stonydell Swimming Pool

by Van Beydler

Water recreation for Ozarkians always meant travelling down to the river to take a dip on a hot summer day until 1932 when Stoneydell Swimming Pool was built near Jerome. Vern Prewett and a Mr. Andres built the massive water park along one of America's great highways,U.S. Route 66. The stone used in building Stoneydell was quarried from the hills around Jerome and Arlington. Most of it was "field stone" but some was flat rock or sand rock that was quarried from somewhere else. The stone was brought off the hills on a sled led by horse. A man was employeed for a dollar a day to drag rocks off the hillsides.

Stoneydell was built of native stones with the biggest building being three stories tall. A waterfall at one end of the pool circulated fresh water into the pool from the three artesian wells which bubbled up from the earth at the Stoneydell Spring. The pool was 100 feet long,44 feet wide,12 feet in the deep end and 3 feet in the shallow end. A face made of stone contained floodlights in the eyes and another colored light in the mouth which was used to illuminate the pool at night.

Stoneydell had lots of visitors from U.S.Route 66. During the 30's, one of the buildings in the complex was a Trailways Bus Station. At the southwest end of the swimming pool a restaurant operated serving travelers and pool customers alike. The building for the bus station is still standing and was most recently used for Granny's Old Fashun' Cookin'.

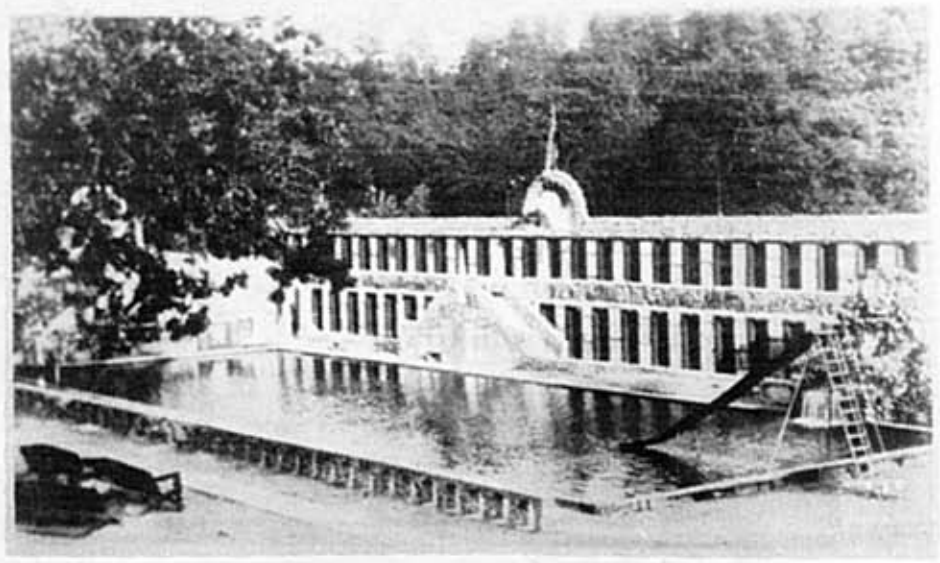
Highway patrolmen stationed themselves at Stoneydell every weekend to direct the traffic. Ray Wann, born and raised in Jerome, worked at Stoneydell when he was sixteen. His job was to kill and dress chickens for the day's dinners. One day a large black limousine pulled in and Mae West and her chauffeur,together with a large dog, got out. Ray cooked her dinner and served it with all the trimmings.

Stoneydell was bought from George Prewett in 1954 by Fred and Ester Widener. The Widener family operated the pool with their children, Katie and Harry. The children took admissions, performed lifeguard duties and gave swimming lessons. Other lifeguards from the area were Jimmy Miller, Larry Prewett, and Frankie Brinkley.

Fred operated the restaurant that specialized in steaks and seafood. The park also featured an antique store. Fred said,"That was back quite a ways when people wasn't too eager to buy antiques, but we liked them." "We forced ourselves to putting some for sale because we couldn't keep it all in the house." There was a package liquor store with a tavern in the bottom part of it. Nine rentals had apartments upstairs and cabins along U.S. 66 on the hillside across from the pool area. There was also a service station that some of the boys worked at when they weren't swimming.

A goldfish pond was stocked with different kinds of fish for tourists and customers to look at. Some of the boys fished the rivers and would bring a carp up to put in the water. Children would feed the fish while their parents were getting ready. According to Fred Widener, "Sometimes some of the boys trot-lined on the river and would catch these old ugly water-dogs. I put some of them in there and some of the tourists would come by there and look at that fish and they didn't know what they were. I told them they were Missouri alligators! They would probably leave before I could tell them the difference, if I ever did."

