

Driller Park  
by Helen McHaney Griffin

Baseball is known as the national pastime of the United States. The game was actually invented in New York in 1839 and patterned after an English game. The old saying "as old as baseball" is derived from the fact that baseball became a sport in America in 1871 when the National Association of Professional Baseball Players was formed.<sup>1</sup> Kilgore, Texas has always been known as a "baseball town". Long before the days of incorporation into a municipality, the young men of the town played what was known as "sand-lot" baseball. As early as 1905 a local team, not a part of any organized league, played in competition with teams in the area towns. The team would travel as far away as Bullard, 10 miles south of Tyler, to play on Saturdays. At that time Sunday baseball was frowned upon by the elders of the communities, therefore any schedule of games on the Sabbath was discouraged.<sup>2</sup>

After the discovery of oil in East Texas in December 1930, organized baseball came to Kilgore with an announcement in the Kilgore Daily News on April 15, 1931. The East Texas League was formed in the office of Kilgore Mayor J. Malcolm Crim on April 14, 1931 with plans for a \$10,000 ball park equipped with lights for night ball games. The league included the Kilgore Gushers, Longview Cannibals, Henderson Oilers, and the Tyler Trojans with Harry Wanderling as President. Each town put up \$100.00 with an agreement of a salary limit for each club set at \$2,000 per month. Major league player Ewell "Turkey" Gross, second baseman, was player-manager for the team. The Kilgore Lion's Club, stressing attendance at games, sold tickets to the games played in the "Old Ball Park" located off the old Gladewater Highway. Kilgore players included White Sox record holder (struck 22 men out) Lefty Leipold, Joe Brantley (two homers againt Tyler), and Hack Miller (football and baseball star). Members of the club, after having moved their location for building several times to accommodate for drilling of oil wells, determined they would build their park around the first dry hole brought in near Kilgore.<sup>3</sup> Kilgore's only victory for the season was over Tyler (19-5) on May 4, 1931. Lack of money, rain, and sparce attendance caused the league to disband May 7, 1931.

1. Encyclopedia Brittanica, pg. 932, Vol. I, Fifteenth Edition 1989.
2. James H. Griffin, Jr., Personal interview, November 14, 1996, Kilgore, Texas
3. Kilgore Daily News, April 28, 1931, pg. 1, Microfilm, Kilgore College Library

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During the years 1932-1935 there was no organized baseball in Kilgore. In 1936, Kilgore joined the East Texas League as the Kilgore Braves, a name given the club in a contest won by Mrs. L. L. Shields. The team, managed by Lee Cunningham, practiced at Houston Park at Laird Hill, a neighboring community to Kilgore, in preparation for playing at Laird Field, a new field named for S. S. Laird on whose land the park was built. The Braves were a farm team of the Oklahoma Indians with Fred Nicholson as Business Manager and Franchise Owner.<sup>4</sup>

In 1937, the Kilgore team was bought by the Crim brothers, J. Malcolm and Liggett N., and the name changed to the Rangers. In 1938, L. N. Crim was President, J. Malcolm Crim, Vice President, and Jimmy Dalrymple was Manager.

A new name for Kilgore baseball was sought in 1939. F. R. Files, Manager of Mid-Continent Supply and later Rusk County Judge, named the team The Boomers with the agreement and support of a committee of city leaders. By the end of the 1940 season, however, lack of interest evidenced by low attendance figures (1939-36,952---1940-15,969) caused the Crim owners to "divorce" the East Texas League entry and sell the franchise. August 30, 1940 was the last home game of the season.<sup>5</sup> There was no baseball in Kilgore throughout the World War II years and the post-war year (1941-1945 and 1946).

As previously stated "Kilgore has always been known as a baseball town". A community-owned project, headed by a board of directors, and comprised of some 400 stockholders, formed the Kilgore Baseball Club and funded a \$100,000 stadium on 4.89 acres located in both Gregg and Rusk counties. The land was deeded to the City of Kilgore by S. S. Laird, and is recorded in the deed records of both counties. The stadium, an ultra-permanent structure, was built of pipe, steel, and concrete to stand as a tribute to the baseball-loving populace of Kilgore. It was known as the finest baseball plant in the circuit. A capacity crowd of 3,100 fans welcomed the return of baseball to Kilgore on April 24, 1947 along with a new League name, new membership in the Lone Star League, and a new "not-quite-finished" park.

4. Kilgore Daily News, op. cit. April 23, 1936. pg. 1

5. Ibid. August 30, 1940

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The Kilgore Drillers, a new Driller Park, and new white uniforms with big blue numerals of the Drillers, looked like the national game itself. Manager Joe Kracher introduced his players to the crowd a few minutes before play got underway. Mayor Roy H. Laird tossed the first ball to catcher Scott E. Lucas, President of the Driller Club. An airplane equipped with a loud speaker flew over the Kilgore region of East Texas yesterday and today to advertize the game.<sup>6</sup> The name "Drillers" was chosen through a contest held in January, as had the previous club names been selected.

In 1949, the Drillers had joined the East Texas League. This same League-play of the Drillers continued at Driller Park under the leadership of President Roger Goyne in 1950 and with the election of Jimmy Dalrymple, longtime Driller Manager, as league president.

A deed, executed on September 13, 1989 by the S. S. Laird heirs granting 15.460 acres adjacent on two sides of the baseball park to the City of Kilgore, gave access to the park and made space available for practice fields, children's and young-people's games, and parking.<sup>7</sup>

Driller Park has been utilized by the professional leagues, Kilgore High School baseball, Kilgore College baseball, amateur and semi-pro teams through the years and more recently for exhibition purposes by the Texas Baseball League. In 1966, it was the site of play-off schoolby games, the Little Dixie World Series. In 1996, the Dixie State Baseball Tournament for 15-16 year olds was held at Driller Park.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1997 the City Commission of Kilgore approved a proposal, brought by the Sports Committee of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce, to seek available grant funds from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission for the purpose of making improvements at Driller Park and other Parks & Recreation facilities owned by the City.<sup>9</sup>

6. Kilgore Daily News, op. cit.-April 25, 1947

7. Cashen, Evelyn Laird and husband, Herbert, Personal interview, January 18, 1997

8. Zimmerman, Dee, President of Kilgore Boy's Baseball Association, Personal interview January 20, 1997

9. Brogotti, Rand, Personal Interview, January 24, 1997

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Truly, commemoration of Driller Park as a Texas landmark is important because of its unique history in the world of sports and the tremendous impact this installation has had and will continue to have in the future by bringing about a wholesome atmosphere of participation and spectatorship for those in pursuit of America's "favorite sport", baseball.

# KILGORE NEWS

*America's No. 1 small city — capital of the East*

1997 YEAR — No. 12

USPS 294-700

KILGORE, TEXAS, WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY 15, 1997

## City votes to file application to designate Driller as landmark

By STAN SHARP

The Kilgore City Commission approved filing an application to designate Driller Park a historical landmark facility.

The approval came during a city commission meeting Tuesday afternoon in the commission chambers at City Hall. All five commissioners were on hand for the session.

Mayor Bill Wilson explained commissioners had been approached earlier about this issue by members of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce Sports Committee and Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation.

Helen "Pudge" Griffin of KHPF said this only means that an application will be made, and does not guarantee the historical marker will be approved.

Commissioners also approved the filing and solicitation of a grant for the improvement of the ballfield facilities at Driller Park on Monday.

In December, the sports committee of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce requested park improvements, particularly to Driller Park and baseball parks on Harris Avenue.

Kenneth Plunk, chairman of the sports committee, introduced Mrs. Griffin, who asked for the historical marker, and Randy Brogoitti, who asked for grants to improve the parks.

Mrs. Griffin said the sports committee wanted to obtain a historical marker for Driller Park from the Texas Historical Commission.

Although Driller Park won't be 50 years old until April, Dr. Norman Black, chairman of the Gregg County Historical Society, has said the group could

make application before then, which is why the city commission acted on the item on Monday.

Mrs. Griffin said the Baseball Association will take care of the cost of the marker.

Research on the narrative has since been completed.

The city owns the baseball park, which is why KHPF and the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce needed approval.

Commissioners also approved:

— Renaming West South Street to Martin Luther King Drive. This designation will be honored in a dedication ceremony this coming Monday, according to City Manager Ron Stephens. The dedication will occur at 11 a.m. and more details will be made available as the week goes along.

City leaders also approved:

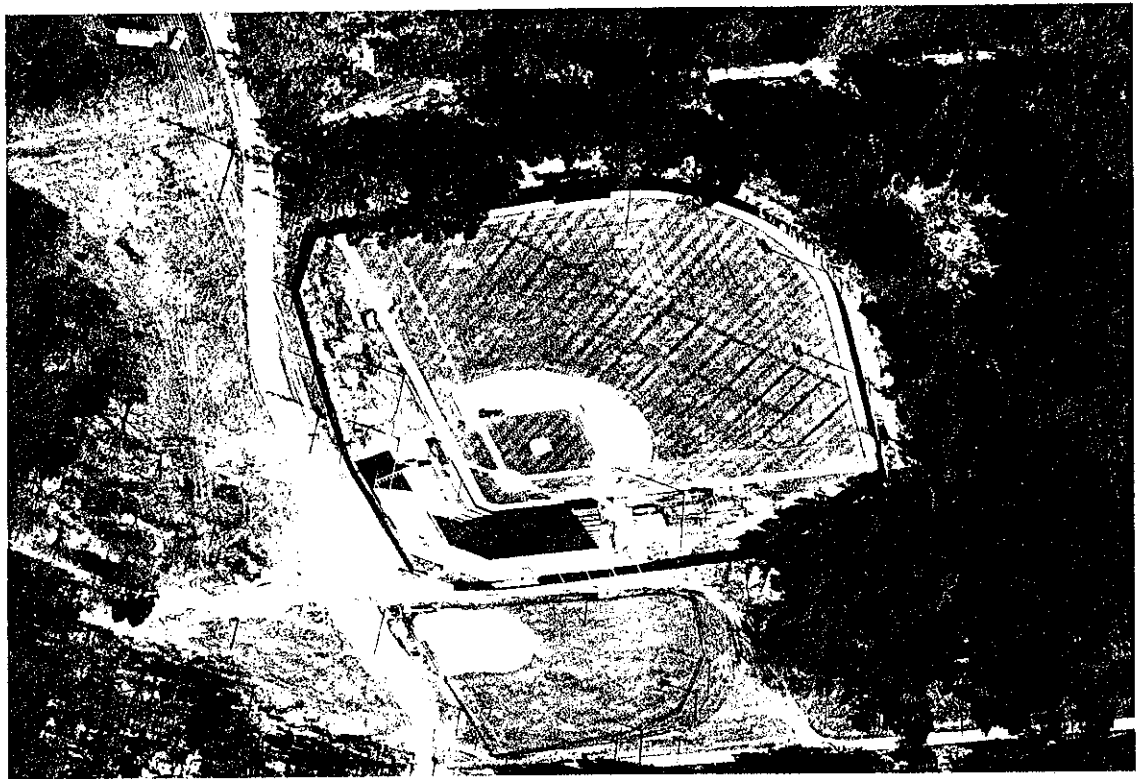
— The minutes of the Dec. 10 City Commission meeting.

— The minutes of the Kilgore Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors Meeting on Dec. 3.

— The minutes of the Roy H. Laird Memorial Hospital Board of Directors meeting on Nov. 26.

— The awarding of a bid on City of Kilgore State Highway 42 sewer improvements to Jim Davis of Springhill, which will cost the City of Kilgore \$98,122.05.

— Jim Wallace, chairman of the board of City National Bank, was appointed to the Roy H. Laird Memorial Hospital Board of Directors.



# City of Kilgore

P. O. BOX 990  
KILGORE, TEXAS 75662

Where Civic Pride is Justified

Scale: 1" = 200'

GREGG CO  
RUSK CO

West

S. COMMERCE ST.

2.544 Ac.

Softball  
Park

Well

Well

Well  
Park

Well

No.

U

North

South

4.89 ac.

~~17.55 ac.~~  
12.925 Ac.

Well

Well

Guiberson

1013'

BROADMOORE ADD.

East

A portion of the S. S. Laird 317 Ac  
Mary Van Winkle Survey, Gregg County

15.469 Ac.

# Application Form Official Texas Historical Marker

(Please complete both sides of form.)

This marker is for (title or subject): DRILLER PARK

(Title subject to change by THC staff and/or State Marker Review Board.)

County: GREGG & RUSK COUNTIES

Marker location (street address and city, or specific directions from nearest town on state highway map):  
Commerce Street at Hunter Street in Kilgore

Distance and direction of marker topic from marker site (if applicable): Left of main entrance to ball park.



### Approval of County Historical Commission

The application and narrative history must be approved by the county historical commission before forwarding to the Texas Historical Commission.

Signature of CHC chair or Marker Committee chair: *Norman H. Black, D.M.*  
Date: 3-24-97

Address: 417 Mobberly Ave.  
Longview, Texas Phone: 903-757-2261 FAX: 903-753-5337

*The CHC chair or Marker Committee chair automatically will receive all copies of correspondence regarding this marker project.*

### Permission of owner for marker placement

Permission for placement of a marker must be obtained from the property owner. Please provide the name of a contact person if the owner is an institution, organization, or public entity. This section need not be completed if the marker is to be placed on right-of-way maintained by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Name: CITY OF KILGORE  
Contact person (if applicable): RONALD H STEPHENS, CITY MANAGER  
Mailing address: P O BOX 990  
KILGORE TX 75662 Phone: 903-984-5081 FAX: 903-983-3523

Owner's Signature: *R. H. Stephens*

Do you wish to receive copies of all correspondence concerning this marker application?  Yes  No

### To whom should the request for payment be addressed?

Name: Kilgore High School Baseball Boosters  
Contact person (if applicable): Pat McCrory  
Mailing address: 2817 Littleton, Kilgore, TX 75662  
Phone: 1-903-984-0599 FAX: 1-903-984-6241

Does this person wish to receive copies of all other correspondence concerning this application?  Yes  No

### Is there anyone else to whom all correspondence concerning this marker application should be addressed? (One additional name and address only, please.)

Name: Mrs. Helen M. Griffin  
Mailing address: 2600 Brookview  
Kilgore, TX 75662 Phone: 1-903-984-8285 FAX: 1-903-984-5527



**SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS**

In order to facilitate delivery of the marker, neither post office box numbers nor rural route numbers can be accepted. If the marker is to be placed on the highway right-of-way, it will be shipped directly to the district highway engineer.

Name: Dr. Norman Black  
Street address: 417 Mobberly Ave.  
Phone: Longview, Texas 75602 903-757-2261

**TYPE AND SIZE OF MARKER DESIRED (Please check one only.)**

**Subject Markers**

This type of marker is solely educational in nature and conveys no legal restrictions to the property. Subject markers are appropriate for topics such as cemeteries, church congregations, businesses, persons, events, and institutions. These markers should not be attached to buildings. If the marker is to be attached to a surface other than the foundry-provided post, please provide the requested information in the space below.

- 16" x 12" grave marker (comes with mounting bar) \$250
- 27" x 42" marker with post \$850
- 27" x 42" marker without post (see below) \$800
- 18" x 28" marker with post \$550
- 18" x 28" marker without post (see below) \$500

If not on post, to what (block of granite, gatepost, etc.) will the marker be attached? \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of material? (wood, stone, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Markers**

Markers conveying the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) designation are reserved solely for historic structures deemed worthy of preservation for their architectural integrity and historical associations. The RTHL designation does carry a measure of legal protection for the structure (see Marker Policies 13 through 18) and for that reason we must have a legal description (lot and block numbers) for the property to be designated. The most commonly used marker for conveying this designation is the medallion and plate (also referred to as a building marker); however, the 18" x 28" or 27" x 42" size marker may be ordered for those who wish a greater amount of historical information to appear in the marker text. Careful attention should be paid so as not to damage historic building material if the marker is to be mounted directly onto the structure. The THC staff can provide alternate ideas for mounting upon request.

