

# FAMILY LIVING

## A Visit To Norman Park, A Trip Down Memory Lane

BY R. J. BERRIER

There was somewhat of an Occasion in downtown Dobson a few runings ago.

The Occasion—note, the capital O—is a visit by the Norman Sisters—Elizabeth Norman, Mrs. Louise Norman (William Holt Neil and Mrs. Betty Norman (O. "Buck") Miller—and their brother, Spencer M. Norman of 6, Mount Airy, the Beulah community, to the Norman Mini-park.

Bob Comer, town manager, had led the family to visit the park to see the marker designating the town area as the Norman Park. The mini-park, located at the corner of Atkins and Crutchfield streets across from the Surry County Courthouse, is one of Dobson's beautification endeavors. The park, across the street from the Norman Flag Park, represents a cooperative effort between the Norman family—leaders in the town seat area for decades—and the Dobson Better Appearance Committee, Dobson Woman's and Town of Dobson.

Completed last year, the park features flowers, shrubs and a rustic bench. Its site is one distinctly dear to the Norman Sisters and brother, for on it once stood the

old family hotel which was owned and operated by their parents, William Brady and Edna Freeman Norman.

The sisters were born and reared in the spacious house on the lot, along with their brothers, Spencer M. Norman of the Beulah community, to whom the lot now belongs, and Guy R. Norman of Richmond, Va.; and a foster brother and sister, John H. M. Witt of Orlando, Fla. and Mrs. Harriet Rees of Houston, Tex.

The visit also provided an occasion for the prominent Surry County family to walk down memory lane, accompanied by Comer and the TIMES WEEKLY editor.

The current history of the park and its former structures goes back some 84 years.

About 1900, William Brady Norman bought a yellow cottage from John Sutliff on lot number 43. Later on, he built a large, 20-room, two-story house around the cottage. Of fieldstone with granite trim, the structure was called the Brady Hotel.

After 1938, it was the private residence of the family. The building was demolished in 1959 to make possible the buildings housing Dobson Florist and the offices of Jim Davis and Dr. Steven Yokeley.

The family built a house at 223 South Crutchfield Street in Dobson and moved there in 1958, a year before the "big house" was demolished. All three of the Norman Sisters currently reside there.

It is no strange thing for the Norman Sisters to receive mail simply addressed to The Norman Sisters, Dobson.

An enterprising computer operator once had them on a mailing list. The mail came addressed to Mr. Norman Sisters, Dobson.

But back to memories of the old Norman home.

As long as the "big house" was uptown on the square, it was the gathering place for the town folks, especially the young ones, for three generations.

The family smiled as they recalled that the Brady Normans lived in "a house by the side of the road." In the front yard, not very far from where the present bench is situated, Mr. Norman built a large rustic seat under a maple tree and planted a Virginia Creeper vine which grew to cover the tree. Young folks dubbed the bench "the love seat."

The yard was surrounded by a very tall hedge, which insured privacy. The hedge was shaped into an arbor at the street entrance. In the back yard, there were always flowers. A latticed well house was covered with a fragrant clematis



**THE NORMAN FAMILY, essembled in Norman Park, inspects the park marker. Seated (l-r) are Elizabeth Norman, Louise Norman McNeil and Betty Norman Miller. Standing is Spencer Norman.**

vine. On the south side, Dobson Baptist Church (now Davis and Son Funeral Home) adjoined the flower garden.

There was really a "heap of living" at the big old house, the family recalled. Two outside doors led to the dining room which, during court week, was always filled to capacity.

During the school terms, many school teachers dined at the hotel.

The doors were finally closed to guests, however. The family recalls that when that finally happened, "It really didn't matter, for we seldom ate a meal without company dropping by to join us."

Not only was there a "heap of living" going on at the house, but "a heap of eating, too," they said, laughing at the memory.

Looking around the mini-park, the family noted that only the park site—and their memories and photographs—remains now.

"We are so happy that the Town of Dobson saw fit to convert it into the Norman Park. We feel indebted to Bob Comer, town manager, for so many improvements to our town. He has proved (author Thomas Wolfe was incorrect for) you can 'go home again' and serve your fellow townfolks with honor and distinction."

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