

## **Veterans Park**

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### **Brief History**

Once the announcement of the purchase of land for a locomotive works by the New York Central was made and after the groundbreaking ceremonies for the locomotive shops on May 17, 1892, the real estate boom began.

The Depew Improvement was formed and purchased 910 acres of land on the North and 190 acres on the South side of the New York Central lines.

The early drawings of what was to become the Village of Depew by the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot show an area designated for a park on Terrace Boulevard.

The construction of the park at Park Place, Terrace Boulevard between Marengo and Meridian Streets was started on June 1, 1898.

A Mr. Webster, a landscape gardener of national repute, prepared plans for the park and the work was continued then under the direction of Mr. A E. Whitley, an expert in his line.

Flower beds were in artistic arrangements and in various designs, while shrubbery was so placed as to give the most beautiful effect possible, winding between which were walks for the convenience of the people who wished to enjoy the beauties of the spot. In the center was a fountain built and formed with stone taken from the Kieffer's quarry. Trees of good size were placed in position to complete the most attractive spot in the village.

The work of construction of the park was completed by the first week in September of 1898.

The Depew Improvement Company soon evolved into the Lands Company of Depew.

On May 17, 1906, the lands Company of Depew deeded the park property over to the Village of Depew with the stipulation that it was to be used for and maintained as a park forever. Village officials agreed to this stipulation in accepting the park property.

At the meeting of the Village Board on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1908, resident John H. McCarthy, speaking on behalf of the Home Gardening Association, asked the board to contribute towards beautifying the park opposite the high school building, to provide flowers and water for sprinkling purposes. He stated that the association had started in last year and had met with considerable success in their work of beautifying the village and those they hoped to accomplish much more this year.

The request of Mr. McCarthy was ordered received and granted; and that the village prepare to furnish flowers and fix up the park, and to notify the water company to turn on the water, as per their offer to do so made last year.

In addition, the board was authorized to employ Levi Grebs to take care of the park, and do such work as the village may require, at the compensation of \$10.00 per week.

At the following meeting of the board a bill was submitted for 800 geraniums at a cost of \$7.00 per 100 of the flowers.

A committee of the Home Garden Association, comprised of Rev. C.F. Killeen, C.F. Richards, J.H. McCarthy, Felix R. Doherty, W.W. Sanderson, John P. Taaffe, Thomas Scully, E.B. Rowley and Charles Mache attended the village board meeting on November 16, 1908 and through Rev. C.F. Killeen, who acted as spokesman, submitted a

proposition to the board for the installing of 24 shade trees and enlarging the flower beds in the park, at an estimated cost of \$124.00, half of the expense to be borne by the association and half by the village.

On motion by Trustee Robert J. Hutchinson, seconded by Trustee William Keefe, the proposition of the Home Gardening Association was unanimously approved by the board and the Association was authorized to have the trees planted under their supervision.

W.F. Richards addressed the board and spoke about the work of beautifying the village. He said that a village was judged by the condition of the property and streets. He thanked the board on behalf of the Home Gardening Association for the consideration given their request.

In 1939, the Twin Village Post, V.F.W. began the planning to erect a suitable World War I memorial to those men of Depew and Lancaster who gave their lives in action.

The August 10, 1939 issue of the Depew Herald reported that John A. Murawski, Commander of the V.F.W. announced that a huge boulder weighing around 10 tons, with two flat sides, one suitable for a base, and the other face on which a plaque may be attached, had been secured.

The boulder was brought to the village green on Terrace Boulevard earlier that week.

The boulder was secured from the C.J. Newton Farm, Creek Road, Elma. It was transported from the creek bed by much jacking up and rolling to the roadway and there loaded on a low tractor-trailer supplied by Arthur Stutzman, Past Commander of the Washington Post, American Legion.

Village of Depew Mayor Arthur Prestine and the Village Board gave formal approval to the placing and erection of the memorial on the village green at the village board meeting on August 7, 1939.

At first the triangle in front of the new Depew Post Office, formed by Suffield, Terrace and Warsaw was contemplated, but for the sake of safety at memorial occasions, the park was held to be a better location.

The members of the Twin Village Post V.F.W. worked very hard in preparing the concrete base on which the boulder was to be placed in the center of the village green across the street from the Depew High School. Once the base was completed, the boulder was set on place.

A formal dedication of the memorial was scheduled at 2 o'clock on Sunday October 29, 1939.

Mayor Arthur Prestine presided as Master of Ceremonies at the unveiling of the beautiful memorial boulder.

A parade of village officials, Gold Star Mothers, veteran's organizations and friends of the twin Village Post, V.F.W. started at Main Street and proceeded to march to the park for the dedication ceremonies led by Police Chief Gustave Kanehl who served as Grand Marshall of the parade. Chief Kanehl himself was a war veteran. Since this time, the park became known as Veterans Park. In ensuing years, the landscape of the park was altered from time to time.