- Medallion and 16" x 12" plate with post \$400
- Medallion and 16" x 12" plate without post (see below) \$350
- 27" x 42" marker with post \$850
- 27" x 42" marker without post (see below) \$800
- 18" x 28" marker with post \$550
- 18" x 28" marker without post (see below) \$500

If not on post, to what (building, gate, etc.) will the marker be attached? \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of material? (wood, stone, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Legal description of property (lot and block number; metes and bounds):**

\_\_\_\_\_

*Before forwarding your material to the Texas Historical Commission, please check to make sure you've included the following items. Incomplete applications cannot be considered and may be returned to the applicant.*

- ✓ completed application form signed by the county historical commission chair or marker committee chair
- ✓ narrative history with reference notes and bibliography
- ✓ photograph of the proposed marker location (do not use instant/Polaroid photos)
- ✓ map indicating marker location and other sites related to the marker topic
- ✓ historic photo of property and current photographs of all elevations (RTHL markers only)
- ✓ legal description of property (RTHL markers only)
- ✓ floor plans (RTHL markers only)
- ✓ site plan (RTHL markers only)

**Mail completed applications to:**

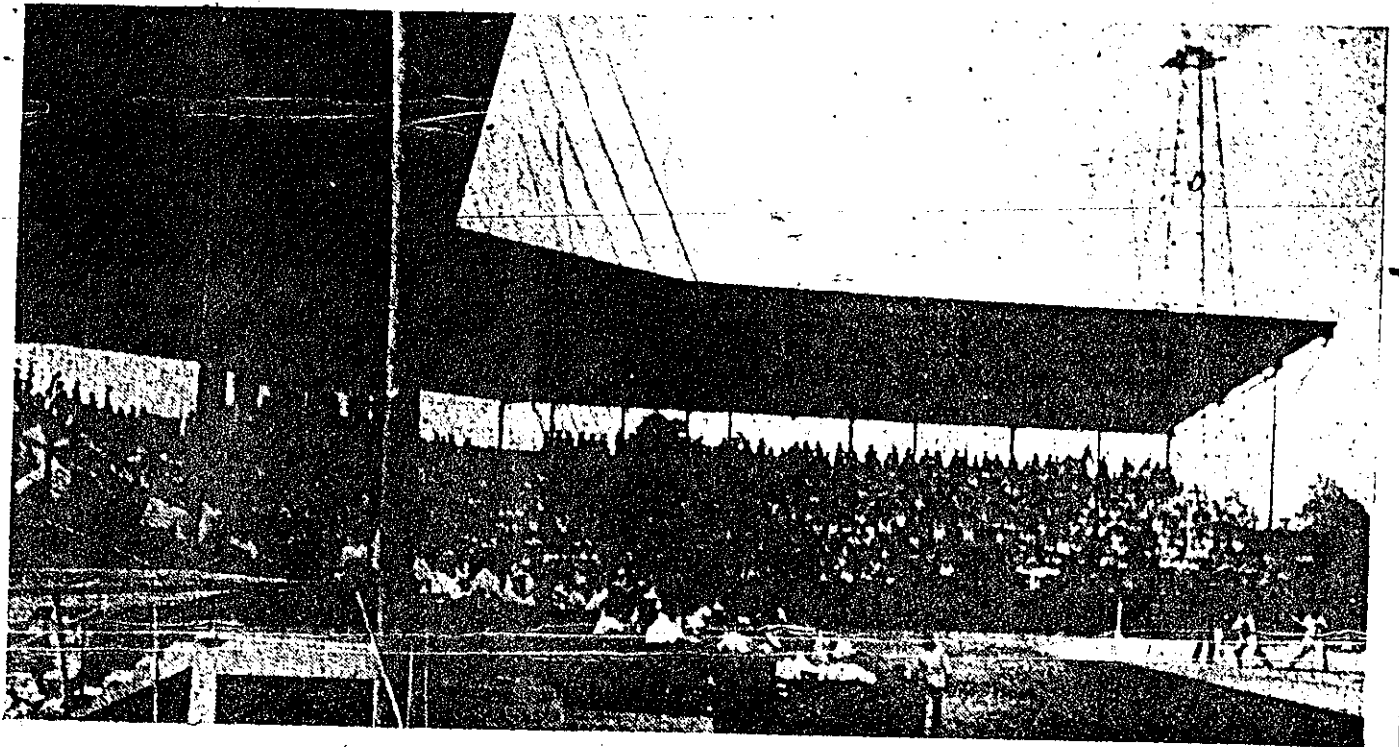
**Local History Programs, Texas Historical Commission, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, Texas 78711-2276 512/463-5853**

Additional items, including directional signs and replacement parts for 1936 markers, are available. Please contact the Local History Programs office for a separate order form.

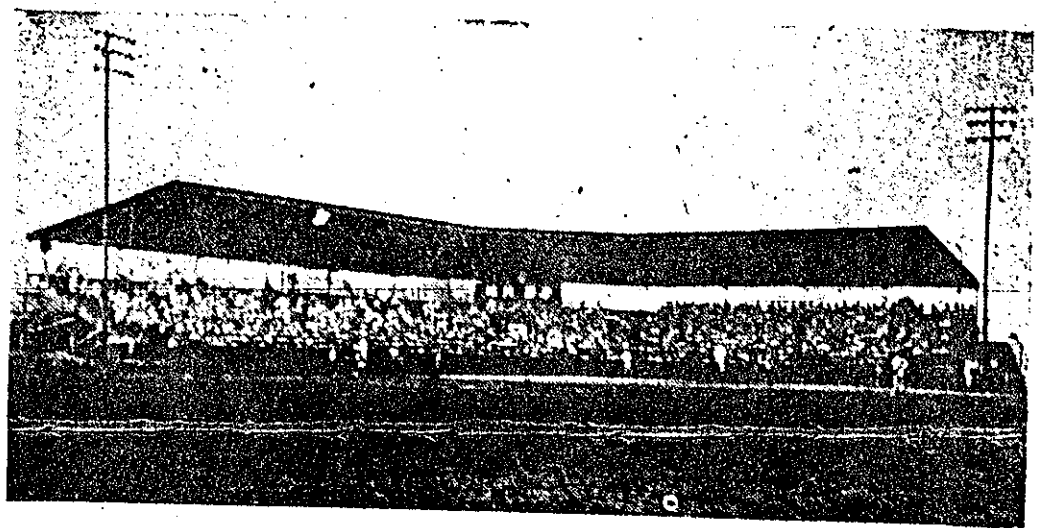
POWERED BY THE OUTPUT OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST OIL F.

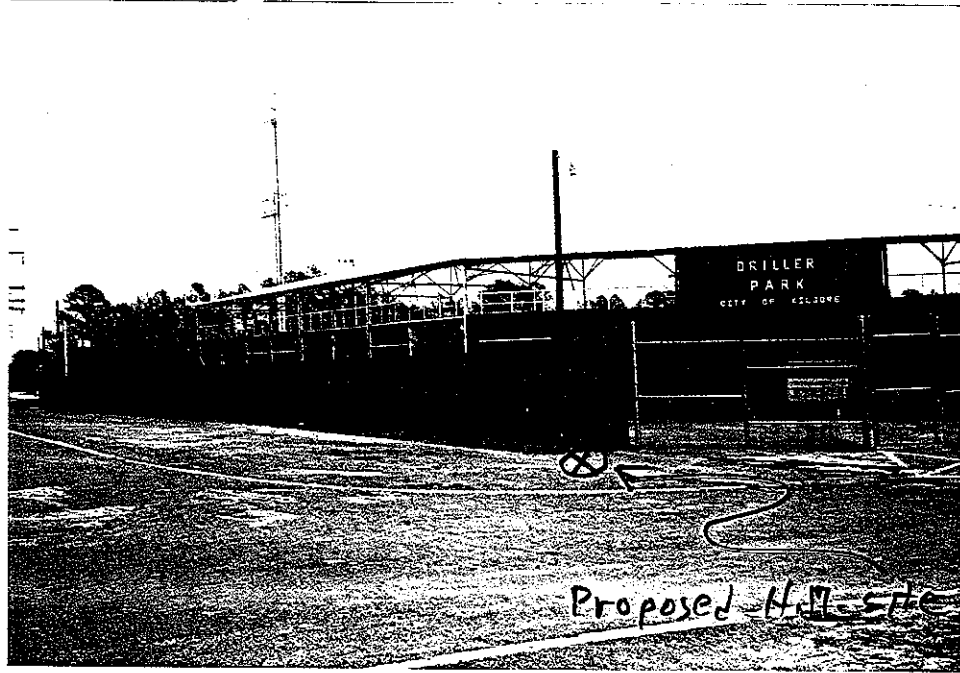
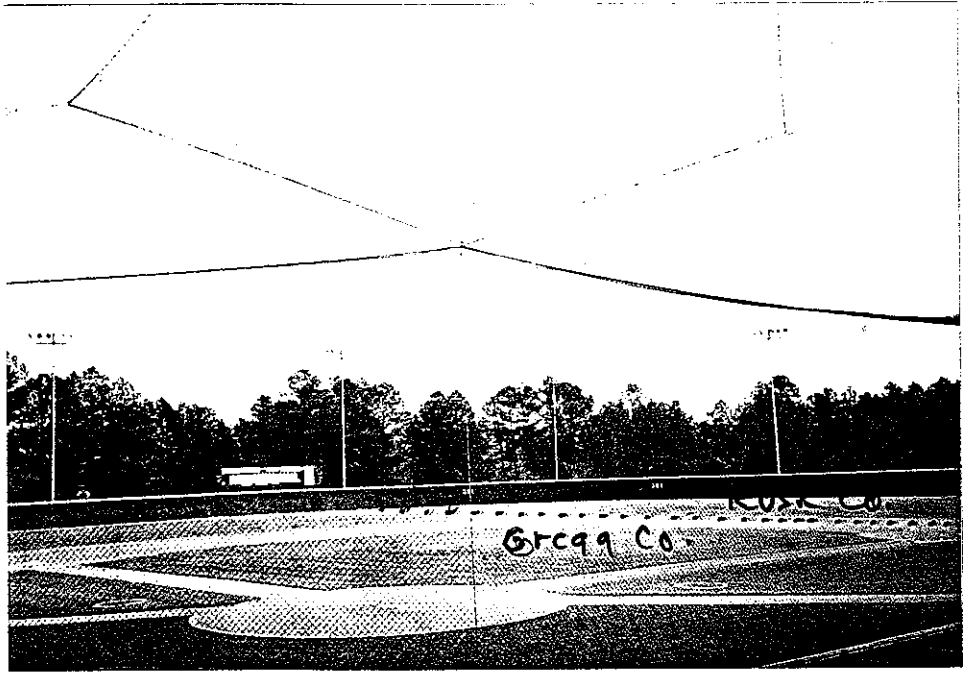
KILGORE, TEXAS, SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 1947

