

Biographical Sketch
CLARENCE EDWARD DUFFNER (Sr.)
by C.E. "Jack" Duffner, Jr.
(1989)

Clarence Edward Duffner (Sr.), the eldest of four children born to Joseph Edward and Agatha (Motz) Duffner, was born February 9, 1902, in St. Louis, Missouri. Siblings were Roy Joseph, Loretto (Mrs. Haskell Hobbs) and the fourth, stillborn. Dad was a tall (6'-0") handsome man, black hair with a trace of auburn and parted in the center, intense hazel eyes, a firm chin of determination and the physique of an athlete.



Clarence, as he was called by his mother, completed the eighth grade at the Immaculate Conception Catholic School with a 91 grade average. Because of the economic conditions in 1916, Clarence was unable to continue his education. He supplemented the family income by first selling newspapers on the streets of St. Louis and later selling medicines in a drugstore where local customers jokingly called him "Doc". Clarence became a self made man from that time forward.

In 1920, Clarence and brother Roy moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma with their father Ed who was starting an oleomargarine making firm. They were joined about two years later by mother Agatha and sister Loretto, but the business floundered, so in 1922 the family moved again, this time to Oklahoma City where the elder Duffner established the Meadow Brook Creamery and later in a restaurant supply firm to become known as The Southern Coffee and Products Company which moved to the new location at 708 North Hudson.

The family residence was located at 104 N.W. 23 Street. Three adjacent houses owned by the family served as residences for other members or provided rental income. All the property was sold about four years prior Agatha's death and this is now the site of a Hardee's store. All of the family members lived out their lives in Oklahoma City. They are buried on various lots in the Rose Hill Cemetery except Loretto who is still living as of this writing.

After the move to Oklahoma City, Clarence became a salesman at age twenty for Meyers Motor Company, selling Dodge automobiles from the agency at Fifth and Robinson streets. Clarence soon met a young lady by

the name of Mildred Wright Boedecker. Mildred, a tall blonde who was affectionately called "Billie", enjoyed telling the story of first seeing "Duff" at the Oklahoma City Indians' baseball games and wondering who was the dashing young man who arrived at the park in a flashy new car wearing a "sailor" hat and a large "sparkler". That same diamond became hers when they married on November 15, 1924. The first home after their wedding is unknown, but on 7 Dec. 1926 they received a gift from her parents, the home at 3021 Harvey Parkway which was soon sold to Margaret Anhalt. With the profit, they purchased their next home at 200 N.W. 31st on 8 Sept. 1928. Although they bought 800 N.E. 21st from Syl Goldman on 16 Oct. 1929, it appears they did not move until after the birth of Marilyn (see below), the refurbishing of the new home and the sale of the previous one on 27 March 1930. On 1 July 1932 a further move was made to 609 N.E. 17th.

Their first son was stillborn in 1926. The second born and first surviving child was Clarence Edward Duffner, Jr., born March 13, 1927. Their daughter, Marilyn Wright Duffner (Mrs. Curtis Cain) was born December 27, 1929.

"Billie's" father suffered failing health, so it was expedient for "Duff" to join him in a partnership and to assist Mr. Boedecker in 1926 in the building of residential properties in the Winan's area. Upon Mr. Boedecker's death in April 1927, "Duff" completed the work in process and proceeded to convert the family home into a duplex in which Mrs. Boedecker occupied most of the original structure. The new Robinson side later became rental property. This real estate and building experience was to serve "Duff" well in a later career. In 1927 the Duffner-Cravens Company was formed to engage in the realty brokerage/finance and insurance business. It was also during this period that a number of "corridor" type apartments were built along North Robinson Street, the Park Crest being a typical example of those structures. With Mr. R D. Cravens, the Duffner-Cravens partnership was formed which was a comparatively successful business, able to survive the depression of the early 1930's due to their activity in the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (H.O.L.C.) refinancing programs initiated by the federal government to enable homeowners to retain their homes during this financially distressed era. The company continued until 1935 when difficult times and family involvement prompted "Duff" to form the Duffner Investment Company with his brother Roy.

In 1937, the C.E. Duffner Co. Inc. a corporation privately owned by C.E. ("Duff") and Mildred ("Billie") was created to build houses. The first small frame homes were built in Creston Hills, and soon the first in northwest Oklahoma City was built at N.W. 32nd Street and Walker. Dr. G.A. Nichols had made the unique trade in 1928 with the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club, trading the Nichols Hills facility for the property area known

as Crown Heights. The latter development was started prior to The Great Depression and was just emerging in 1937 when "Duff" and "Billie", operating as the C.E. Duffner Co., bought building sites. On these lots were built the first of their many classic Colonial style, two-story, full basement, brick homes, which were to become their legacy. "Billie" assisted in the exterior designs inspired by studies of trade publications and their travels. She also did the complete decorations exhibiting a flair for things artistic she had developed in her school years. Forty-two of these homes were built in this neighborhood including the one at 539 N.W. 38th which was the first they had built for their own. It was occupied in Feb. 1940. The Crown Heights homes were followed by others backing up to the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club along Hillcrest Street in Nichols Hills where another twenty upscaled versions were constructed prior to World War II.