Stoneydell was located just down the road from Arlington. Arlington was the last stop on the railroad for years. The trail which led from the rails westward was called Springfield Trail. Everything was carried by wagons westward after it was unloaded from the trains. Before it became U.S. Route 66 the road was old No. 14.



Stonydell in July 1955. (Photo courtesy of Bill & Georgia Beydler)

The Arlington School sat across from Stoneydell. Built in 1873, the one room schoolhouse continued into the 20th century. Katie (Widner) Fincher recalled going to school there in the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. A page from the 1873 ledger shows the school board voted to build a schoolhouse at a cost of $300. They also voted to hire a teacher and pay her $30 a month unless a good one could be found for less.

Stonydell Swimming Pool, Arlington, Mo. (Photo courtesy of Bill and Georgia Beydler)

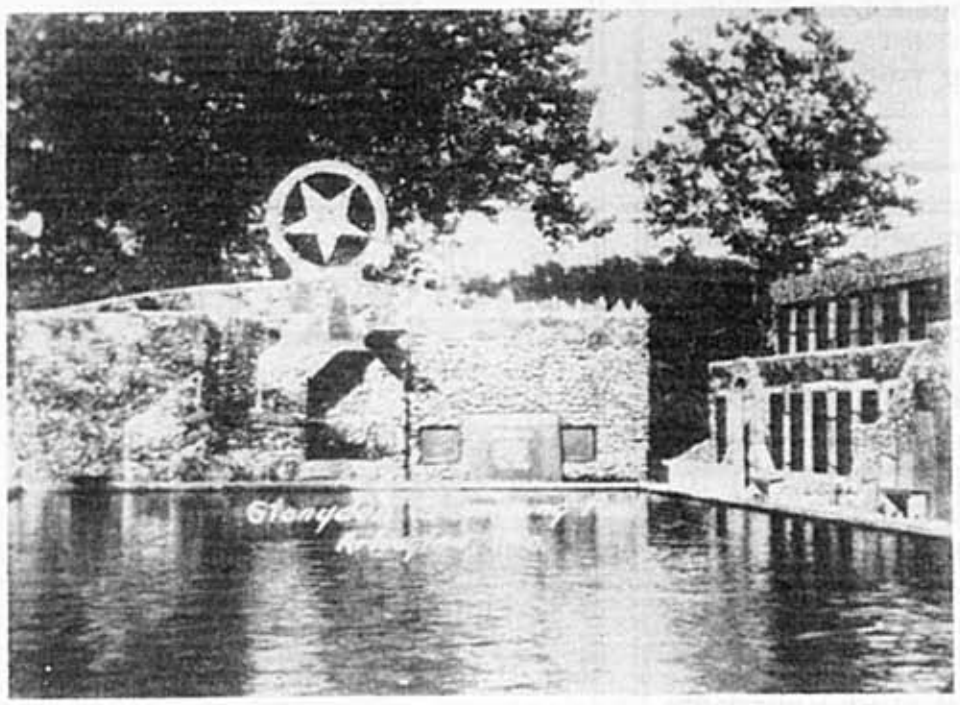
In the entire history of Stoneydell there were no drownings. No bottles were allowed in the swimming area so broken glass wouldn't become a hazard. Cost for admission was 50 cents for adults and 35 cents for children. The price remained the same and never increased during the Widener's ownership. There were lots of private parties and people came from all over the area to swim. Katie remembered counting 300 people during some weekends saying."The pool was so full of people all you could see was heads." There were 52 changing lockers for patrons to store their belongings in while frolicking in the water.

When the highway department bought the property in 1965 they left the big building standing for a while with the intention of using it for the contractor's office. Their home office was in Sedalia. "The big building was down in the valley and their radio wouldn't reach that good, to where they could talk back and forth, so they moved it up on the hill." The highway department brought in a huge wrecking ball. The building probably would have stood forever. When the wrecking ball struck it revealed heavy steel rods supporting the native stone. It was solid rock and concrete that was then dozed in and covered over. The demolition was started in 1965 and completed in 1966.

You can still see water from the artesian wells coming out of an open pipe along Interstate 44. Fred says one of the wells is 150 feet deep between the outer road and where the park was located behind where Stoneydell stood. The park was filled with picnic tables for people to eat on. Fred still has two sections of land with two small artesian wells that still run all the time. People stop there with jugs to get water to drink.

Katie remembers all the good times that were had at Stoneydell. "You don't think about it when you're young, but now I wish the building could have been spared, as a landmark."

Stoneydell is gone and thousands of people speeding by on Interstate 44 have no idea that at one time they could stop on old 66 to splash happily in the waters of Stoneydell.



Stonydell Swimming Pool along Route 66.