# BASEBALL RETURNS

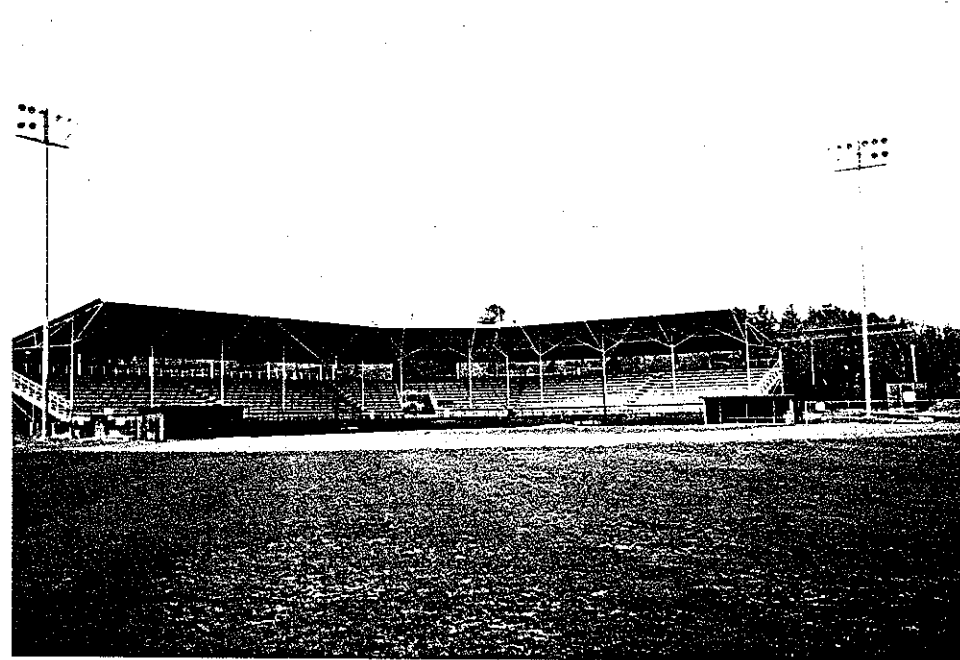


LONE STAR LEAGUE'S FINEST

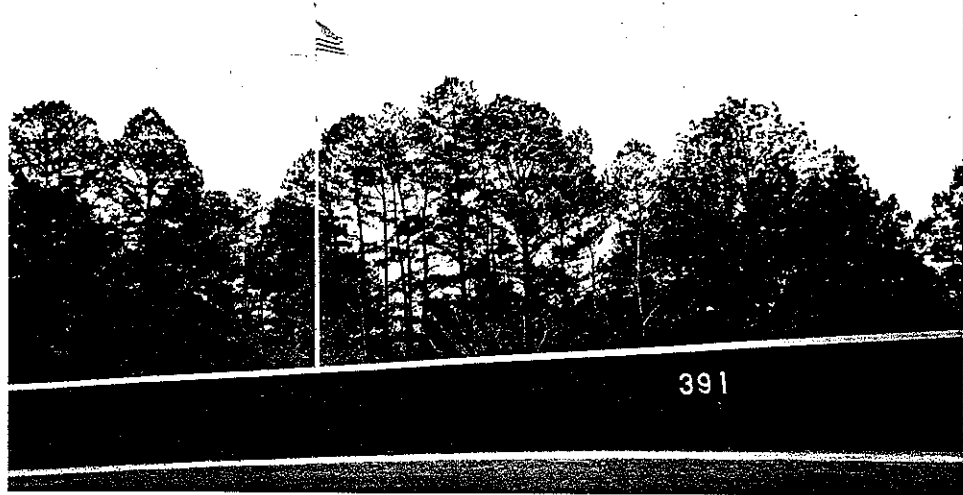




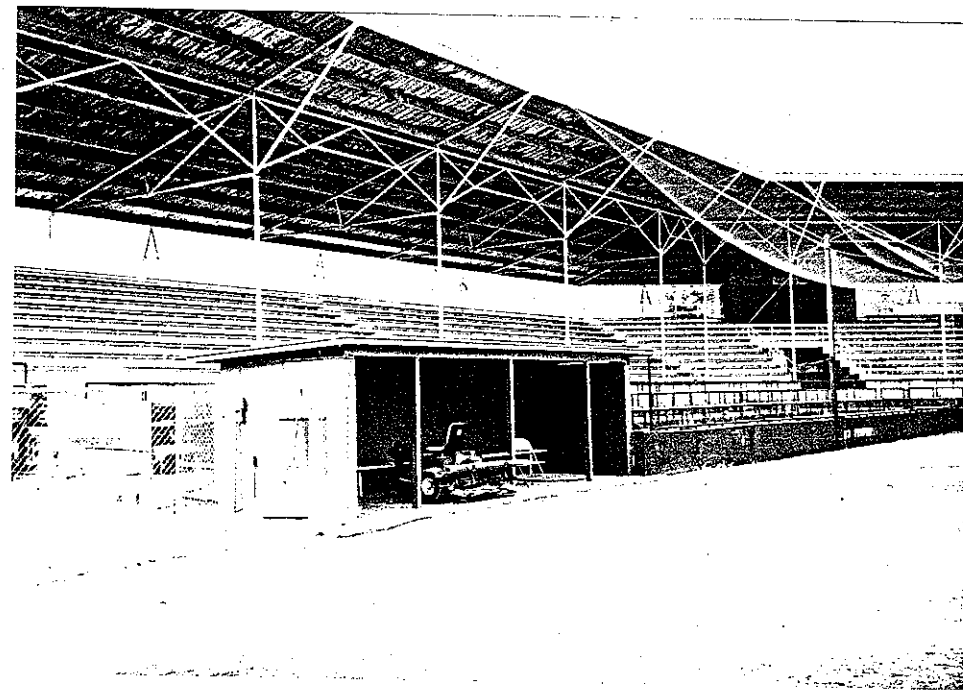
Press Box



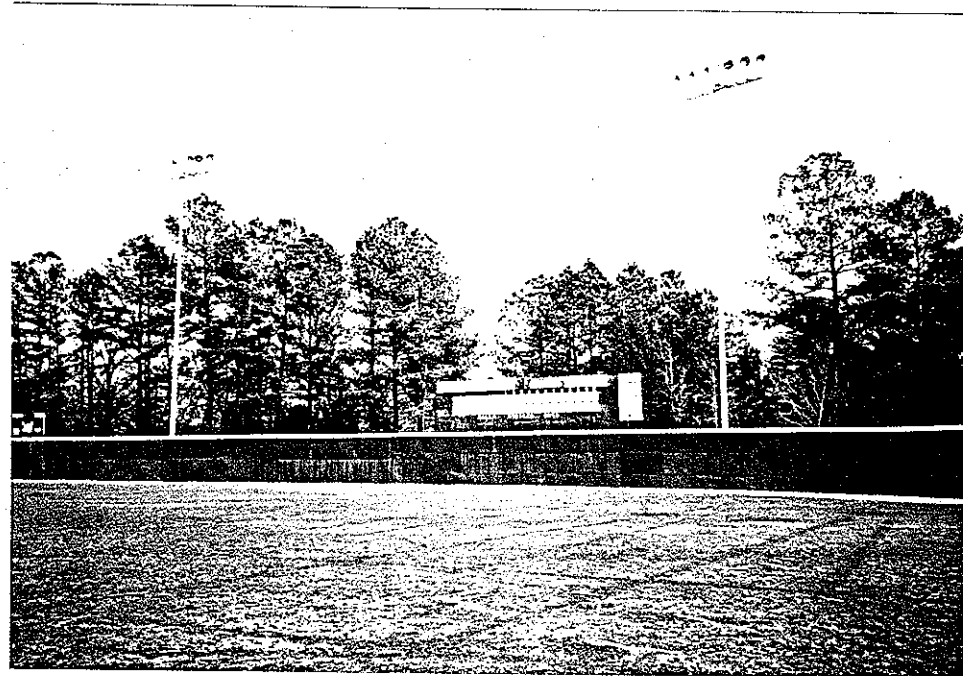
Grandstand



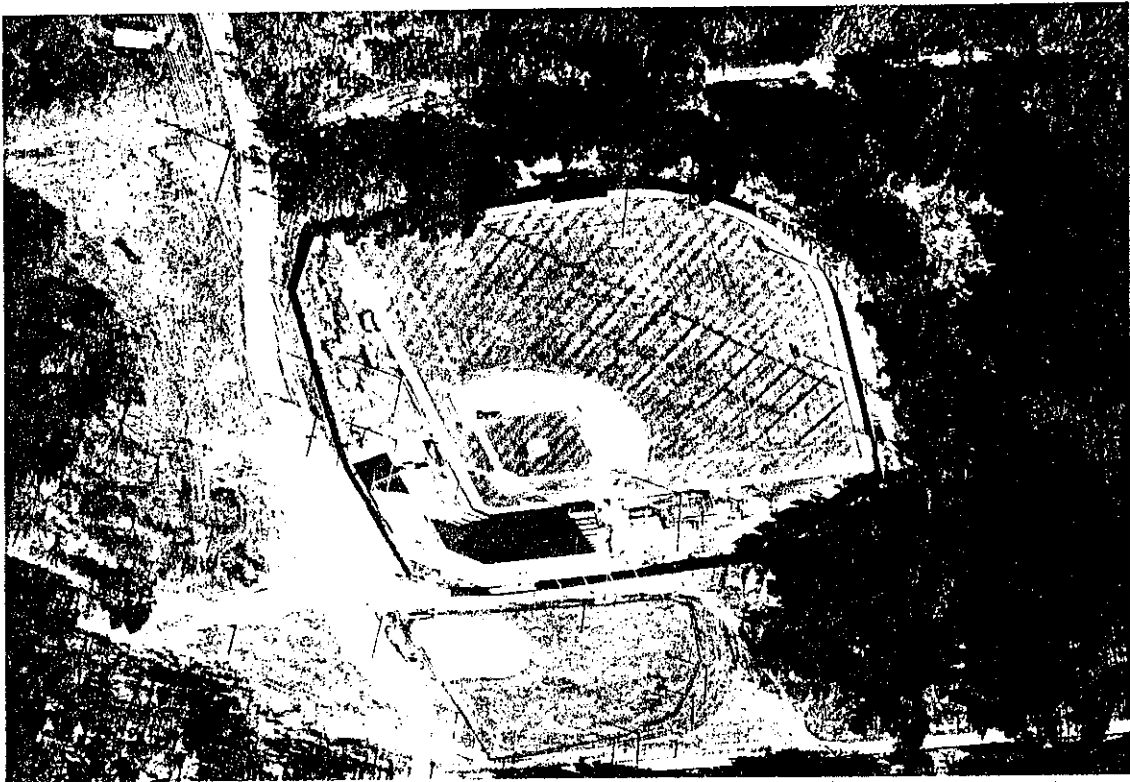
Center field & Flag pole



1st Base Dugout

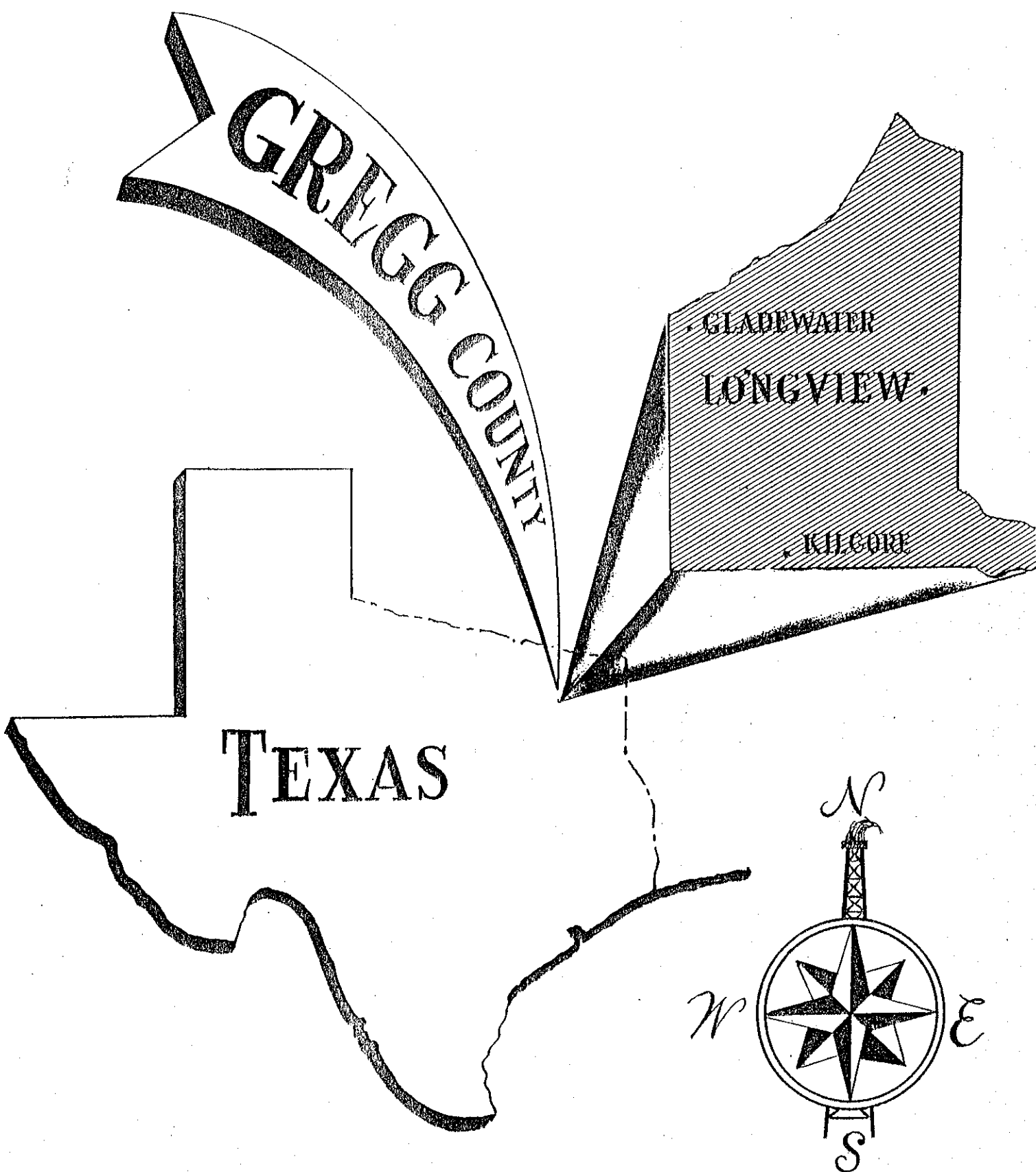


Scoreboard



Driller Park

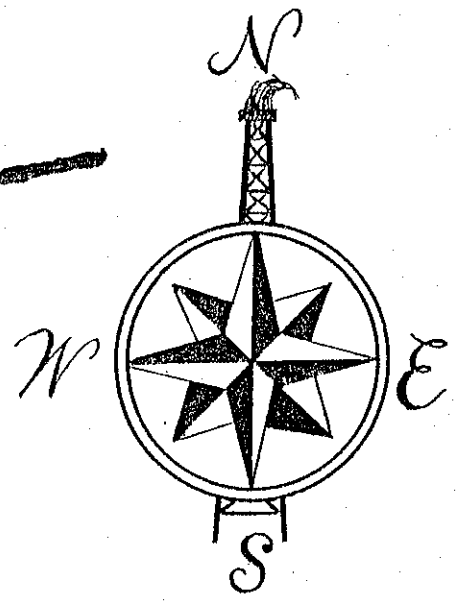
Aerial photo made about 1,200 feet in  
the 1990s.