A private investment, The Virginian Apartments, which were prestigious for their time, was erected at 3541 North Broadway and 3600 North Robinson in 1943. The 20 unit project was sold after Mildred's death and later became the site of the new Centennial Expressway.

During World War II, government restrictions related to size, materials, etc. curtailed building activities. "Duff" served on the Office of Price Administration (OPA) Board while at the same time building housing facilities on Tinker Field and private apartments in Midwest City.

The end of the war brought opportunities for greater achievements. One of the most prestigious of these was C.E. Duffner Co.'s purchase in 1945 of the 52 acres comprising the last nine golf holes of The Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club which were leased from G.A. Nichols. This area became 100 luxury home sites (originally selling for \$3,200 each) described in the newspaper announcement of the two million dollar project. Again, "Billie" exhibited her talent in the partnership by naming the streets of The Village subdivision for localities in England. Another residence for the family was built in this area in 1947 at 1813 Devonshire followed by others at 1712 Bedford and 1812 Drury Lane (in the late 1980's, some of the homes in this area sold for up to \$500,000). Soon after opening, post-war restrictions in the industry prevented rapid development, and 25% remained undeveloped at the time of Dad's untimely death at the age of 49.

In 1947, attention turned to small tract homes to meet the needs of the Veteran's Administration's programs providing home needs of returning veterans. The Northwest Sewer Co., headed by Duffner with John Coyle, E.B. Treadwell, Morgan Cox, Hess and others, built the facility extending from N.W. 43rd Street and Georgia to Wilshire and May Avenue, an ambitious undertaking that provided the development of the huge drainage area.

The C.E. Duffner Co. built 137 small frame homes at Wilshire and May Avenue known as The Wilshire Addition. While a modest community today, it was an "opener" at that time for the whole area and provided for the financing of the sewer facility. The addition was literally a mile from the nearest housing, service station or cafe.

Duffner is perhaps not the person most remembered for the formation of The Village, a separately incorporated town which indeed he did create, probably because other developers continued its expansion after his death. It was however, a historical moment in November 1949 when he, Floyd Myers and Ollie Malcom spent the night at the field office to establish their residency, as was required by Oklahoma state law, to file a petition for incorporation. The new Midland Development Company formed by Duffner started in the southwest corner on Westchester Drive in alliance with Leo Oppenheim, Charles France and other owners of the Suburban Water Co., whose water line terminated there. It provided water for the new town which could not have been developed without it. The Duffner Co. and another Duffner company, the Midland Construction Co. built many of the houses and sold quite a number of lots to other builders. Once again, "Billie" took an active part, especially in naming the streets, also of English origin. The community grew east to Pennsylvania Avenue and north to Britton Road almost overnight. A partnership was formed with Floyd Harrison to develop the tract purchased from Frank Clark north of Britton and west of Casady School. Upon Duffner's untimely death at the age of 49, on June 20 1951, the partnership was dissolved by his family, and the remaining partners completed the development. The town of The Village at this writing has a population of 12,000 persons in 4,500 homes, a number of churches and schools, five parks, and a city staff of 80 employees.

Although Dad, on occasion, referred to his limited education, his achievements in the industry, the acknowledgments of his peers by his selection as one of the first Vice Presidents and National Directors in the Home Builders Association's infancy, and the naming in his honor of the park on Hefner Road by the City of The Village, all indicate that Duffner was regarded by the community as a respected businessman and reputable builder, a legacy that is remembered to this day.

"C.E.", as many of his friends called him, was also involved in work for his God and his friends. He was a prime mover in the formation of Christ the King Catholic Church and Parish. Father Buswell (later Bishop of Pueblo, Colorado) was the first priest assigned to establish the parish. "C.E.", John Coyle, Father Buswell and Bishop McGuinness worked with the Nichols Estate (the land owners) to acquire the site and start the first building. "C.E." also worked with and for his friends, typified by the achievements during his presidency of The Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club in 1946. It was a trying summer, but the new, enlarged pool was completed by the efforts of

his company, and the first alteration and remodeling of the clubhouse was undertaken since its initial construction.

He was an avid participant in the sport of golf, was winner in his president's flight in the 1930 Trans Mississippi tournament, a Club Champion and several times finished a leader in his flight at the Broadmoor, which he enjoyed with a group of his friends from the Oklahoma City area attending those matches. He also enthusiastically shared his activities on his boat at Lake Hefner and later on Grand Lake in northeastern Oklahoma.

Postscript: Since this printing in 1989, C.E. "Jack" Duffner Jr. died on November 21, 1997. Since the death of Curtis Cain (Marilyn's husband) in 1997, Marilyn has married Kennan S. Morrison. (Marilyn D. Morrison 1999)