

The Road to Brown's House and Brown's Woods  
By: Ken Black

If you've ever had a reason to visit City Hall, you might find yourself in sympathy with R.A. Brown, owner of the old Brown Hotel, which was at 3rd and Keo in downtown Des Moines.

In 1929, Brown built a house on a five-acre lot on the north property line adjoining Beaverdale Park. His access was 34th Street, which was along the west edge of the park. This was a public street and the public made good use of it for parking during ball games, often as many as 32 cars at a time, making it difficult for anyone to get in and out. All this traffic kept the unpaved road in poor condition, even after Brown had, at his own expense, brought in bricks and cinders for the entire length of the road. Brown asked the city for help in keeping the road in good repair, but the city considered it a private drive and would not maintain it.

After lengthy discussions, the city eventually agreed in 1932 to reduce the 30-foot wide street to a 10-foot wide driveway, and consider it an easement of the park land. As such, they agreed to maintain it.

During the years since, the bricks and cinders have been covered with asphalt and that's the way the driveway still appears today.

The following is an excerpt from the March 1932 minutes of the Des Moines Parks Board. It is a letter dated March 3, 1932 from R.A. Brown, then owner of what has come to be called Brown's Woods, to the Des Moines Parks Board, c/o J.N. "Ding" Darling.

*To J.N. Darling:*

*With your permission, I would like to present a problem which has caused me much inconvenience during the past three years. It concerns the maintenance of a roadway along the west side of Philpott Park (later renamed Beaverdale Park). The privilege of this roadway was granted by the City Council because it is the only way I can get to my home, which is directly north of the park. The road occupies the location of 34th Street, if extended. Naturally, the road must be kept open, and because of this, the public makes use of the road when they visit the park, and they use it to such an extent that I have difficulty in maintaining even a reasonably smooth drive. At considerable personal expense, I had bricks dumped the entire length of the driveway, and over the bricks was put two carloads of cinders. That the public has given this road tremendous use can be shown by a comparison of the road in the park with the road on my property. The road on my side of the fence has not worn out in three years, but the road in the park is full of bumps, and practically none of the cinders are left.*

*Mr. Davis, the custodian of the park, can give you firsthand information as to the number of cars which go over the drive to the end period side of the park in a season. I've told*

*Mr. Mattis that I would appreciate some help in maintaining this drive, but he said that it is a private roadway and the Parks Department could not maintain it. I contend that it is a public driveway, and as such should receive the same maintenance as any other drive in a park which the public uses. The best evidence of the public use is the road itself, but you can secure additional info by asking Mr. Davis.*

*I don't object to the public cutting my trees for firewood, nor throwing their refuse on my side of the fence, nor picking the flowers and shrubs that I have planted, nor doing other things that make my living next to the park undesirable, but when it comes to spending a lot of money on a driveway that the public uses, I most emphatically assert that I should not be made to stand for the expense. If it were a private driveway for its entire length it would be only natural that I would maintain it myself. As long as the public uses at least half of it, I think that the public ought to stand the expense of keeping it in good condition during the park season. NO PARKING signs are disregarded. I have counted as high as 32 cars at one time parked on the north side of the ball diamond. Spring is almost here and the road is in need of repair to get it ready for the coming season. Your cooperation will be appreciated.*

*This request is respectfully submitted.*

*R.A. Brown  
March 3, 1932*