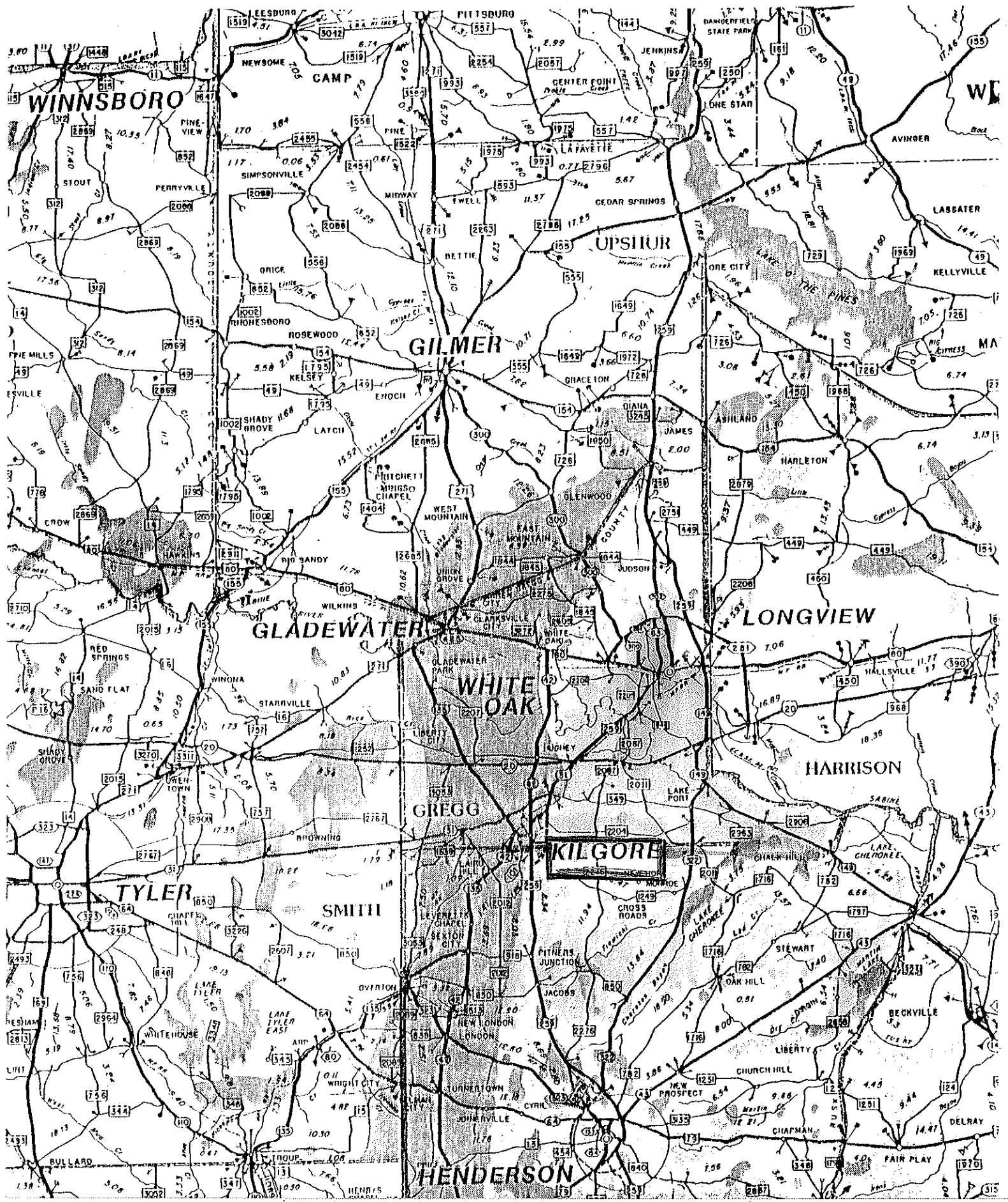
GREGG COUNTY

GLADEWATER  
LONGVIEW  
KILCORE

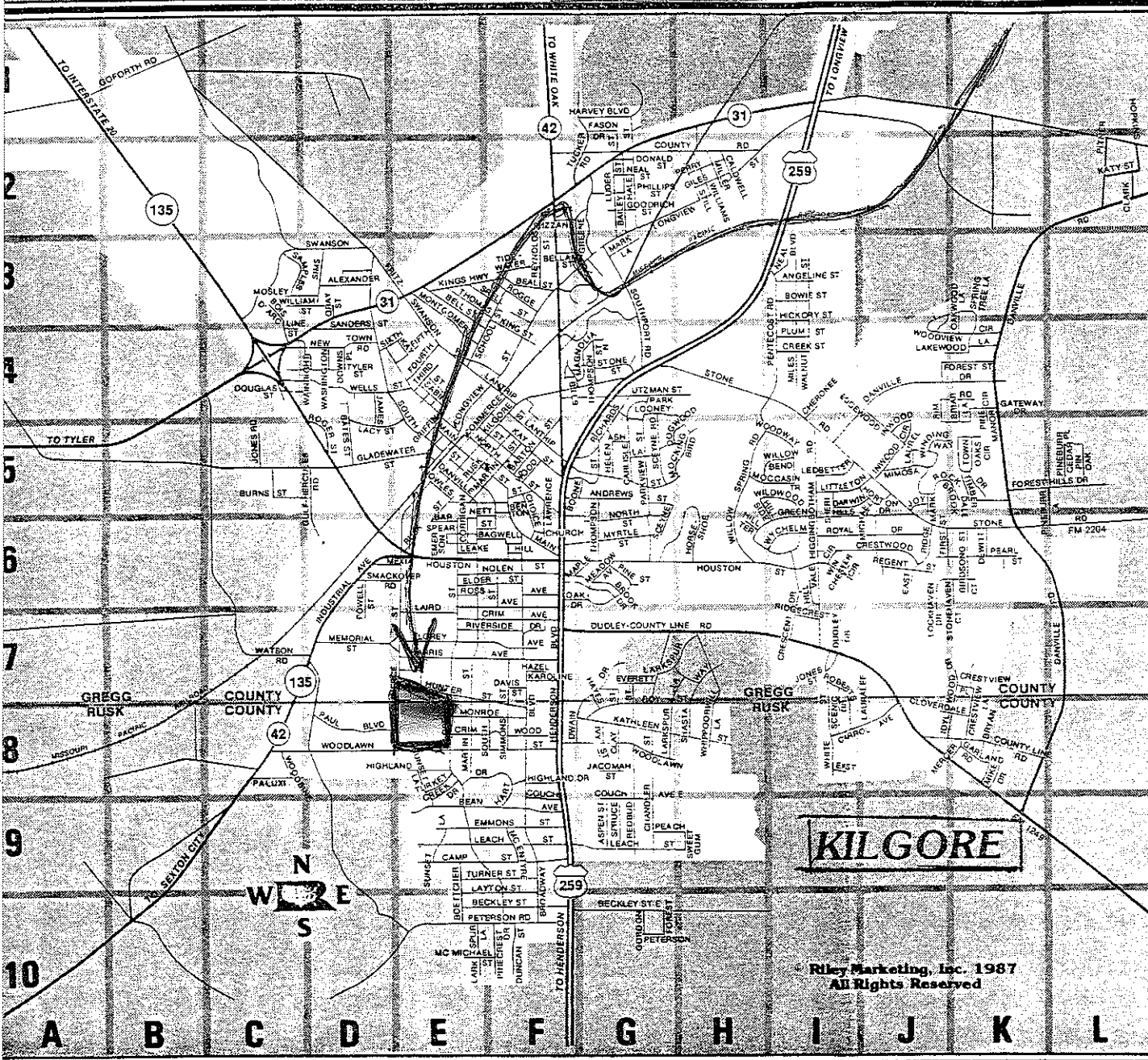
TEXAS



# GREGG COUNTY



# DRILLER PARK



## KILGORE STREET INDEX

ALEXANDER	D-3	GLADEWATER ST	D-5	NEW TOWN RD	D-4
ANDREWS ST	G-3	GOPORTH RD	B-1	NOLEN ST	F-6
ANGELINE ST	I-3	GOODRICH ST	G-2	NORTH ST	E-4, F-6
ASH LA	G-5	GRAY ST	D-3	OAK DR	F-6
ASPEN ST	G-9	GREENE	F-3	OAKWOOD LA	J-3
BADWELL AVE	E-6	GREEN HILLS DR	M-6, I-5	PARK LA	G-4
BAILEY ST	G-2	GRIFFIN ST	E-5	PARKVIEW ST	G-5
BARNETT ST	E-5, F-5	GULF-MERCILES RD	E-5	PAUL BLVD	D-8
BARTON ST	F-5	HALE ST	G-2	PEARL ST	J-6
BATES ST	D-5	HARRIS AVE	E-7	PENTECOST RD	I-3
BEAL ST	F-3	HART ST	F-9	PERRY ST	H-2
BEAN AVE	E-9	HARVY BLVD	G-1	PETERSON RD	F-10
BECKLEY ST	F-10	HAYES ST	G-7	PHILLIPS ST	G-2
BECKLEY ST E	G-10	HAZEL ST	F-7	PINEBURR LA	K-6
BELLAMY ST	G-3	HELEN ST	G-5	PINEBURR PL	L-5
BELL ST	E-3	HENDERSON BLVD	F-6,8	PINECREST DR	F-10
BENTON	F-5	HICKORY ST	I-3	PINE MANOR CIR	K-4
BILLS DR	F-4	HIGGINGBOTHAM RD	I-6	PINE ST	G-6
BIRDSONG CT	K-6	HIGHLAND DR	E-8	PITNER	L-2
BIRDSONG ST	K-6	HIGHLAND DR	F-8	PLUM ST	G-5
BOETTCHER DR	E-10	HILLSIDE	M-5	POWELL ST	I-4
BOIS D ARC	C-3	HILL ST	F-6	REBLUD ST	G-3
BOONE ST	F-5	HILL TER	M-6	REGENT ST	J-6
BOWIE ST	I-3	HILLVALE	I-6	REYNOLDS ST	F-3
BRIAR LA	F-7,8,9	HOPKINS	I-7	RICHARDS ST	F-6
BROADWAY BLVD	F-7,8,9	HORSESHOE DR	G-6	RIDGECREST	I-7
BROOK DR	F,G-6	HORSESHOE DR	M-6	RIM RD	M-4
BRYAN	K-6	HOUSTON ST	J-5	RIVERSIDE DR	E-7
BURNS ST	C-3	HOUSTON ST	E-6	ROBERTS	I-7
CALDWELL	M-3	HOUSTON ST	G-6	ROCKBROOK DR	J-5
CAMP ST	E-9	HOUSTON ST	I-6	ROGER ST	D-5
CAMP ST	F-9	HUNTER ST	E-7	ROGGE DR	F-3
CARLISE DR	G-5	IDYLLWOOD DR	J-6	ROSS AVE	E-6
CARROL AVE	J-6	INDUSTRIAL AVE	D-7	ROSS AVE	F-6
CEGAS	G-5	INWOOD RD	J-5	ROYAL DR	F-6
CHANDLER ST	G-9	INWOOD RD	J-5	ROY ST	G-6
CHANDLER ST	G-9	IVY ST	G-8	RUSK ST	E-5
CHEROKEE	I-4	JACOMAH ST	G-8	RUSK ST	E-5
CHOCOLATE ST	F-5	JAMES ST	D-4	SABINE ST	E-4, F-5
CHURCH ST	F-3	JONES RD	C-3	SAMRIS	C-3
CLARK	L-2	JONES ST	I-7	SANDERS ST	D-4
CLAY ST	G-6	JOY DR	J-5	SCENIC DR	I-6
CLOVERDALE LA	J-8	KAROLINE ST	G-5	SCENEY RD	G-5
COMMERCE ST	E-5	KATHLEEN ST	G-8	SCHOEN RD	G-6
CORRIGAN ST	E-6	KATY ST	L-2	SCHOOL ST	E-4
COUCH AVE	F-8	KAY ST	F-4	SHASTA WAY	M-8
COUCH AVE E	G-8	KAY ST	F-4	SHERRY LA	I-5
COUNTY LINE RD	K-8	KILGORE ST	F-3	SIMMONS ST	F-8
COUNTRY RD	G-2	KINGS HWY	E-3	SHMS	D-3
CREEK ST	I-4	KING ST	F-4	SIXTH AVE	D-4
CRESCENT DR	I-7	KNOWLES ST	E-5	SMACKOVER RD	D-6
CRESTVIEW LA	K-8	KNOWLES ST	F-5	SOUTHPORT RD	G-3
CRESTVIEW PL	J-7	LACY ST	D-5	SOUTH ST	E-5
CRESTWOOD CIR	I-6	LAIRD AVE	E,F-6	SOUTH ST W	E-8, F-6
CRESTWOOD ST	J-6	LAKEWOOD LA	J-4	SOUTH ST W	D-4
CRIMWOOD LA	F-6	LANTHRIP ST	F-6	SPEAR ST	E-6
DANVILLE RD	J,K-4	LANTHRIP ST	G-3	SPEAR ST	E-6
DARWIN ST	I-5	LARKSPUR LA	E-10	SPRING TREE LA	K-4
DAVIS ST	F-7	LARKSPUR LA	G-7	SPRUCE ST	G-9
DEWITT	K-6	LARKSPUR LA	G-8	STILL	M-2
DOGWOOD TR	E-4	LAURALEE	J-6	STONE RD	M-4, I-5, K-6
DONALD ST	G-2	LAUREL	J-5	STONM ST	G-4
DOUGLAS ST	G-2	LAWRENCE ST	F-5	STONEHAVEN CT	J-6
DOWNES PL	D-4	LAYTON ST	F-8	SUNSET LA	E-6,8
DUDLEY-COUNTY LINE RD	G-7	LEACH ST	E,F,G-9	SUZANNE ST	F-2
DUDLEY DR	I-7	LEAKE ST	E-4	SWANSON	C-3
DUNCAN ST	F-10	LEBBETTER DR	I-5	THIRD AVE	E-4
DWAIN DR	F-8	LEONARD ST	C-4	THOMAS ST	E-3
EAST	I-6	LITTLETON RD	I-5	THOMPSON ST	G-3,6
EASTRIDGE	J-6	LOCKHAVEN DR	J-6	THOMPSON ST N	G-4
EDGEWOOD RD	E-4	LONGVIEW ST	E-5, G-2	TIDEWATER RD	F-3
ELDER ST	E-6	LOONEY AVE	G-4	TIMBERDALE DR	K-5
EMERSON	E-6	LUOER ST	G-2	TOWN OAKS CIR	J,K-5
EMMONS ST	E-9	MAGNOLIA ST	G-4	TOWN OAKS DR	K-5
EYERSON ST	G-7	MAIN ST	F-2	TUCKER DR	F-2
FASON DR	G-1	MAIN ST	F-8	TURKEY CREEK DR	E-8
FIFTH AVE	E-4	MAPLE AVE	F-6	TURNER ST	E-9
FIRST ST	J-6	MARK LA	G-3	TYLER ST	G-4
FLORENCE ST	E-6,8,9	MARK PL	J-5	UTZMAN ST	G-4
FLOREY AVE	E-7	MARTIN ST	E-6,7,8, F-3	WAINWRIGHT AVE	D-4
FOREST HILLS DR	K-5	MC ENTYRE ST	F-9	WALNUT ST	I-3
FOREST ST	J-4	MC MICHAEL ST	E-10	WASHINGTON ST	D-4
FOURTH AVE	E-4	MEMORIAL ST	G-6	WATSON RD	C-7
FRITZ-SWANSON RD	E-3	MERCER	J-8	WELLS ST	D-4
GARLAND RD	K-6	MEXIA ST	D-5	WHIPPOORWILL LA	M-8
GATEWAY DR	K-4	MICHAEL	J-6	WHITE ST	I-8
GILES ST	M-2	MIKE DR	K-3	WILDOOD LA	M-5
		MILES BLVD	I-4	WILLIAM ST	C-3
		MILLER ST	H-2	WILLIAMS	M-2
		MIMOSA ST	J-5	WILLOW BEND	M-5
		MOCKINGBIRD LA	G-5	WILLOW SPRING RD	M-5
		MONROE ST	E-8	WINCHESTER DR	I-6
		MONTGOMERY ST	E-3	WINDING WAY	J-5
		MOSLEY ST	C-3	WOOD ST	F-5
		MYRTLE ST	G-6	WOODLAWN ST	E-8
		NEAL	I-3	WOODLAWN ST	C-3
		NEAL ST	G-2	WOODVIEW CIR	E-4
				WOODWAY	I-5
				WYCHELM DR	M-6

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*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

April 3, 1997

Dr Norman Black  
Gregg CHC  
417 Mobberly Ave  
Longview TX 75602

Re: DRILLER PARK

Dear Dr. Black:

I've looked over the application you sent in for a historical marker for Driller Park, and I have some questions.

The park does not yet meet the 75-year age requirement for subject markers. Did you intend to submit it as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, for which the age limit is 50 years? I'm not sure it would qualify as an RTHL, but that is the only category currently in place for which it would be acceptable age-wise.

The other alternative would be to hold on to this application until the proposed State of Texas Antiquities Register (STAR) is implemented - probably in another year or so. Proposals call for all age requirements under the STAR to be 50 years.

Please let me know your preference. I understand from your office that you will be out of town until the 14th; I will be out of the office from the 14th-18th, so you might want to wait until I return if you want to discuss it on the phone. Otherwise, you can send a letter. Thanks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia J. Beeman".

Cynthia J. Beeman, Administrator  
Official Texas Historical Markers  
Local History Programs



## Gregg County Historical Commission

Norman W. Black, D.D.S.  
Chairman

417 Mobberly Avenue  
Longview, Texas 75602

Phone 903-757-2261  
Fax # 903-753-5337

April 14, 1997

Cynthia J. Beeman, Administrator  
Official Texas Historical Markers  
Local History Programs  
Texas Historical Commission  
P. O. Box 12276  
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Driller Park (Kilgore, Historical Marker Application)

Dear Cynthia:

Realizing that the above subject, erected in 1947, does not yet qualify for the Subject Marker classification I would like to propose this entity as a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

There are at least two areas in which this fine ballpark is unique. Situated in the middle of, at the time, the world's largest oilfield it was only natural for the designers and builders to take advantage of readily available materials. The labor force was replete with expert welders. A large portion of the framework of the bleachers was constructed of oil-field pipe. In addition the entire stadium is fenced or walled with sheet iron, much the same as that used in the construction of the many oil tanks in the area.

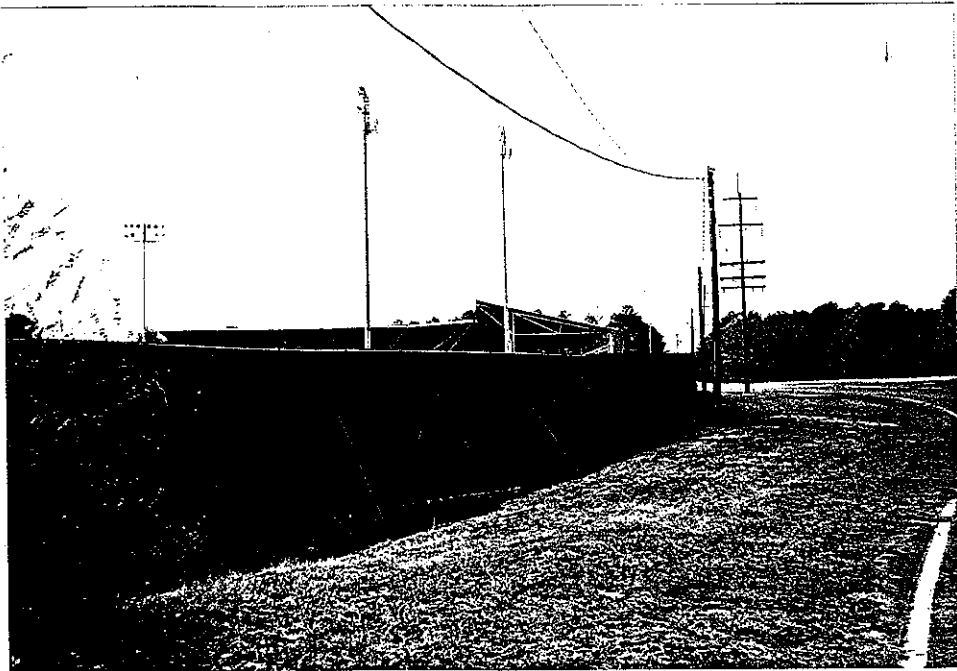
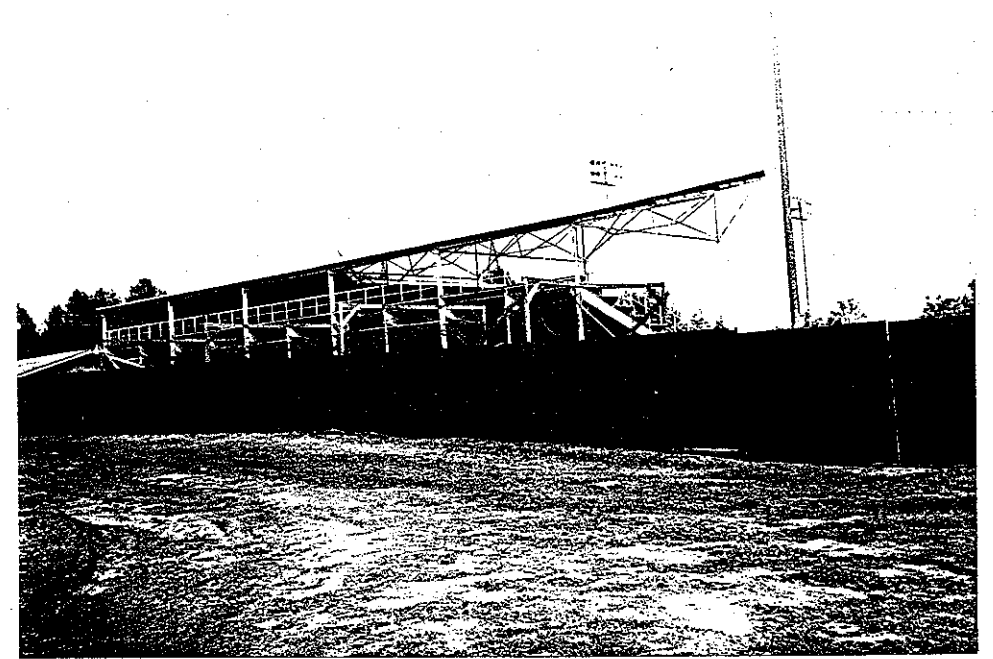
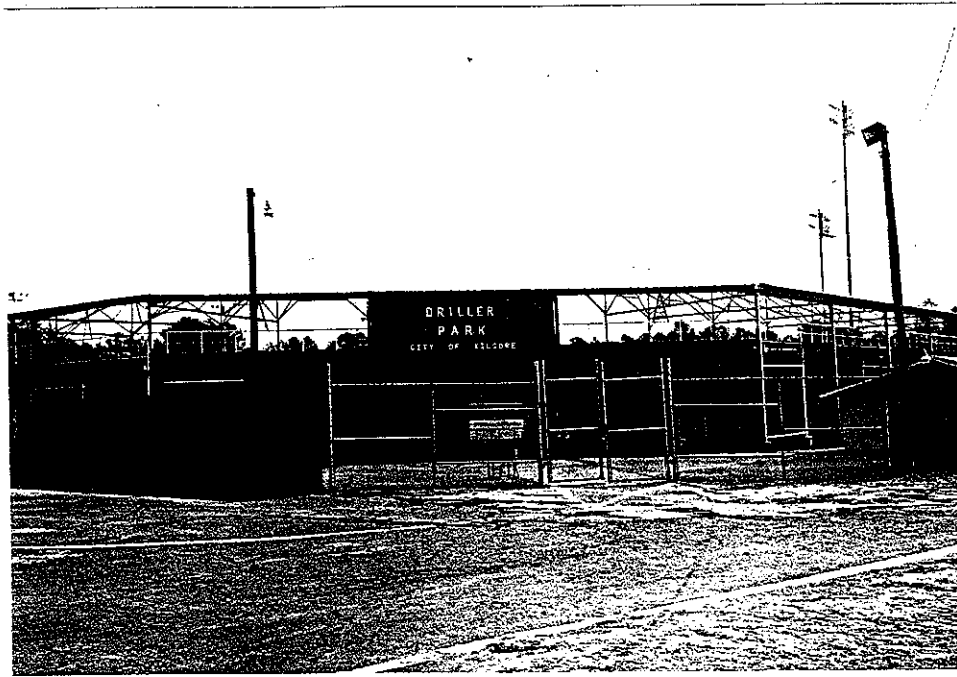
The historical aspects of this subject are covered in the application narrative.

I am enclosing additional photographs of the park, which were made the same day of the first set I sent, to demonstrate the use of these materials.