Sometime in the late 40's or early 50's, a wooden bandstand was erected in the park where concerts were held.

In the mid 1960's the wooden bandstand was dismantled and a concrete pad with a brick wall was erected. This was to be a multiple use structure to be used for the Memorial Day services, outdoor concerts, as a wading pool in the summer time and an ice skating rink in the winter. There was one problem with the proposed last two uses. The structure would literally not hold water so that idea was abandoned although the concerts and services continued to be held for several years until it was demolished.

A second memorial stone was added to the park along side the original boulder in the mid 1980's after the closing of the Dresser Transportation Equipment Division, formerly know as the Symington Gould Corporation.

After the end of World War II, the Symington-Gould Corporation dedicated a memorial stone with a plaque to honor the employees who had made the supreme sacrifice from 1941-1945. There were 549 employees who served their country during this time period.

Shortly after the closing of the plant on October 1985, Mrs. Philomena Pelleterie approached the village board to attempt to get the stone and plaque moved from the entrance of the Dresser property to a place in the Veterans Park where the citizens of the community could view it.

Dresser executives gave permission to the Village of Depew to remove the stone and it was removed and set in place at Veterans Park.

The idea of constructing a gazebo was first brought up in 1984 by then Trustee Dennis Gabryszak as he left office upon his election to the Cheektowaga Town Board.

The village board under then Mayor Arthur J. Domino took up the idea and held several meetings with the citizens who abutted the park for their input after preliminary plans were being made.

The gazebo was erected in May 1991 and a formal dedication was held during the Memorial Day services on May 31, 1992.

The gazebo continues to be used for the Memorial Day Services; band concerts by the Lancaster Town band and has been the scene of a number of weddings since it was first erected. Since December 1992 the gazebo has been decorated for the holiday season and Christmas tree lighting for the community has been held along with the arrival of Santa Claus.

On November 3, 2012 several volunteers planted eight trees in the southwest corner of the park to further enhance the beauty of the park. A \$1000 grant to fund the project was secured from Johnson Controls thru the efforts of Scott Wegst an employee of the company and an assistant chief in the Depew Fire Department. The trees selected to be planted, added a historical element to the park being of the variety of trees, which were in the original planting of the park.

In April, 2014 a committee from the American Legion Post 1528 received permission from the Village Board of Trustees to add a memorial to honor the fallen military from the Korean War as well as the Viet Nam War alongside the existing memorials from World War I and World War II in Veterans Park

The committee was headed by Post Commander Jacob Schu and included 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Commander Richard Bulman and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Commander Robert Sharpe. The American Legion Committee did all of the survey work, layout and stone selection and acquisition. The Village of Depew Department of Public Works crew including the setting of the stones did the memorial construction.

The American Legion Post 1528 received equal donations and support from AMVETS "Buddy" Knaus Post 14 and the Korean Era Disabled American Veterans Post 203 for the purchase and installation of the plaques.

Of particular note, is that the AMVETS Post 14 is named after PFC Richard "Buddy" Knaus, who was the first soldier killed from Cheektowaga in the Viet Nam War. His name appears on the plaque, along with twelve other names. The Korean War plaque displays the six casualties all of whom were from Depew, Lancaster and Cheektowaga.

The dedication of the memorial was held on Saturday morning October 18, 2014 at 11a.m. In attendance at the dedication were Mayor Steven Hoffman and members of the Village Board of Trustees, New York State Senator Patrick Gallivan, Erie County Legislator Ted Morton and members of the various veteran organizations.

These memorials have been long overdue, as it has been 61 years since the end of the Korean conflict and 39 years since the end of the Viet Nam War.

The M-5, 105MM field gun from World War II was dedicated on November 12, 1950 on a plot of land at Litchfield Avenue and Terrace Boulevard across the street from the Twin Village Post VFW 463.

The piece would remain in place until the Twin Village Post VFW 463 lost its charter in 2013.

The Depew Joint Veterans Committee headed by Commander Jacob Schu of American Legion Post 1528 began the process of relocating the artifact by performing a survey and preliminary layout of a new pad for the memorial in October 2014. The cannon would be relocated in Veteran's Park.

The Depew Village Board approved the move to the new location on July 24, 2015 despite some opposition from several neighbors to the park.

The project was completed at no cost to the taxpayers. The DJVC secured volunteers, contributors and local businesses who provided the manpower, materials and support required for relocating and rededicating the memorial with a new plaque including the history of the piece.

The rededication ceremony was held on October 24, 2015 and was attended by various local village, town, county and state legislators.

Veterans Park in the Village of Depew is now listed on a web site which is a Directory of US War Memorials, Monuments and Markers

Arthur J. Domino  
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