

Doling Park of Yesterday



THE HISTORY OF DOLING PARK

Doling Park has been a popular picnic, caving and swimming destination for generations of Springfieldians since James Marshall Doling purchased Giboney Cave and the surrounding 40 acres in 1883. In the early 1900s, private investors added an amusement park with a roller skating rink, dance hall, bandstand, ball fields, penny arcade, boat rentals and Shoot-the-Chutes, a multi-story outdoor slide which people rode with flat-bottomed boats into Doling Lake. The Park Board purchased Doling Park in 1929, and though the amusement park was dismantled, the skating rink continued to operate through the 1960s. Today Doling Park is home to Doling Family Center, Northview Center and the Doling Museum, dedicated to the park's colorful past.

This map includes bygone attractions as well as enduring landmarks.

Doling Park Timeline

For more than a century.....

Doling Park has been a popular recreation destination for generations of Springfieldians. Here's a little of the park's history.

1840s - 1880s The Giboney Homestead

The Alexander Giboney family emigrated from Kentucky to Greene County in 1845, homesteading the land now known as Doling Park. Alexander's sons, James H. and John T. Giboney, purchased 40 acres for \$50 (\$1.25 per acre) in 1846 and received a land patent from President Millard Fillmore in 1852. The family built a cabin uphill from what's now known as Giboney Cave, near the site of the current Doling Museum. The spring flowing from the cave supplied the family's water and the cave itself served as a cool cellar. The Giboney family raised horses, cattle and "...a little bit of corn." The land was home to the Giboney family for more than 30 years.

1880s - 1907 Doling's Park

Prominent Commercial Street merchant James Marshall Doling discovered Giboney Cave and the surrounding land, while allegedly searching for his wandering milk cow. Doling found the cave and the surrounding area so pretty, he decided to buy it.

In 1883, John T. Giboney sold the 40-acre tract to Doling for \$2,500. Doling reportedly purchased the property "...for a summer home," but soon announced he would make it into a park. Over the next two decades, Doling and his son, Robert, built three lakes (later, one large lake), a cottage, a picnic area, a pavilion, a theater, bandstands, men's and women's bathhouses (with swimsuit rentals) and Shoot-the-Chutes, a multi-story outdoor slide which people rode on flat-bottomed boats into Doling Lake. In winter, ice skating was allowed on the lake. By the early 1900s, Doling Park had developed into an amusement park.

1907 - 1929 Doling Amusement Park

In 1907, the Springfield Amusement Company, comprised of Springfield businessmen Charles Brooks, William H. Jezzard and Ben E. Meyer, purchased the property from James Doling for \$50,000. This began Doling Park's heyday as an amusement park.

At its height, Doling Park included a roller skating rink, boat rentals, a professional ball field, a dance hall, a penny arcade, a pony show, a 2,000-seat theater and 19 amusement park rides — including a roller coaster, tilt-a-whirl, funhouse and a small, spring-powered wooden merry-go-round (rumored to later have been sold to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborne, MI.) The park also offered swimming, fishing and boating, and was home to numerous annual picnics. Large crowds gathered for Fourth of July fireworks and swimming races. Tours of Giboney Cave were available, and the cave's interior waterfall was said to be worth 10-cent admission.

Springfield residents could catch the Boonville Avenue streetcar and ride it to Doling Park.

1929 Doling Park becomes a Public Park

The Springfield Amusement Company sold Doling Park to the then-named Springfield Park Board for \$85,000 on April 8, 1929. The Park Board was formed in 1913 to build and maintain public parks in the city. Doling, already rich with history, was a handsome addition to the early Park Board's inventory.

Also in 1929, the original skating rink burned, but plans to rebuild it came about quickly, and the attraction reopened in March 1930.

1930s - 1950s Post-War popularity

The Park Board further developed Doling Park as a public park, rebuilding and later expanding the roller rink, constructing pavilions, restrooms and more ball fields.

W. W. Morrison operated the skating rink and other amusement park attractions through a lease with the Park Board from 1930 to 1977. The Doling skating rink was extremely popular after World War II through the 1960s. It was the site of beauty contests, follies-type shows and revues, figure skating and pairs competitions, as well as the social gathering place — particularly for teens. Several famous skaters got their start at Doling.

Amusement park attractions remembered from this era include the penny arcade, pony rides, Ferris wheels, a merry-go-round, the Wild Mouse roller coaster, the Dodgems bumper cars, the Caterpillar, the Whip and the fun house — home to Gigglin' Gertie and Laughin' Luke.

1960s - 1970s

The Park Board began plans to build a public swimming pool at Doling in 1960, and the Doling Pool opened in 1965.

In the 1960s, the park's dance pavilion, overlooking Doling Lake, was converted into the Doling Community Center upstairs, housing youth and teen programs, outdoors education and accessible recreation.

While the skating rink remained popular, Doling's amusement park was on the decline by the 1960s, and the remaining rides were removed in the 1970s.

Despite renovations in 1972, the skating rink closed in 1978. The building was renovated to become the Northview Center.

1980s-1990s

The "old" Northview Center was dedicated in the former Skating rink in 1980, and operated there for many years, providing programs activities and hot meals for Springfield seniors through the Southwest Missouri Office on Aging.

Doling's annual Fourth of July fireworks show ceased in the 1980s, and was replaced with popular Firefall event.

2000s to present

The voter-approved county-wide 2001 and 2006 Parks Sales Taxes ushered in an era of tremendous growth for the Park Board, including Doling Park.

The Doling Family Center opened in 2003, bringing a new level of family fitness and recreation opportunities to north Springfield. The old Doling Community Center was removed. In 2003, the "new" Northview Center opened at its current location, expanding services for seniors and accessible recreation. The old skating rink was later torn down, leaving behind only the exterior wall.

The Doling History Museum was opened in 2006 in the footprint of the former skating rink, housing photos, artifacts and memorabilia from Doling Park's rich history. The same year, the first Doling Reunion was held at the museum. The museum is open April through October; Tuesday, Fridays and Sundays, and has no admission fee.

In 2013, as the Park Board celebrated its Centennial year, the new Doling Indoor Aquatics Center opened as an addition to the Doling Family Center. The facility was built on the site of the former outdoor Doling Pool.

Later in 2013, Doling Lake was rededicated, following major lake and waterway improvements. The lake was dredged, the banks and stream channel were stabilized and repaired, and pedestrian access was improved with a new paved walking trail.

Today

Doling Park is one of the Park Board's 10 Historic Parks, but the park also offers modern recreation opportunities. The park includes Doling Lake, picnic grounds and pavilions, walking trails, nature trails, Giboney Cave, Doling Family Center, the Northview Center, the Doling History Museum and access to The Link. Doling Park, with its dynamic history, remains a favorite destination for Springfieldians of all ages.



Visit Doling Museum

Hours: Tues. 1-5 p.m. • Fri. 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. • Sun. 1-4 p.m.
Open April - October; No admission fee.