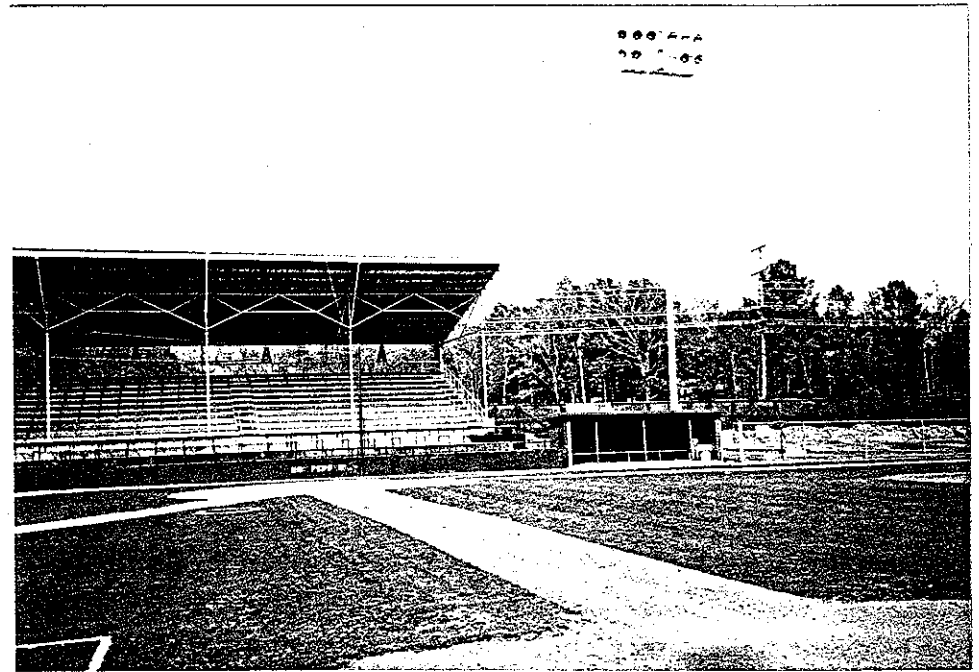
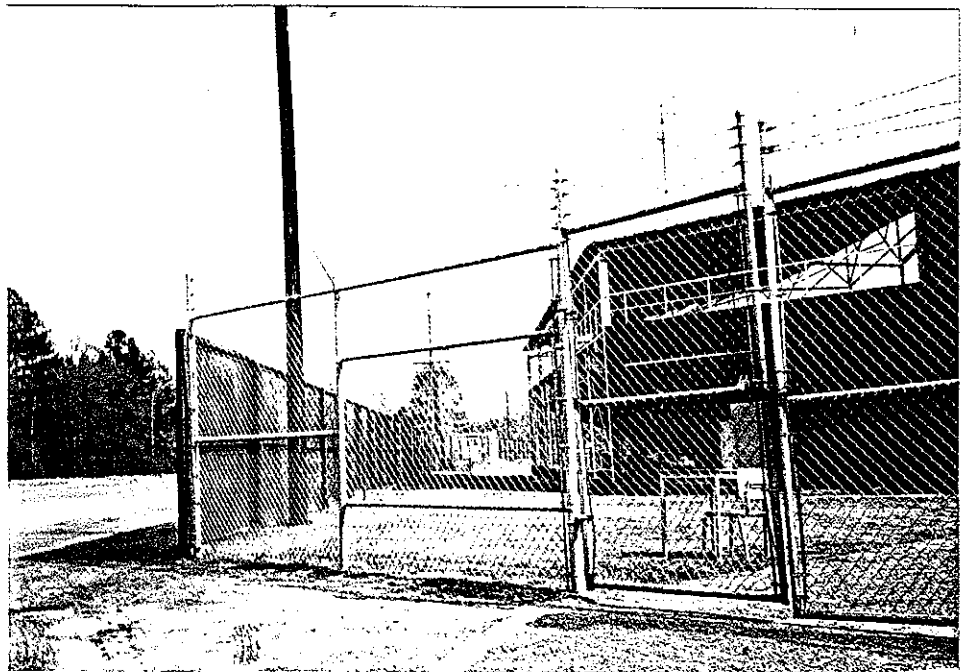
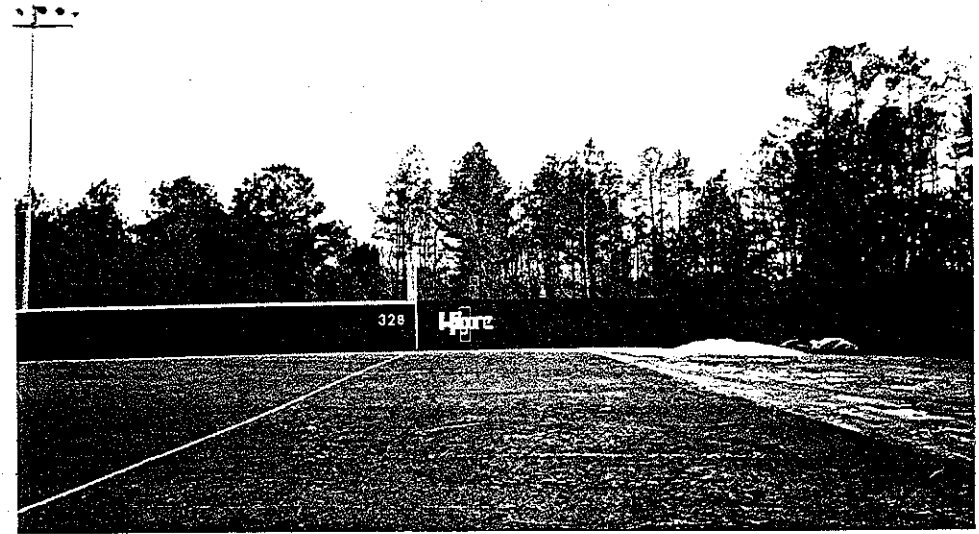
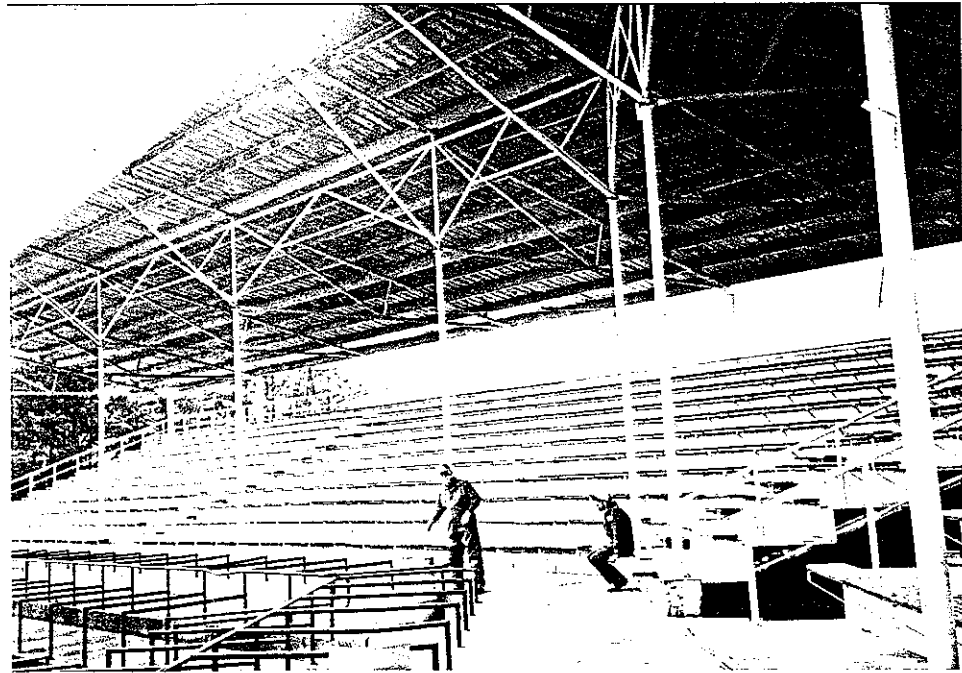
Sincerely,

Norman Black, D.D.S.

Enc. - 7 photographs



Additional photos made 2-23-97  
sent to T.H.C. 4-14-97



Additional photos sent to T.H.C. 4-14-97  
photos made 2-23-97



**Gregg County Historical Commission**

Norman W. Black, D.D.S.  
Chairman

417 Mobberly Avenue  
Longview, Texas 75602

Phone 903-757-2261  
Fax # 903-753-5337

April 16, 1997

Cynthia Beeman, Administrator  
Official Texas Historical Markers  
Texas Historical Commission  
P. O. Box 12276  
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Driller Park

Dear Cynthia:

A recent issue of the Kilgore News-Herald, Sunday, April 13, 1997 featured Driller Park on its coming 50th anniversary. I am enclosing a copy of both articles. Although interesting and containing anecdotal information the most significant items in the issue were a few photographs that I did not know about.

Sincerely,

Norman Black, D.D.S.

Enc.

# Take me out to the ballgame!

## Driller Park celebrating 50 years

By BUCK RINGGOLD

The date was April 24, 1947, a red-letter day for sports in the city of Kilgore.

On that particular day, a certain grocery store advertised large fresh country eggs for 39 cents a dozen, hamburger meat for 35 cents a pound and apples at 29 cents per two pounds.

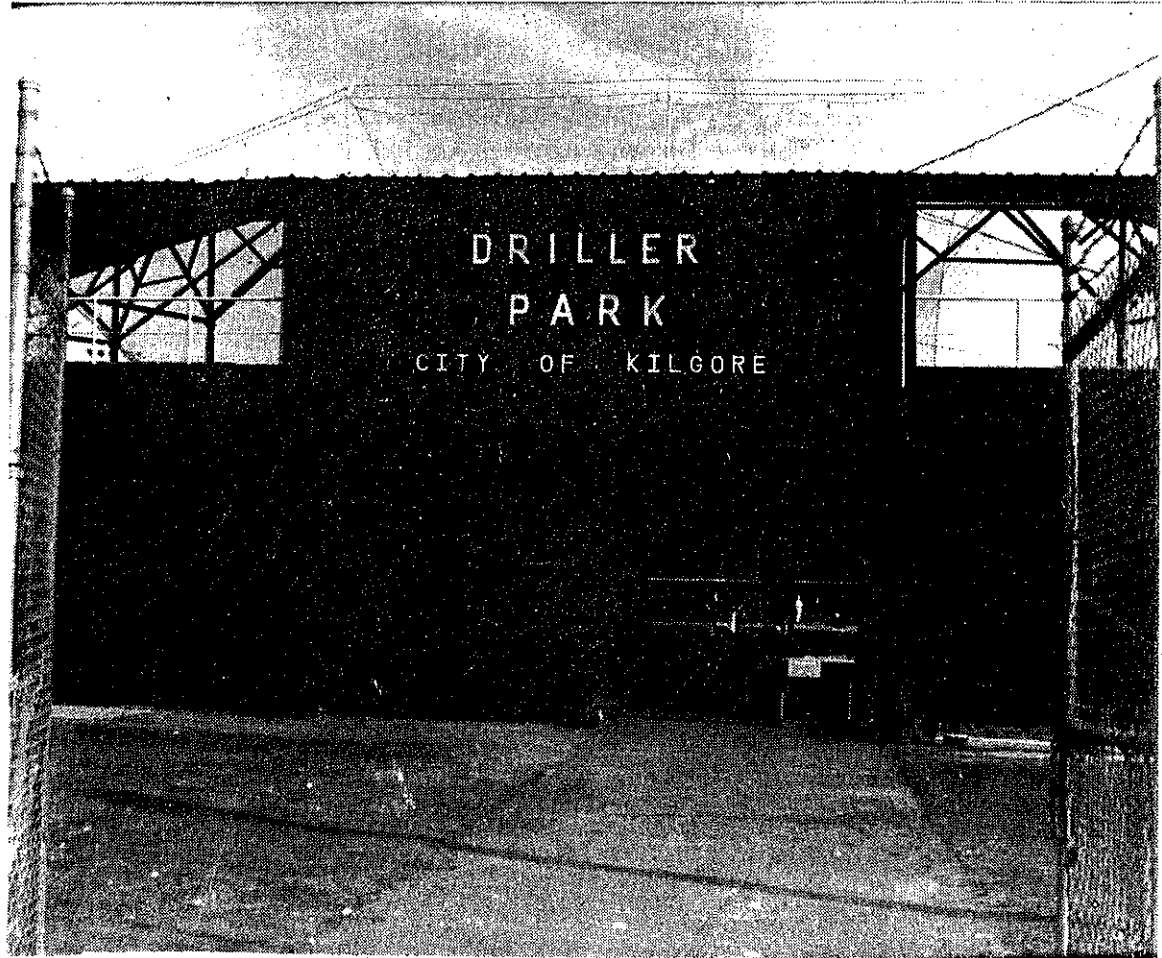
The motion picture playing at the Crim was "The Razor's Edge," which starred Tyrone Power, Gene Tierney and Anne Baxter. Pepsi was being sold for six cents a bottle.

Harry Truman was President of the United States. America was two years removed from World War II. And, nine days prior to April 24, 1947, another important date in the history of sports occurred when Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball's color barrier.

On April 24, 1947, nearly 50 years ago, a total of 3,100 people jammed a new Kilgore baseball park to witness the return of professional baseball to the city after a seven-year absence.

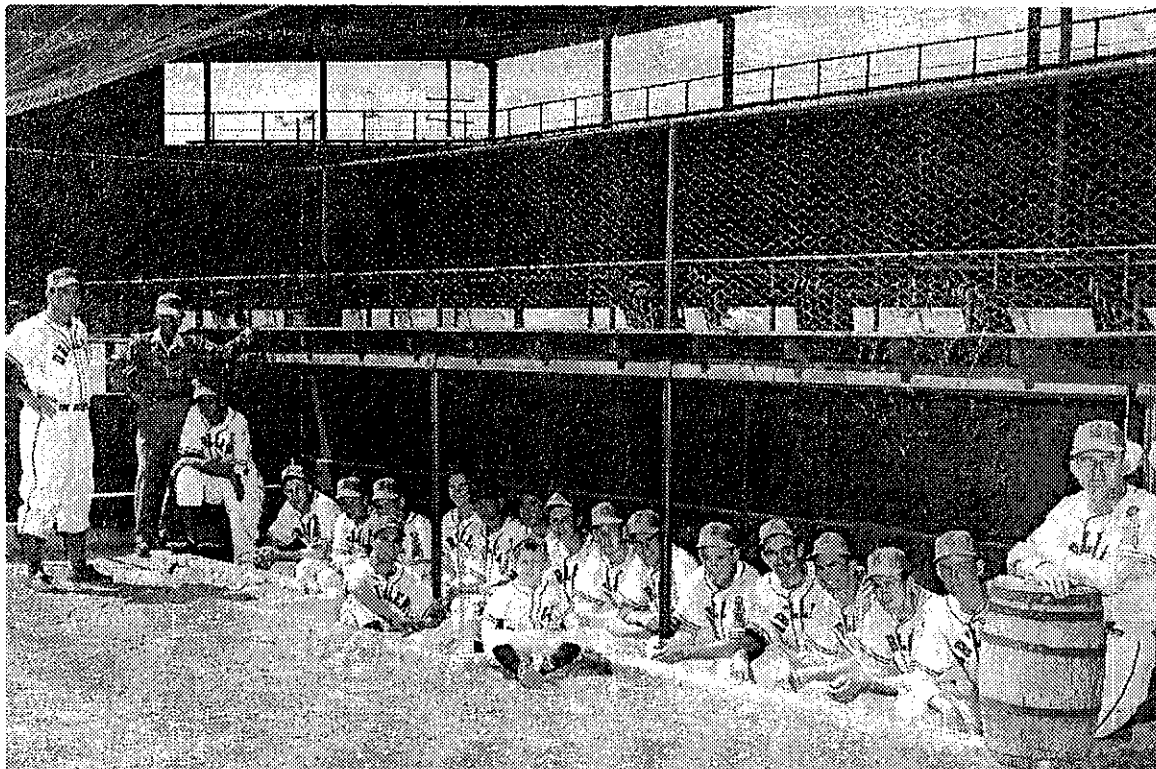
The local nine, the Kilgore Drillers of the Lone Star League, lost that day in their

See DRILLER, Page 7A



**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS —** Pictured above is the outside entrance to Kilgore's Driller Park, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Driller Park's first game took place on April 24, 1947, a contest between the Kilgore Drillers and the Henderson Oilers of the Lone Star League. The park

has played host to several youth, high school, college and professional games over the years. Last year, the park was the site of a Texas-Louisiana League exhibition game between the Tyler WildCatters and the Alexandria Aces, as well as the 1996 Dixie Pre-Majors State Tournament. (Photo by Buck Ringgold)



**ORIGINAL TENANTS —** This vintage photo shows members of the Kilgore Drillers, a Class C professional baseball team for which Driller Park is named after. In their only two seasons as a member of the Lone Star League (1947-

48), the Drillers won the league championship. In 1949 and 1950, the Drillers qualified for the playoffs in the East Texas League. The league disbanded after the 1950 season, and Kilgore has not fielded a professional team since.

## Kilgore has had several pro teams

By BUCK RINGGOLD

Professional baseball in Kilgore had its roots firmly entrenched long before the opening of Driller Park 50 years ago.

Kilgore fielded an independent team, not part of any organized leagues, back in 1905. The team played other teams from area towns, usually on Saturdays. Games on Sunday were not played out of respect to the Sabbath.

The formation of a professional baseball league which included Kilgore coincided with the discovery of oil in the area on December 1930.

A few months later, on April 14, 1931, the East Texas League was founded in a meeting at the office of then-Kilgore Mayor J. Malcolm Crim. Six Class D teams, including the Kilgore Gushers, were formed

See TEAMS, Page 7A

# ★ DRILLER

(Continued from Page 1A)

new digs but went on to win the league championship that year as well as the following season. The club disbanded two years after that, which ended Kilgore's entry into professional baseball.

But the baseball park remained, and it's still standing to this day. That park came to be known as Driller Park, and the facility celebrates its half-century of existence this year.

Driller Park came about primarily because of two reasons: the fact that Kilgore received a professional baseball franchise for the first time since 1940; and also the formation of a local organization that would ensure funding of a new stadium, the Kilgore Baseball Club.

The Kilgore Baseball Club was a community-owned project made up of approximately 400 stockholders. Several people were also designated to serve on the club's board of directors.

The organization invested \$100,000 in funding for the construction of a new baseball facility to accommodate the Kilgore entry in the Lone Star League.

"Work is slated to begin this week on the Kilgore Baseball Club's new stadium, following a series of directors meetings at which various bids and proposals were considered, President Scott E. Lucas announced Saturday," stated an article in the Jan. 5, 1947 edition of the *Kilgore News Herald*.

"Nine of the club's 15 directors, at a meeting Friday afternoon, agreed to accept the proposal of A.E. McCubbin and Rex Stegall, owners of the Kilgore Boiler Works, to build the entire plant on a non-profit basis. Mr. McCubbin will supervise the job free of charge, employees of the Kilgore Boiler Works will do the work; the payroll will be met weekly by the baseball club, which will have its own timekeeper on the job. All material purchases will be approved by the club and paid for at actual cost.

