

THE NAME JOSEKE GROVE




A History of How the City Came to Be Called What It Is

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INTRODUCTION

A City With Two Words to Explain



Most place names in Oklahoma arrived through one of a handful of routes: a settler's surname carried west, a geographic feature that made itself obvious, a word borrowed from one of the many Indigenous nations whose territory the land once was, or occasionally a name chosen by a railroad company that needed to mark a stop on a timetable. Joseke Grove arrived through two of those routes simultaneously, which is part of what makes it unusual and part of what has led, over the decades, to a fair amount of confused guessing about what it actually means.

The name has two words and each carries a separate history, a separate set of people, and a separate relationship to the land that the city sits on. This document traces both of them — Joseke, the family name that became the city's name, and Grove, the landscape feature that shaped the settlement before the settlement had a name at all.

“The name of a place is the last thing its founders chose and the first thing everyone else remembers.”

Both words are still present in the name the city carries today. Only one of the things they refer to is still present in the landscape.



PART ONE

The Joseke Family and the Name That Stayed

The surname Joseke does not appear in any European genealogical record. It does not come from Spanish, though it carries a sound that is adjacent to it, and it does not come from English, though the families who settled around it eventually anglicized its pronunciation until the accent on the middle E was largely abandoned in casual speech. The name originated with a single family, and that family's history is inseparable from the particular complexity of nineteenth-century Oklahoma.

Kurux Joseke was born in 1851 in the Cherokee Nation's territory in what is now northeastern Oklahoma, the son of a Cherokee mother and a Mexican father who had arrived in Indian Territory sometime in the 1840s along routes that the historical record has largely declined to document in detail. His surname combined

elements of both lineages in a way that was common in that generation and that era: a Cherokee syllabary rendering of a Spanish given name, passed down as a family identifier, eventually written in Roman script by territorial record-keepers who spelled it as it sounded to them and moved on.

“K. Joseke, postmaster, appointed April 3rd, 1891. Settlement of Diamond Creek, Sagamore Co., Indian Terr.”

— *Federal Postal Register, 1891*

Kurux Joseke arrived in what would become the southeastern portion of the city sometime around 1883, establishing a homestead on land adjacent to the creek bed that would later bear the Diamond Creek settlement name. By 1891 he had been appointed as the settlement's first postmaster, a role that placed him at the center of its administrative and social life for the following fifteen years. His land encompassed a substantial portion of what the settlement considered its civic core, including the stand of pecan trees that the early residents had already begun calling the Grove.

When incorporation discussions opened in 1906, the settlement had been known informally as Diamond Creek for nearly two decades, but the name carried complications — other Diamond Creeks existed in the territory, and the postal service had already flagged confusion in the routing of correspondence on more than one occasion. The council sought a name that was locally specific, that honored the founding character of the community, and that would produce no ambiguity in federal records. Council member Harlan Reyes, himself a longtime associate of the Joseke family, proposed the name at the October 1906 session.

Kurux Joseke had died in 1903, three years before the vote. He did not know that the town would carry his name. The council minutes record that Reyes described him simply as the man who had made the settlement worth naming, and that the vote in favor was eleven to three with no recorded dissent from those who voted against.

The family line continued in Sagamore County through several generations. The last direct descendant to hold property in the city under the Joseke surname, a woman named Cora Joseke, sold her holdings in the southeastern district in 1978 and relocated to Tulsa. The family's connection to the land the city is named for has since passed entirely into the historical record.

Records pertaining to the Joseke family landholdings and the original homestead plat are held by the Sagamore County Clerk's office. The 1891 postal appointment record is reproduced in the Sagamore County Historical Society's founding families archive.



PART TWO

The Grove, What It Was, and What Replaced It

The Grove was a stand of old-growth pecan trees occupying roughly four acres at the center of the Diamond Creek settlement, in the area that would become the Town Hall District following incorporation. The trees were large enough when the first homesteaders arrived in the 1880s to suggest a presence of several hundred years, their canopies wide and interlocked, the ground beneath them running soft with decades of fallen husks and leaf matter. Early settler correspondence refers to it consistently and without elaboration, the way people refer to a thing that everyone already knows — simply the Grove, as though no further description were required.

“The children gathered at the Grove again this afternoon. It is the one place in this settlement that feels as though it has always been here, and always will be.”

— Letter, M. Crowley to her brother, August 1889

The Grove served as a common gathering point for the settlement's first two decades, functioning as the informal center of community life in the absence of any formal civic infrastructure. Town meetings were held beneath it. The first school in the settlement operated in its shade during warmer months before a proper schoolhouse was constructed. The Joseke family's homestead bordered it on the eastern side, which was one of the reasons Harlan Reyes proposed the combined name Joseke Grove rather than simply Joseke when the incorporation vote came around — the Grove was inseparable from the family in the memory of anyone who had been in the settlement long enough to remember what it looked like when it was first being built.

The Grove was cleared in 1921 as part of the Town Hall District expansion authorized by the city council the previous year. The decision was recorded without significant debate in the council minutes, described as a necessary accommodation for the construction of the civic annex and the widening of Bellweather Bend. The trees were felled over the course of three weeks in March of that year. A single pecan tree was retained at the edge of what is now the Town Hall grounds, though whether it was part of the original Grove or a later planting is a matter the historical record has not resolved definitively. It is still standing.

The clearing of the Grove generated more reaction in the community than the council minutes suggest. Letters to the Sagamore County Register in February and March of 1921 raised objections to the decision, several of them invoking the Grove's age and its centrality to the settlement's founding character. The council's response, delivered through an official statement printed in the same paper, acknowledged the sentiment and described the decision as a necessary expression of the city's growth and its confidence in its own future. The Grove was gone by the end of March. The city kept its name.

“They have taken down the trees and put up a building. The building will have a name on it. The trees did not need one.”

— Letter to the Sagamore County Register, March 1921, unsigned

Grove Quarry, designated QS-0 in current county records, shares its name with the same geographic feature. The quarry sits at the southeastern edge of the city, in the district adjacent to the Joseke family's original homestead, and its earliest records from the late 1880s identify its location relative to the Grove as a navigational reference point. The name persisted through the quarry's operational years and into its current designation, outlasting the feature it was named for by more than a century. The quarry basin, which has been flooding incrementally since the late 1990s, is administered under separate county authority and is closed to public access.

The city's name, in other words, preserves two things that are no longer present in the landscape: the Joseke family's direct connection to the land, and the Grove itself. What remains is the name, carried forward by a city that has expanded considerably beyond the four acres where it began.

Records related to the 1920 Town Hall District expansion authorization and the 1921 clearing are held in the Sagamore County Clerk's archive under municipal works filings. The Sagamore County Register letters from March 1921 are available on microfilm at the Sagamore County Historical Society.



A NOTE FROM THE OFFICE OF HISTORICAL RECORDS

Place names are records of a kind — imprecise, partial, subject to the particular pressures of the moment in which they were chosen — but records nonetheless, carrying forward the decisions and circumstances and people that a community considered worth preserving when it had the chance to choose. Joseke Grove preserves the memory of a family whose land shaped the settlement and a landscape feature that defined its center for its first four decades, both of them now absent from the physical ground the name describes. That absence is part of the history too, and this office considers it worth acknowledging plainly alongside the rest.

Residents and visitors seeking additional historical documentation are encouraged to contact the Sagamore County Historical Society or to consult the digital archive at joseke-ok.org. Inquiries regarding the Joseke family land records and the Grove Quarry administrative designation should be directed to the Sagamore County Clerk's office. Questions regarding the quarry site's current operational status should be submitted to the Office of Special Projects via Form OSP-1.



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