"The stands will seat 1,770 people and 154 boxes will accommodate an extra 616, giving total capacity of 2,386, not counting temporary bleachers which will be considered later."

The article also stated that the estimated total cost of installing stands was \$15,000, the cost for installing lights was \$1,500 and the cost of materials at \$4,500.

Later in January, the team name Drillers was given to the club. The nickname came about as the result of a contest jointly won by Mrs. Claude A. Baugh and E.C. Thevenet. Scott Lucas was appointed team president, and Joe Kracher was named the team's manager.

Work on the new diamond

began during the late stages of the opening month of 1947, along with the club selling advertising space on the outfield signs. Concrete for the stands was poured and underground drainage pipes were installed in early February.

Approximately a month before the official grand opening, the park was nearly 75 percent complete. But construction continued as the big day approached.

"Organized baseball returns to Kilgore for the first time in seven years," stated a front-page article in the April 24, 1947 *Kilgore News Herald*. "Preceded by a gala opening ceremony set for 7:30 p.m., the Drillers and the Henderson Oilers will clash for the third time this season at Kilgore's new park off Harris Avenue and Commerce Street. Kilgore last saw an organized baseball game on Aug. 30, 1940.

"The park, one of the finest baseball plants in the Southwest, is so new that it is still short of completion. But work has progressed sufficiently for the park to accommodate around 3,000 fans.

"The Driller Baseball Club — conceived last winter by local civic leaders and made an actuality through the generous support of the many Kilgore stockholders — is in its inaugural season.

"But the crowd enthusiasm, color, sharp-breaking curves, fast balls, screaming line drives, long flies, arguments with umpires and the multitude of items which combine to make baseball the Great American game will be present again in abundance tonight."

Indeed it was for the 3,100 fans which jammed the new facility. Before the game, they got to witness performances by the Kilgore College Ranger band and Rangerettes, as well as Mayor Roy H. Laird throwing out the first ball to team president Scott Lucas.

"Nobody had any doubts that the attendance situation here was going to be a huge success from the word go," wrote Joe Ellis in the April 25, 1947 *Kilgore News Herald*. "An hour and a half before game time, a sprinkling of the faithful already had chosen choice spots for the contest.

"By 7:30, the stands were packed to the unfinished rafters, and at a quarter of eight even box seats were at a premium. The crowd eventually overflowed into the left-field bleachers."

Kilgore opened its inaugural season with two games in Henderson before beginning its home schedule. However, the home throng was disappointed when the Henderson Oilers de-

feated the Drillers, 9-5, in 11 innings.

The Drillers' first run was scored on a sacrifice fly by left fielder Joe Bartkowski, which brought in starting pitcher Bob Ross. The only homerun in the contest was hit by Henderson third baseman Lew Morton.

The first win picked up by the Drillers at their new home took place on April 27, 1947, when Bill Grafton pitched a two-hit shutout in a 2-0 decision over the Tyler Trojans.

Driller Park was eventually completed during the course of the season, and received rave reviews.

"The plant is complete with club house, restrooms, box office, concession stands, press box, radio room and steel fence," read a photo caption in the August 24, 1947 *News Herald*. "It has the league's only electric scoreboard. Conveniently located, the park has three entrances for automobiles and ample parking space. The infield has an underground drainage system.

"Stands and boxes seat about 2,400. Bleachers are available to accommodate another 800."

Kilgore went on to finish first during the regular season, then defeated Tyler and Marshall in postseason play to grab the first-ever Lone Star League title. The Drillers did it again the following year.

Prior to the 1949 season, the Drillers became part of a new East Texas League. Kilgore made the playoffs the following two years, but were unable to capture the league crown both times.

On Sept. 9, 1950, the Drillers played what turned out to be the final home game for a professional team in Kilgore, a 9-3 loss in the league playoffs to Marshall, which defeated the Drillers the next day, 8-2, to eliminate the Kilgore team from postseason play.

The league disbanded weeks later, leaving Kilgore without professional baseball to this day.

The baseball park built to house the Drillers remained, though, to host, among other things, Kilgore High School baseball, Kilgore College baseball, high school playoff contests, semi-pro and youth baseball games. In 1966, it was the site of the Little Dixie World Series.

Modern-day baseball fans got to witness the return of professional baseball to Kilgore and, specifically, Driller Park.

Through the efforts of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce and its Sports Committee, the Tyler WildCatters of the independent Texas-Louisiana League played the Alexandria  
See DRILLER, Page 8A

## ★ TEAMS

(Continued from Page 1A)

with Harry Wanderling serving as league president.

Each town, including Kilgore as well as Longview, Tyler and Henderson, paid \$100 for its respective clubs along with an agreement of a salary cap, limiting each club to spend \$2,000 per month.

Also at that meeting in Crim's office, plans for a \$10,000 ballpark in Kilgore were established, along with lights in order to play night games.

Preparations were made for the opening of the season and the new park. A former major-league second baseman, Ewell "Turkey" Gross, was named player-manager of the Gushers.

Gusher players of note included pitcher Lefty Leipold, a former member of the Chicago White Sox, and slugging minor-league star Hack Miller.

Several local organizations, including the Kilgore Lions Club and the *Kilgore Daily News*, emphasized the locals to come out for the ballgames. Lions members also sold tickets as well.

"Now is the time for every citizen of Kilgore to start making plans to be on hand for the first baseball game of the season to be played here next Thursday," stated an editorial in the April 24, 1931 edition of the *Kilgore Daily News*. "No less than a turnout of four or five thousand should be present to give the Kilgore team a great send off.

"Every business store in town should close its doors in order that employee and employer will have a chance to lend his presence and support to the Gushers."

However, on the verge of the club's opener, which was scheduled for April 28, 1931 against the Longview Cannibals, the new park was not complete, for a purpose: the drilling of oil wells on the site.

The game was moved to the old baseball park of the Old Gladewater Highway, but received another impediment in the form of rain, washing out the contest.

Kilgore opened the season in Longview with two losses, then returned home to face Henderson on May 2, another Gusher defeat. The Gushers finally picked up their first victory on May 4, when they defeated Tyler at home, 9-5.

But it would turn out to be the only win in franchise history, because three days later, See TEAMS, Page 8A

LD Sunday, April 13, 1997

## ★ TEAMS

(Continued from Page 7A)

the East Texas League, plagued by financial problems as well as low attendance and bad weather hampering play, officially disbanded.

Kilgore returned to the professional baseball scene in 1936 with a new entry, the Kilgore Braves, which joined a new East Texas League. The nickname of the Braves, a farm team of the Oklahoma City Indians, came about as the result of a contest won by Mrs. L.L. Shields.

A new park was constructed, Laird Field, named for S.S. Laird. The ballpark was built on his land.

The Braves opened their new park on April 24, 1936, a 4-3 loss to the Marshall Orphans. The following day, Kilgore turned the tables on the Orphans, posting a 17-8 victory.

Unlike their predecessors, the Braves were able to complete their first season of existence in Kilgore, finishing in eighth place in the league with a mark of 45-106.

Team ownership changed hands in 1937, when the Braves were purchased by the Crim brothers, J. Malcolm and Liggett. Upon their purchase, the Crims changed the name of the team from the Braves to the Rangers, to honor the Kilgore

College athletic teams of the same moniker.

Two years later, in 1939, the team's name was changed to the Boomers, which was suggested by local businessman and future Rusk County Judge F.R. Files. The nickname honored those, including settlers and newcomers, who helped make Kilgore a "booming" city.

"We're all pioneers in building Kilgore," Jerry Sitton, then-manager of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce, said at that time. "And we're all boomers."

The nickname proved to be appropriate in the team's first season, 1939, as the Boomers, under the guidance of manager Jimmy Dalrymple, won their first and only East Texas League pennant, defeating Henderson in a playoff.

The Boomers had finished the regular season in second place with an 81-58 record, but took four of five games against Palestine in the opening round and then swept four straight in the finals against Henderson.

The clincher came on Sept. 18, when Frank Perko pitched a four-hitter and struck out eight in a 5-1 Boomer victory. He also helped out on the offensive side with a homerun.

"Displaying more speed and a better curve than he had at

anytime during the scheduled season, during which he won 20 games to four lost to lead the league, Perko shut the Oilers out with one single until the sixth when O'Laughlin doubled and then scored on a double by Tatum for the Oiler's lone marker," stated an article in the Sept. 19, 1939 issue of the *Kilgore Daily News*.

Less than a year later, though, on Aug. 29, 1940, team president J. Malcolm Crim, citing declining attendance and dwindling support, announced that the Boomers would disband at the end of the season.

"Kilgore fans for various reasons have shown that they will not support a baseball team under the present conditions and I am not one to try to make them like it," said Crim in an *Kilgore Daily News* article dated Aug. 30, 1940.

Attendance figures seem to have supported Crim's claim. In 1939, the year the Boomers won the pennant, the team drew 36,952. The following year, however, the Boomers attracted 15,969 fans through their turnstiles as the club tumbled to fifth place with a 31-56 mark.

Kilgore was without baseball from 1941 to 1946, due in large part to World War II.

The sport returned to the city in 1947 with the formation of

the Kilgore Drillers, a Class C charter member of the Lone Star League. The Driller nickname was coined from a contest, with the winning entry submitted by both Mrs. Claude A. Baugh and E.C. Thevenet.

In addition that year, the Kilgore Baseball Club was formed, consisting of approximately 400 stockholders. The club's major purpose was to fund a new \$100,000 stadium for the city, which turned out to be Driller Park.

On April 24, 1947, the new park opened for a game against the Henderson Oilers. Before a crowd of 3,100 people at a park that was not 100 percent complete, the Oilers took the victory, 9-5, in 11 innings.

The Drillers, under manager Joe Kracher, bounced back, however, to capture the league title with a 78-60 record, downing both Tyler and Marshall in the playoffs.

The following year, the Drillers won their second straight pennant with a 94-44 mark, along with playoff conquests over Henderson and Longview.

In 1949, the Drillers moved into yet another East Texas League and fell to fourth place with a 75-65 record, but advanced to the league finals before losing to Gladewater.



## ★ DRILLER

(Continued from Page 7A)

Aces in an exhibition contest in May of 1996.

Later that year, Driller Park was the site of the state Dixie Pre-Majors 15-16-year old tournament.

The facility has received nearly \$60,000 worth of renovations over the past five years on a project put together by the KHS Baseball Booster Club, the Kilgore Boys Baseball Association, the City of Kilgore and Gregg County.

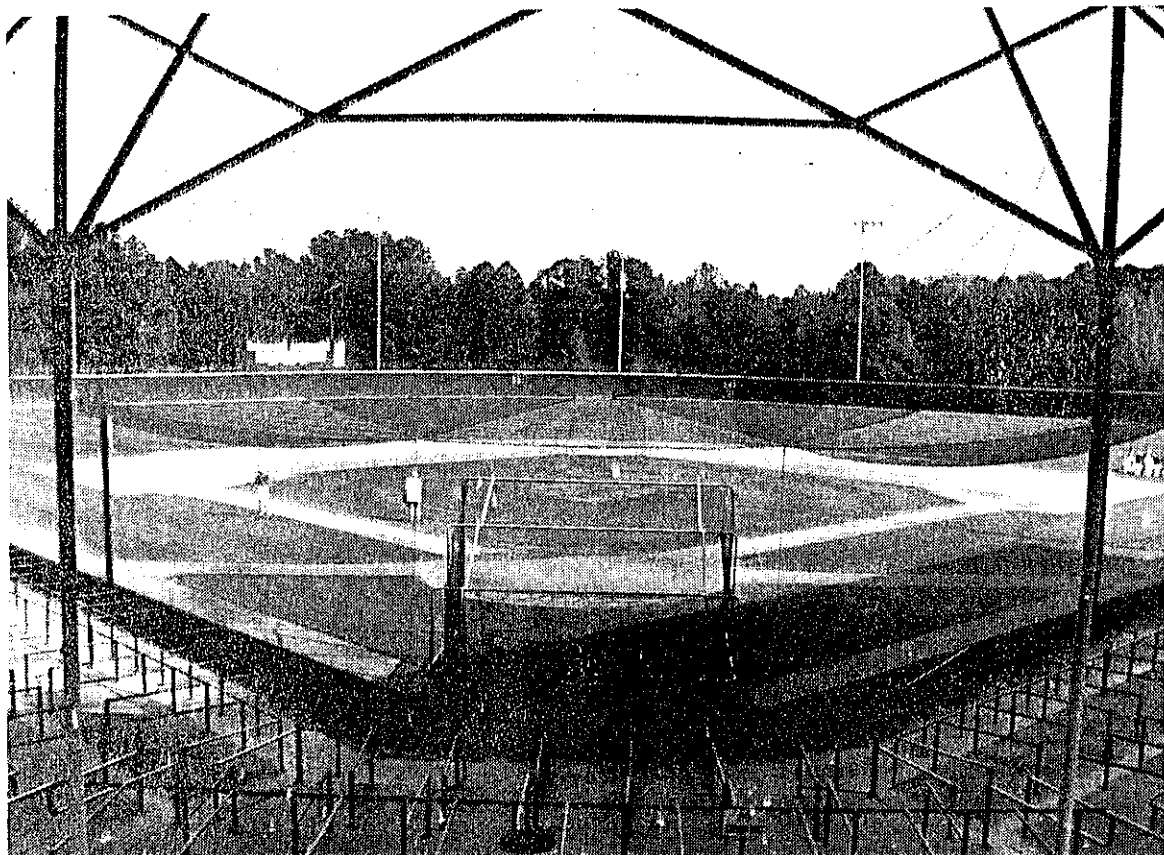
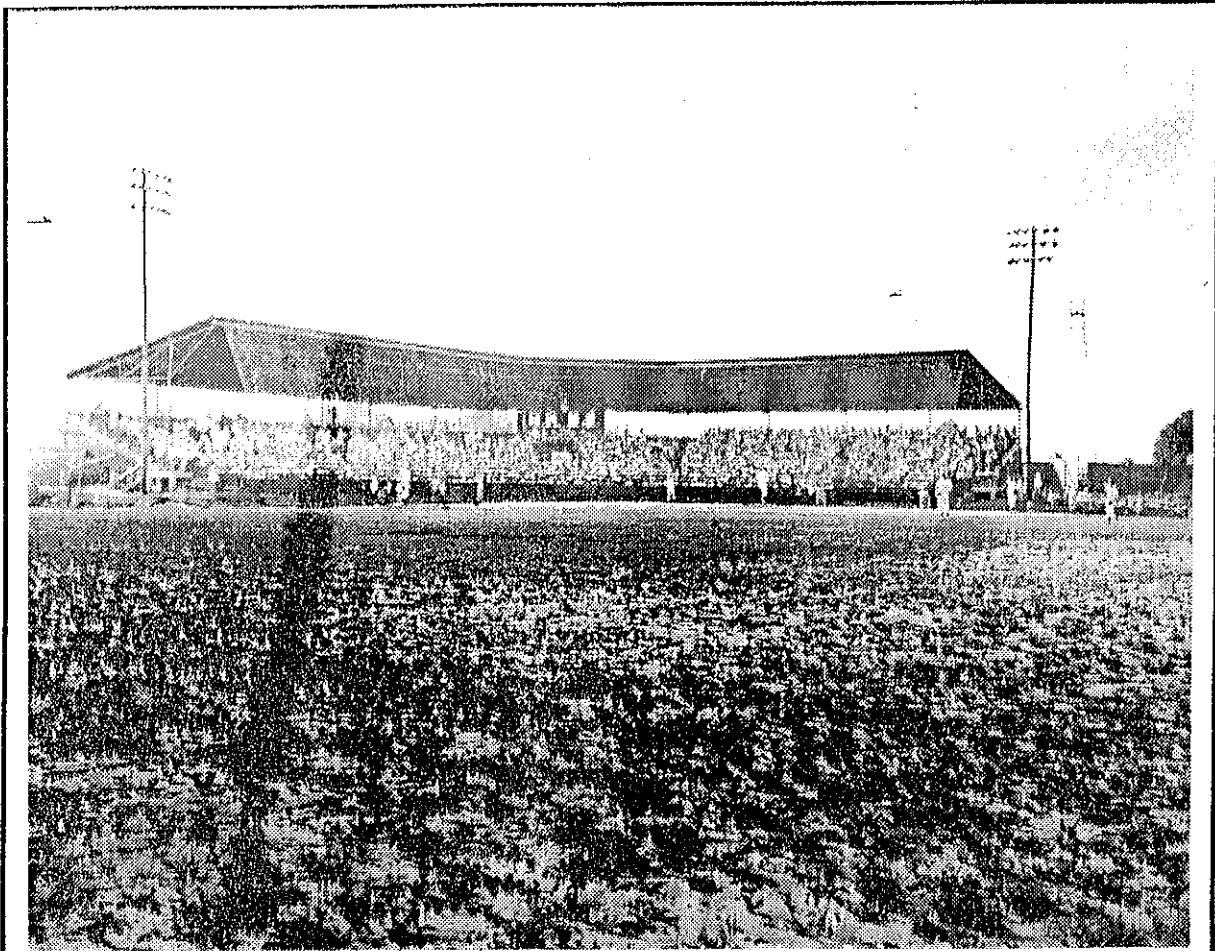
Among the renovations done to Driller Park the past few years included repainting the dugouts and the outfield fences, installing a new underground drainage system, painting the bleachers, putting up new netting behind home plate, installing a new manual scoreboard beyond left-center field as well as extensive upkeep of the playing field.

Early this year, because of the 50th anniversary of the Driller Park, the Chamber of Commerce's Sports Committee brought a proposal to the Kilgore City Commission to receive available grants from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in order to continue to make improvements at the park. The needs will be presented to a grant writer and consultant later this month.

In addition, the Sports Committee has also petitioned for Driller Park to receive a state historical marker. That application is still under completion.

Those things, among others, are to help insure that Driller Park, considered one of the best fields to play in America when it opened a half-century ago, will continue its reputation for the next 50 years.

On April 24, 1997, a 50th anniversary celebration, featuring a hamburger supper, will take place at Driller Park starting at 6 p.m.



**DRILLER PARK. . . . . THEN AND NOW** — The picture on top, taken from beyond the outfield fence, shows Driller Park as it looked in its inaugural year, 1947. Notice that there were still patches

of dirt showing on the outfield grass. The above picture is the current Driller Park playing surface, taken from the top of the stands behind home plate. (Above photo by Buck Ringgold)



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

George W. Bush • Governor

John L. Nau, III • Chairman

Curtis Tunnell • Executive Director

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

April 23, 1997

Dr Norman Black, Chair  
Gregg CHC  
417 Mobberly Ave  
Longview, TX 75602

RE: DRILLER PARK  
18" X 28" marker w/post  
Job # 19397; Received: 3/26/97

Dear Dr. Black:

We have received the above-referenced marker application. The application will be reviewed and evaluated by the Texas Historical Commission staff in the order in which it was received. Currently, there is about a 30-45 day wait between the time subject marker applications are received and evaluated. Should additional information be needed for the review, we will contact you and any parties listed below at that time. After any deficiencies have been corrected, we will send copies of the application to the members of the State Marker Review Board, who will make the final determination of the topic's acceptability for marking.

We will notify all parties as soon as the Board makes its decision. If the topic is approved for marking, payment will be requested at that time. If not approved, the application will be returned along with a letter of explanation.

Because of the variables involved in the marker process, and because we must coordinate our orders with the schedule of the contracting foundry, we suggest that the date of the marker dedication not be set until the completed marker is received.

We appreciate the effort made to record this topic. Should there be any questions about the status of this marker application, please contact me at 512/463-5853.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ronald C Kaase".

Ronald C Kaase  
Local History Programs

pc: Mrs Helen M Griffin

### ***Driller birthday set for tonight***

Festivities marking the 50th anniversary of Driller Park will take place tonight.

From 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., a hamburger cookout will be held at Driller Park. Tickets for the cookout are \$4, with all proceeds going to Driller Park projects.

Then at 7:30 p.m., a special presentation marking the 50th anniversary of Driller will be observed at the ballfield.

Events include a proclamation by Mayor Bill Wilson, congratulatory statements from Gov. George Bush, Texas Rangers President Tom Schieffer and American League umpire Jim Evans, as well as a military color guard and an oral presentation on the history of Driller Park.

Tickets for the hamburger supper will be on sale at the gate. Admission to the 7:30 p.m. ceremony is free of charge.

In the event of rain, the ceremony will take place in the stands at Driller, underneath the roof.

# Driller Park celebrates 50 years with ceremony

By BUCK RINGGOLD  
Sports Editor

Driller Park, once considered among the finest baseball facilities ever constructed, celebrated its 50th anniversary Thursday night.

It was on April 24, 1947 that Driller Park celebrated its grand opening when the Kilgore Drillers of the Lone Star League battled the Henderson Oilers. Thursday, ceremonies were held at the park to commemorate the occasion.

Those in attendance listened to congratulatory statements from Gov. George W. Bush and American League umpire Jim Evans, as well as an oral history of Driller Park.

Kilgore Mayor Pro Tem Rex Whitten read a proclamation on Driller's 50th birthday, encouraging the citizens of Kilgore to support improvements and efforts made to the park for its half-century celebration.

In Gov. Bush's congratulatory letter, he noted that it "is a great opportunity for people to meet, exchange ideas and celebrate five decades of baseball" at Driller.

"I commend all the volunteers who have worked for the last eight years to restore the baseball facility," Bush added. "Your restoration of this park is a great tribute to the Texas spirit of dreaming and doing."

Evans, a Kilgore native who has umpired major league baseball games since 1971, wrote that a major turning point for him occurred at Driller Park.

"I was umpiring a Dixie Baseball World Series in 1966," he wrote. "I was the plate umpire and Dusty Boggess, a retired National League umpire, was in the stands.

"Dusty came down between innings and complimented me on my work. In subsequent visits and conversations, he encouraged me to consider a professional career in umpiring after I finished college.

"I've often wondered how my life would have been different had I not been in Driller Park that night when a young kid got the spark and the word of encouragement he needed to shape his future."

Evans also saluted the many people who helped maintain Driller for 50 years, adding that "If any of you are ever in a major league park where I am working, come down to the rail and yell 'Driller Park.' I'll come over and give you a hug."

Currently, members of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce's Sports Committee are awaiting word to see if they will receive available grants from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in order to continue to make improvements at the park.

Also, the Sports Committee has petitioned for Driller Park to receive a state historical marker, coinciding with the park's 50th anniversary. That application is still under completion.

Gary Blanks, Sports Committee president, said that future improvements would not just occur at Driller, but also the surrounding land.

"We have a 23-acre park, and we have a large parcel of land that is unused," Blanks told those in attendance.

Among the future improvements that Blanks and other committee members proposed included construction of a new brick entranceway at the park, work on new recreational softball fields on the north end of Driller and installation of jogging and nature trails and picnic areas on the south end.

"It's going to take all of your effort, but from what I've seen at Driller the past few years, I don't think we'll have a problem doing it," said Blanks.

Randy Brogoitti, vice-president of the Kilgore High School Baseball Booster Club, said that past, present and future improvements to Driller Park will help ensure the chance that the facility can celebrate its 100th anniversary 50 years from now.

"Kilgore is a unique community in the way that when it wants to do something, it usually gets it done," Brogoitti said. "And this (Driller Park) is one of those type of facilities that speaks well for this community."

Local resident Helen "Pudge" Griffin, the vice-chairman of the Gregg County Historical Commission and one of the people greatly responsible for pursuing a historical marker for Driller Park, gave an oral presentation on the history of the facility, as well as a history of professional baseball in Kilgore.

"Kilgore has been and will always be known as a baseball town," Ms. Griffin said in her concluding remarks.

Driller Park was built in 1947 through the efforts of an organization called the Kilgore Baseball Club, which funded the money available to construct the facility.

Over the years, Driller has hosted numerous youth, high school, college and professional baseball contests as well as the 1966 national Dixie Youth World Series.

Last year, the Tyler WildCatters played the Alexandria Aces in a Texas-Louisiana League exhibition game at Driller, and the park was also the site of the 1996 Dixie Pre-Majors State Tournament.

One of the players who took part in Driller's first contest, Bruce Swan, was the guest of honor at Thursday's ceremonies. Swan was the catcher for the Henderson Oilers in the April 24, 1947 game against the Kilgore Drillers.

"The stands were just like they were (on that date 50 years ago), but the big difference was the playing field," said Swan, who currently resides in Leverett's Chapel. "The infield was fair, but there were six inches of sand in the outfield. The playing field has just improved so much now."

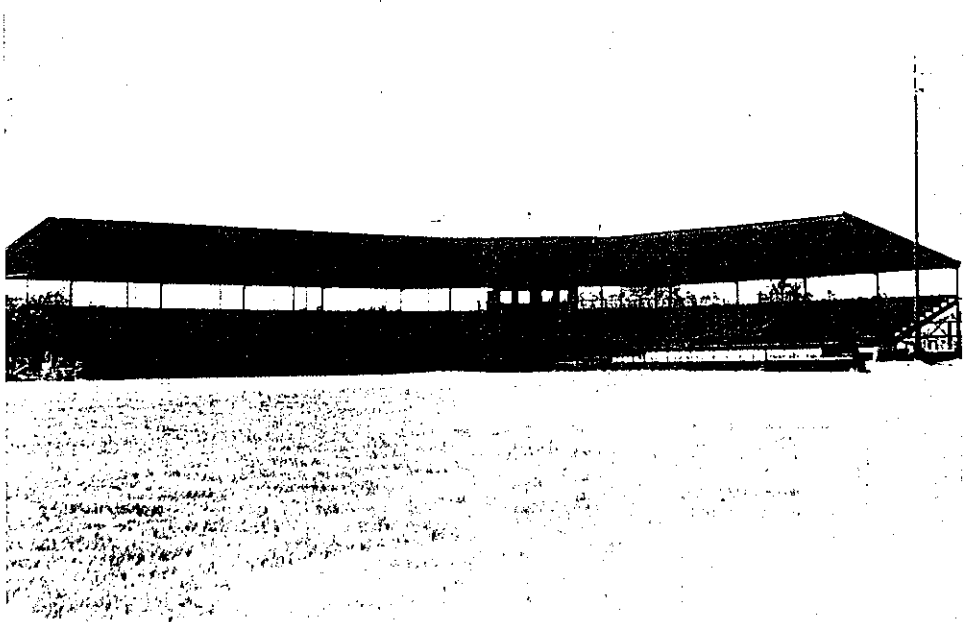
Tonight, Driller Park's first baseball game to mark possibly the next half-century will take place at 6 p.m., a contest between Kilgore High School and Pine Tree.



Driller Park 1947

(dirt and grass in outfield)

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# *Driller marks golden anniversary*

By BUCK RINGGOLD  
Sports Editor

Driller Park in Kilgore, once considered among the finest baseball facilities ever constructed, celebrated its 50th anniversary on April 24.

It was on April 24, 1947 that Driller Park celebrated its grand opening when the Kilgore Drillers of the Lone Star League battled the Henderson Oilers. On April 24, 1997, ceremonies were held at the park to commemorate the occasion.

Those in attendance listened to congratulatory statements from Gov. George W. Bush and American League umpire and Kilgore native Jim Evans, as well as an oral history of Driller Park.

Kilgore Mayor Pro Tem Rex Whitten read a proclamation on Driller's 50th birthday, encouraging the citizens of Kilgore to support improvements and efforts made to the park for its half-century celebration.

Currently, members of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce Sports Committee are awaiting word to see if it will receive available grants from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in order to continue to make improvements at the park.

Also, the Sports Committee has petitioned for Driller Park to receive a state historical marker, coinciding with the park's 50th anniversary. That application is still under completion.

Gary Blanks, Sports Committee president, said that future improvements would not just occur at Driller, but also the surrounding

land.

"We have a 23-acre park, and we have a large parcel of land that is unused," Blanks told those in attendance.

Among the future improvements that Blanks and other committee members proposed included construction of a new brick entranceway at the park, work on new recreational softball fields on the north end of Driller and installation of jogging and nature trails and picnic areas on the south end.

Local resident Helen "Pudge" Griffin, the vice-chairman of the Gregg County Historical Commission and one of the people greatly responsible for pursuing a historical marker for Driller Park, gave an oral presentation on the history of the facility, as well as a history of professional baseball in Kilgore.

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Over the years, Driller has hosted numerous youth, high school, college and professional baseball contests as well as the 1966 national Dixie Youth World Series.

In 1996, the Tyler WildCatters played the Alexandria Aces in a Texas-Louisiana League exhibition game at Driller, and the park was also the site of the 1996 Dixie Pre-Majors State Tournament.



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

George W. Bush • Governor

John L. Nau, III • Chairman

Curtis Tunnell • Executive Director

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

September 3, 1997

Kilgore High School Baseball Boosters  
c/o Pat McCrory  
2817 Littleton  
Kilgore, TX 75662

RE: DRILLER PARK  
18" x 28" marker w/ post

Commerce & Hunter Streets, Kilgore  
Job # 19397, Gregg County

Dear Pat McCrory:

I am pleased to notify you that the State Marker Review Board has reviewed and approved the above-referenced structure for the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) designation. This special status, awarded to properties deemed worthy of preservation for their architectural integrity and historical associations, conveys a measure of legal protection to the building. Notification of any modifications to the exterior of this structure should be made to the Texas Historical Commission at least 60 days prior to the commencement of work. Please refer to the enclosed brochure for further information on the RTHL designation.

Payment for the marker, in the amount of \$550.00, is now due. Please complete and return the enclosed payment form at your earliest convenience. Once payment for the marker is received, the application will be placed in line to have the marker inscription written. The inscription will not be written until after funds have been received. When the text is prepared, a copy will be sent to you and any parties listed below for review and approval.

The Texas Historical Commission congratulates you on the preservation of this fine structure and appreciates your effort to record Texas history in this manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frances Rickard".

Frances Rickard, Director  
Local History Programs

pc: Norman Black, Gregg CHC  
Helen Griffin





TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

George W. Bush • Governor

John L. Nau, III • Chairman

Curtis Tunnell • Executive Director

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

November 4, 1997

Dr. Norman Black  
417 Mobberly Ave.  
Longview TX 75602

RE: DRILLER PARK  
18" X 28" marker with post  
Gregg County, Job # 19397

Dear Norman:

Enclosed is the proposed inscription for the above-referenced marker. (Please note that this is a working copy, including filing and foundry instructions. The right-hand margin, which is uneven in this copy, will be justified on the finished marker.)

Please review and verify the information contained in the inscription. In particular, be sure to check all names and dates, and make certain we have noted the correct marker location. Please contact other sponsors of this application to discuss the wording of this marker. If you approve the inscription, sign where indicated and return it to me. You also may want to make a copy of the inscription for your files.

If you have corrections to make or changes to suggest, please do so on the enclosed copy of the inscription and return it to me with the marked corrections. To ensure that I catch all your suggested changes, I ask that you not type a new version of the inscription. The revised wording will need to meet style and spacing requirements; suggestions for new information not documented in your narrative history must be sent with appropriate reference notes.

The marker will not be ordered for casting until the county historical commission and other persons or groups listed below have approved the inscription. For that reason, we will expect to receive signed copies of the inscription from each person; in order to avoid possible delays, you may want to consult with each other and discuss approvals or possible revisions and coordinate the return of all of the copies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily C. Bell".

Emily C. Bell, Historian  
Official Texas Historical Markers  
Local History Programs

c: Mrs. Helen M. Griffin



LENHART PROPERTIES, INC.

1100 Stone Road, Suite 125 - Kilgore, Texas 75662

Fax no. 903-984-5527 - Phone no. 903-984-8285, or 1-800-767-8285

DATE: November 11, 1997  
TO: Norman Black FAX#: 903-753-5337  
FROM: Helene (Pudge) Griffin  
PAGES: 2 (INCLUDING COVER SHEET)

Terry Stembidge, who provided all the micro-film copies for the research, has documented through a personal interview today (November 11, 1997) that the dates in the suggested inscription are correct.

I do suggest that the word "supply" following the words "oil field" be deleted and that the word "TANK" be inserted with a hyphen before the word "steel". Mr. Stembidge documented this usage from his research in the personal interview today.  
Thanks -

THIS MESSAGE IS INTENDED ONLY FOR THE USE OF THE INDIVIDUAL OR ENTITY TO WHICH IT IS ADDRESSED AND MAY CONTAIN INFORMATION THAT IS PRIVILEGED, CONFIDENTIAL, AND EXEMPT FROM DISCLOSURE UNDER APPLICABLE LAW. IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED THIS COMMUNICATION IN ERROR, PLEASE NOTIFY US.

Texas Historical Commission Staff (ECB), 10/30/97; REV 11/18/97

18" x 28" Official Texas Historical Marker with post  
Kilgore County (Job #19397)

Location: Commerce & Hunter streets, Kilgore

**DRILLER PARK\***

ON APRIL 24, 1947, MORE THAN 3,100  
FANS CELEBRATED THE POSTWAR RETURN  
OF BASEBALL AS THE KILGORE DRILLERS  
PLAYED THE HENDERSON OILERS ON  
DRILLER PARK'S OPENING DAY, ERECTED  
BY THE KILGORE BASEBALL CLUB FOR  
\$100,000 ON LAND DEEDED TO THE CITY  
OF KILGORE BY S.S. LAIRD, THE PARK  
STRADDLES THE LINE BETWEEN GREGG  
AND RUSK COUNTIES, AN EXCELLENT EXAM-  
PLE OF SMALL STADIUM ENGINEERING,  
THE BALLPARK WAS CONSTRUCTED OF  
OIL FIELD PIPE, TANK STEEL, AND CONCRETE  
WITH AN INFIELD UNDERGROUND DRAINAGE  
SYSTEM. THOUGH THE DRILLERS DIS-  
BANDED IN 1950, DRILLER PARK CONTINUES  
TO BE A HAVEN FOR BASEBALL IN THE  
CITY OF KILGORE.\*\*

(1998)\*\*\*

\* 3/4 inch lettering

\*\* 1/2 inch lettering

\*\*\* 1/4 inch lettering

PLEASE CHECK ONE AND SIGN:

- I approve this text as written.  
 Please consider the revisions as  
noted on this copy.

Norman K. Black, D. A. L.  
(signature)

12-3-97



**Dedication  
of an  
Official Texas Historical Marker**

**Driller Park  
Hunter St.  
Kilgore, Texas**

**Friday, May 1, 1998  
6:30 p.m.**

**Sponsored by  
The Texas Historical Commission  
The Gregg County Historical Commission  
The Rusk County Historical Commission  
The Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation  
The Kilgore Chamber of Commerce  
The Kilgore Boys Baseball Association**



## Program

- Welcome ..... Dr. Norman Black  
Chairman, Gregg County Historical Commission
- Invocation. .... Dr. William J. Ingersoll  
President, Kilgore Ministerial Alliance &  
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church
- Introduction of Guests ..... Dr. Black
- Proclamation from the City of Kilgore ..... Joe Parker  
Commissioner, City of Kilgore
- History of Driller Park ..... Terry Stenbridge  
Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation
- Dedication of Marker.....  
Dr. Black, Chairman, Gregg County Historical Commission  
Virginia Knapp, Chairman, Rusk County Historical  
Commission
- Reading of Marker Inscription.....  
Helen McHaney Griffin, Vice Chairman, Gregg County  
Historical Commission,  
Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation,  
Project Researcher
- Unveiling of Marker.....  
\* Virginia Long, representing Gregg County Historical  
Commission  
Betty Jo Walker, representing Rusk County Historical  
Commission
- Benediction.....Dr. Ingersoll

\*Secretary, Texas Historical Commission

DRILLER PARK HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION

6:00 P.M., FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1998, KILGORE, TEXAS.

WELCOME

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the dedication of an Official Texas Historical Marker: Driller Park. This historical marker is authorized by the State of Texas and is sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission, The Gregg County Historical Commission, the Rusk County Historical Commission, the Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation, the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce and the Kilgore Boys Baseball Association.

INVOCATION

The invocation will be given by Dr. William J. Ingersoll, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church...Dr. Ingersoll... Thank you, Dr. Ingersoll.

(VIRGINIA K.)

This is an unusual historical marker dedication in that it is co-sponsored by two counties. May I present Miss Virginia Knapp, Chairman of the Rusk County Historical Commission?

GUESTS

We have some guests I would like to introduce: <sup>read list of guests</sup> ~~members of~~ the G.C.H.C., members of the Rusk C.H.C.) Also with us are:

1. First of all I would like to recognize the members of the G.C.H.R. & R.C.H.C. who are present.

Dignitary List for  
Driller Park Historic Marker Dedication  
May 1, 1998

2. Bruce Swan, the catcher for the Henderson Oilers in the first game played at the park on April 24, 1947, and the only known survivor for either of the teams that played in that game

Gregg County Judge Mickey Smith

RUSK CO. COMM. BILL HALE

Kilgore City Commissioner Joe Parker

Kilgore City Commissioner Gary Boyd

Kilgore City Commissioner Jerry Ted Roberts

Kilgore Chamber of Commerce President Ty Sharp

Kilgore Boys Baseball Association President Dee Zimmerman

Kilgore High School Baseball Booster Club President Barry Gill

The members of the Gregg County Historical Association (as a group)

Any KISD Trustees or other representatives as identified

Need to thank several people:

Kilgore Chamber of Commerce Sports Committee Chairman Gary Blanks (can not attend)--for his work in planning the marker dedication

Pat and Johnnie McCrory--for their assistance in erecting the marker at the ballpark

RALPH HALL Also, we are indeed honored with the presence of our Congressman, The Honorable Ralph Hall and his lovely wife, Mary Ellen. It is well known that Ralph has a special place in his heart for Kilgore, and that feeling is reciprocated. He has some remarks for us at this time...Congressman Hall...(Ralph will present a U.S. flag to Joe Parker, a member of the Kilgore City Commission. Joe Parker will continue and make a proclamation from the City of Kilgore.)

PROCLAMATION Joe Parker, Commissioner of the City of Kilgore will make a proclamation. Thank you, Mr. Parker.

HISTORY Mr. Terry Stembridge, of the Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation, will present a brief history of Driller Park... Terry...Thank you, Terry.

DED. Miss Virginia Knapp, Chairman of the Rusk County Historical Commission will now dedicate the marker, followed by the reading of the text of the marker by Helen McHaney Griffin, Vice-Chairman of the Gregg County Historical Commission...

TEXT Thank you, Virginia and Pudge.  
 [We dedicate this marker to the Kilgore Baseball Club and the Citizens of Kilgore.]

UNVEILING The marker, as you know, is out of the view of most of us, although some of us may be able to see it now. It will be unveiled by Virginia Long, representing the Gregg County



Historical Commission, and Betty Jo Walker, representing the Rusk County Historical Commission. (When the marker has been unveiled, announce it so and proceed with the benediction.)

BENEDICTION The benediction, now, by Dr. Ingersoll.

# Driller Park to receive historical recognition

By Jack Stallard

Staff Writer

KILGORE — Driller Park, former home of the Lone Star League's Kilgore Drillers and currently the home field of the Kilgore High School Bulldogs, will become the first baseball stadium in the state to receive an official Historical Marker by the Texas Historical Commission in a ceremony scheduled for tonight at the 51-year-old stadium.

The marker will be unveiled in a 6:15 p.m. ceremony prior to the start of Kilgore's District 16-4A regular-season finale against the Gilmer Buckeyes. In addition to state and local dignitaries, Bruce Swan — a catcher for the Henderson Oilers in the first game played at the park in 1947 — will be recognized.

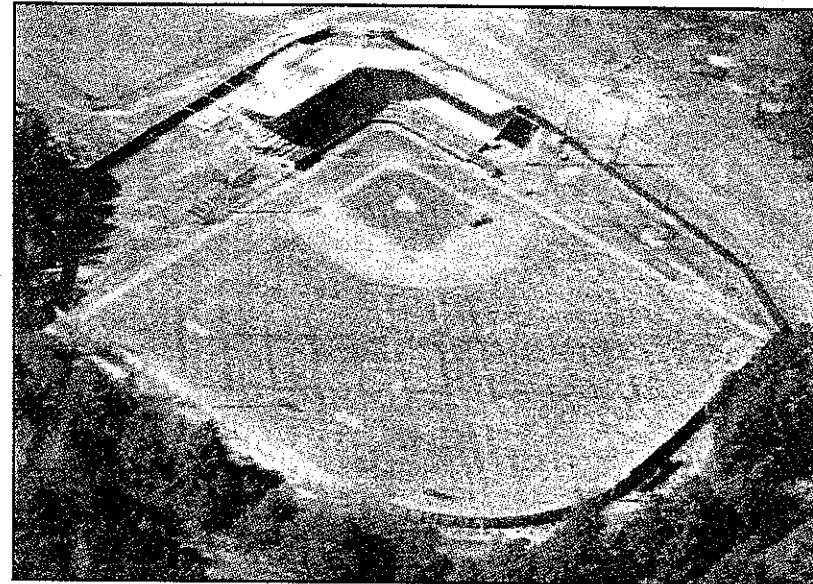
"I think this will be a tremendous opportunity for the community to celebrate 51 years of a great ballpark," said Paul Bendel,

Executive Vice President of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce.

Built in 1947 by the Kilgore Baseball Club at a cost of \$100,000, Driller Park became the home of the Kilgore Drillers during the team's four-year existence from 1947-50. The park, truly a product of the East Texas oil field environment, was built by Kilgore Boiler Works using oil field tubing instead of structural steel. The field was fenced with the steel used for building oil storage tanks.

Driller Park was named by Mrs. Claude Baugh and E.C. Thevenet, two of 14 local fans who entered the name in a contest. Both were given season passes to the inaugural season.

The Drillers hosted the Henderson Oilers on April 24, 1947 in front of an overflow crowd of 3,100 in the first game played at Driller Park. Kilgore Mayor Roy H. Laird threw out the ceremonial first pitch to Scott Lucas, President of



Aerial view of Kilgore's Driller Park.

the Kilgore Baseball Club.

Tickets to the first game were 50 cents (during the regular season tickets were 75 cents for grandstand seats and 50 cents for bleacher seats), and fans got their money's worth as Henderson notched a 9-5 win over the Drillers in an 11-inning game.

The Drillers went on to win the Lone Star League title with a 78-60

record, capturing the championship with by sweeping Tyler in a best-of-seven series and then beating Marshall, four games to two.

In 1948, the Drillers fell behind in the standings early before rebounding to post a 94-44 record during the regular season and defeating Henderson (four games

See Driller, 4D

## Driller From 1D

to three) and sweeping Longview in the playoffs.

The Drillers slipped to fourth place (75-65) in 1949, opening the playoffs with a four games to three series win over Longview before being swept by Gladewater. The team finished third in the league in 1950 with a 78-59 record, losing a first-round playoff series to Marshall (four games to one).

Kilgore dropped a 9-3 decision to Marshall on Sept. 9, 1950 in the

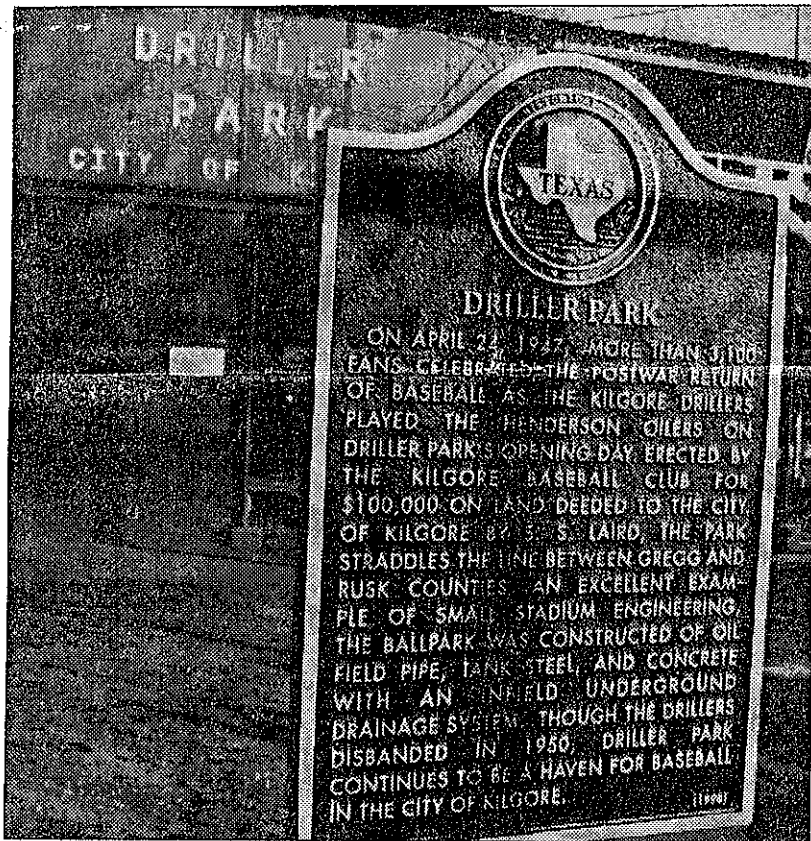
last Drillers game ever played at the stadium. The following night in Marshall, the Drillers dropped an 8-2 decision in the team's final game ever.

The Drillers finished with a 325-228 record in four seasons (338-242 counting playoffs).

In 1966, Driller Park was the site of high school playoff games and the Little Dixie World Series. Major improvements were made to the facility in the late 1980s and

early 1990s, including a new grass playing surface, a new sprinkler system and drainage system and new lights.

In recent years, the park has hosted Dixie State Pre-Majors (15-16 year-old) baseball tournaments and numerous high school playoff games. Estimated attendance to UIL sanctioned events at Driller Park is more than 80,000 in the last three years.



**DRILLER PARK STATE HISTORICAL MARKER**

## Driller Park receives state historical marker

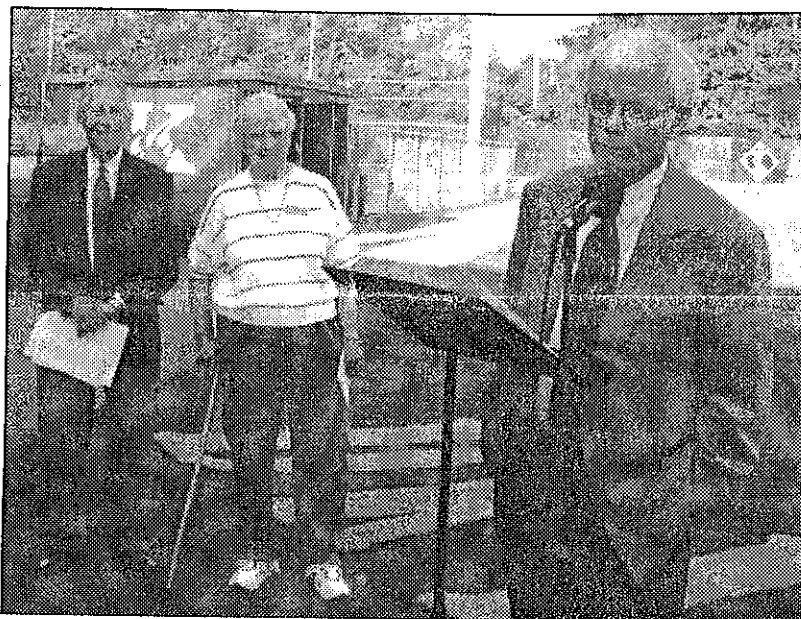
By **BUCK RINGGOLD**  
Sports Editor

Driller Park became the first and, thus far, only baseball facility in the state of Texas to receive a unique distinction.

On Friday, in a pregame ceremony prior to Kilgore High School's regular-season finale, Driller Park was officially granted a state historical marker by the Texas Historical Commission.

The marker was unveiled at the end of the short ceremony. It is located inside the gate just to the left of the front entrance to Driller Park, which was built in 1947.

Friday's ceremony was jointly sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission, the Gregg County Historical Commission, the Rusk County Historical Commission, the Kilgore Historical Preservation Founda-



*Photo by Buck Ringgold.*

**DRILLER SPEECH** — Terry Stembridge (at right) of the Kilgore Historical Preservation Foundation offers a history of Driller Park during Friday's state historical marker ceremony. At left is Dr. Norman Black of the Gregg County Historical Commission and Virginia Knapp (center) of the Rusk County Historical Commission.

See **DRILLER**, Page 11A

# DRILLER

(Continued from Page 10A)

tion, the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce, the Kilgore Boys Baseball Association and the KHS Baseball Booster Club.

Terry Stembridge of the KH-PF delivered a history of Driller Park from its beginnings.

The stadium was built to accommodate the Kilgore Drillers minor league franchise when professional baseball returned to the city after a six-year absence.

Also during festivities, City Commissioner Joe Parker read proclamations from Gov. George W. Bush and Kilgore Mayor Bill Wilson, offering their congratulations on Driller receiving the state marker.

Wilson proclaimed Friday as "Driller Park Day" in the city of Kilgore.

Parker said that Wilson's proclamation also encouraged Kilgoreites to continue improvements to the facility so that it can continue to stand in the present and beyond.

In addition, Parker presented Barry Gill, president of the KHS Baseball Booster Club, an American flag that once flew

over the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

The flag, a gift from State Rep. Ralph Hall, will be used at Driller for future events.

The ceremony concluded when Helen "Pudge" Griffin of the Gregg County Historical Commission read the official inscription that is on the marker.

"On April 24, 1947, more than 3,100 fans celebrated the post-war return of baseball as the Kilgore Drillers played the Henderson Oilers on Driller Park's opening day," read Ms. Griffin.

"Erected by the Kilgore Baseball Club for \$100,000 on land deeded to the city of Kilgore by S.S. Laird, the park straddles the line between Gregg and Rusk counties.

"An excellent example of small stadium engineering, the ballpark was constructed of oil field pipe, tank steel, and concrete with an infield underground drainage system.

"Though the Drillers disbanded in 1950, Driller Park continues to be a haven for baseball in the city of Kilgore."

# KHS

(Continued from Page 10A)

Sports questions concerning area college and prep sports, schedules and other sports items should be directed to Buck Ringgold, sports editor.  
984-2593

## Driller Park to receive state historical marker on May 1

A ceremony to unveil a state historical marker for Driller Park will be held on Friday, May 1 at 6:30 p.m.

The marker for Driller Park, the only baseball stadium in the state to be granted an official Historical Marker by the Texas Historical Commission, will be uncovered during a pre-game ceremony prior to a baseball game between Kilgore and Gilmer High Schools.

In addition to state and local dignitaries, Bruce Swan, a catcher for the Henderson Oilers in the first game played at the park, will be recognized.

Built in 1947 by the Kilgore Baseball Club at a cost of \$100,000, the park has the unique feature of being located in two counties. A player at first base will be in Rusk County and, when he advances to third base, that same player will be in Gregg County.

Throughout its history, the park has been utilized by professional leagues, KHS baseball, Kilgore College baseball, amateur and semi-pro teams.

In 1966, the park was the site of high school playoff games and the Little Dixie World Series.

Major improvements were made to the facility in the late 1980s and early, 1990s. A new grass playing surface, sprinkler system and drainage system were installed along with new lights.

In recent years, the park has hosted the Dixie State Pre-Majors Baseball Tournament for 15-16-year olds and numerous high school playoff games.

Estimated attendance to UIL-sanctioned events is over 80,000 people for the last three years.

Through the efforts of the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce Sports Committee, grant funds are being sought from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission for the purpose of making further infrastructure improvements to the park.

Today, Driller Park is one of the most sought-after baseball parks by high school teams in East Texas.