

Memorial Park: In the Beginning

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These women were the wives of merchants, mining engineers, or other professionals, and a few were professionals themselves, including teachers and a nurse. Initially, they worked to clean up unsightly lots and plant trees and flowers, using funds raised at card parties. Soon they focused on the need for a public park.

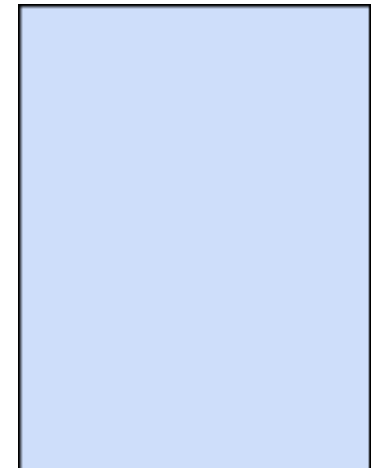
A driving force in the club was Sara Kidder, a widow who became president of the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad, which she managed with distinction. She offered the club a half-acre lot at Bennett and Bank streets. She eventually piped water from a spring on her adjacent property and donated a six-foot iron fountain with water spewing from lions' mouths.

The women tirelessly raised funds for the park, hosting card parties, raffles, and a variety show with an all-women orchestra. In 1911 the women's efforts resulted in the creation of City Square, Grass Valley's first public park. Set between the rail depot and the shopping district, it became the gateway to the town.

City Square was only a start.

The Chamber's long-time secretary, James C. "Jim" Tyrrell, traveled throughout the state, promoting the town's interests and seeking ideas for the town's improvement.

Tyrrell returned home thinking his town could also accomplish something grand. He conceived of a large park that could provide recreation for children and adults as it also memorialized the spirit of sacrifice which citizens had shown during the war.



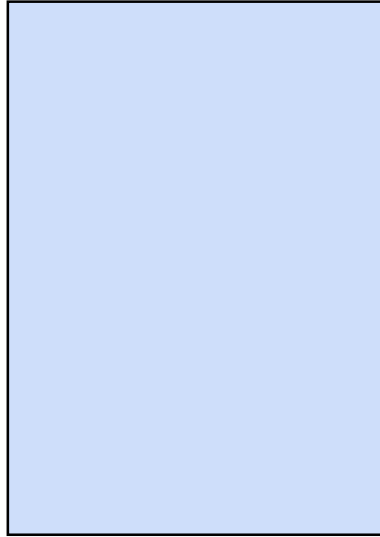
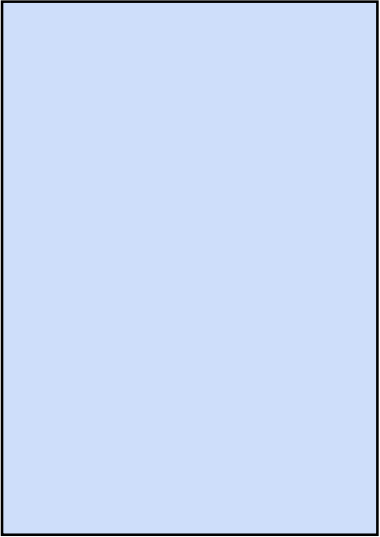
The Chamber asked for contributions with the slogan, "Give a Shift for the Park." Through the early months of 1921, hundreds of local families contributed as much as \$5 each (about a day's wages) to the campaign.

“Give a Shift for the Park”

A decade after the dedication of City Square Park and following World War I, Jim Tyrrell saw other communities planning memorials for those who died in the war. Tyrrell remembered that Sara Kidder and the Women's Club had approached William Bourn, the Empire gold mine owner, a decade earlier. The women had asked Bourn to donate land for the first park, and Bourn had offered a roughly seven-acre site the mine owned on Colfax Avenue.

Tyrrell thought the property on Colfax Avenue would make a splendid park, and he knew it still belonged to the Empire mine. He approached his friend and Elk Lodge brother George Starr, managing director of the mine. Perhaps on the back of a napkin in the club lounge, Tyrrell and Starr drew preliminary plans for a park. William Bourn embraced their ideas and gave the land.

“Grass Valley’s Greatest Asset”



The dividends were great because Memorial Park was an immediate hit, well used, and treasured from the start. Editor Kinyon reported "kids playing from morning until night" in the park.

He called it "Grass Valley's greatest asset."

The Chamber of Commerce raised and spent \$8,156 to build the park. Citizens contributed an even greater value of donated materials and volunteer labor. Mining engineer Ben Penhall donated a stone bridge. The Idaho Maryland Mine built a community building. Libby Starr, the wife of George, donated the swimming pool and the Empire mine built the pool house. The Farm Bureau provided landscaping and raised a flagpole. GV women planted the gardens. Tyrrell, Starr, and the community built a park that became a model for other towns and cities without using taxpayers' money.



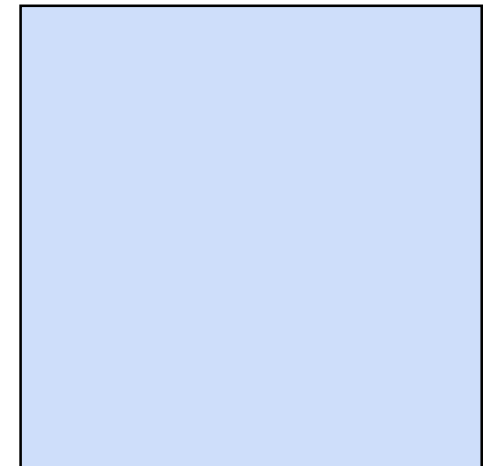
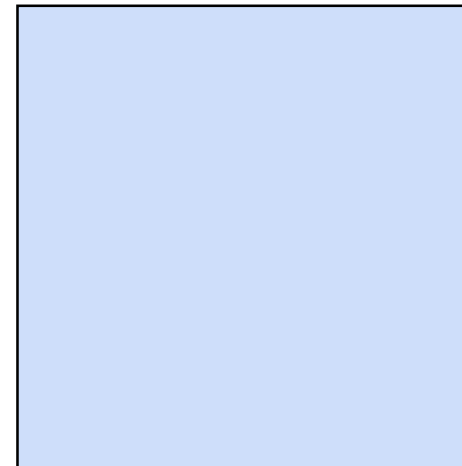
Jim Tyrrell presided as master of ceremonies when Grass Valley dedicated its Memorial Park-with its tennis courts, ball field, pool, and memorial grove-on Armistice Day, November 11, 1921. Near the podium hung a scroll listing 457 sailors and soldiers from the Grass Valley district who served in the Great War. Tyrrell dedicated the cornerstone for a monument to 16 men and one woman who didn't return.

A veteran proclaimed: "Grass Valley is one of the few cities ... to let veterans know they are not forgotten:" A well-illustrated feature article in a San Francisco newspaper said the park represented what a remarkable town could accomplish.

"Loving work means lasting work," Tyrrell told a luncheon of the Women's Improvement Club. He gave Chartres Cathedral in France as an example of what he meant. "No man knows its architect, and no one knows its builders." he said. It was erected by artisans "who cared nothing for their own glory ... who gave their services without price and even without record, as a matter of worship."

Tyrrell felt he and Grass Valley had done the same at Memorial Park. Now adults and children alike have enjoyed the park for a century.

A Centennial Park



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CHAS. E. UREN, C. E.

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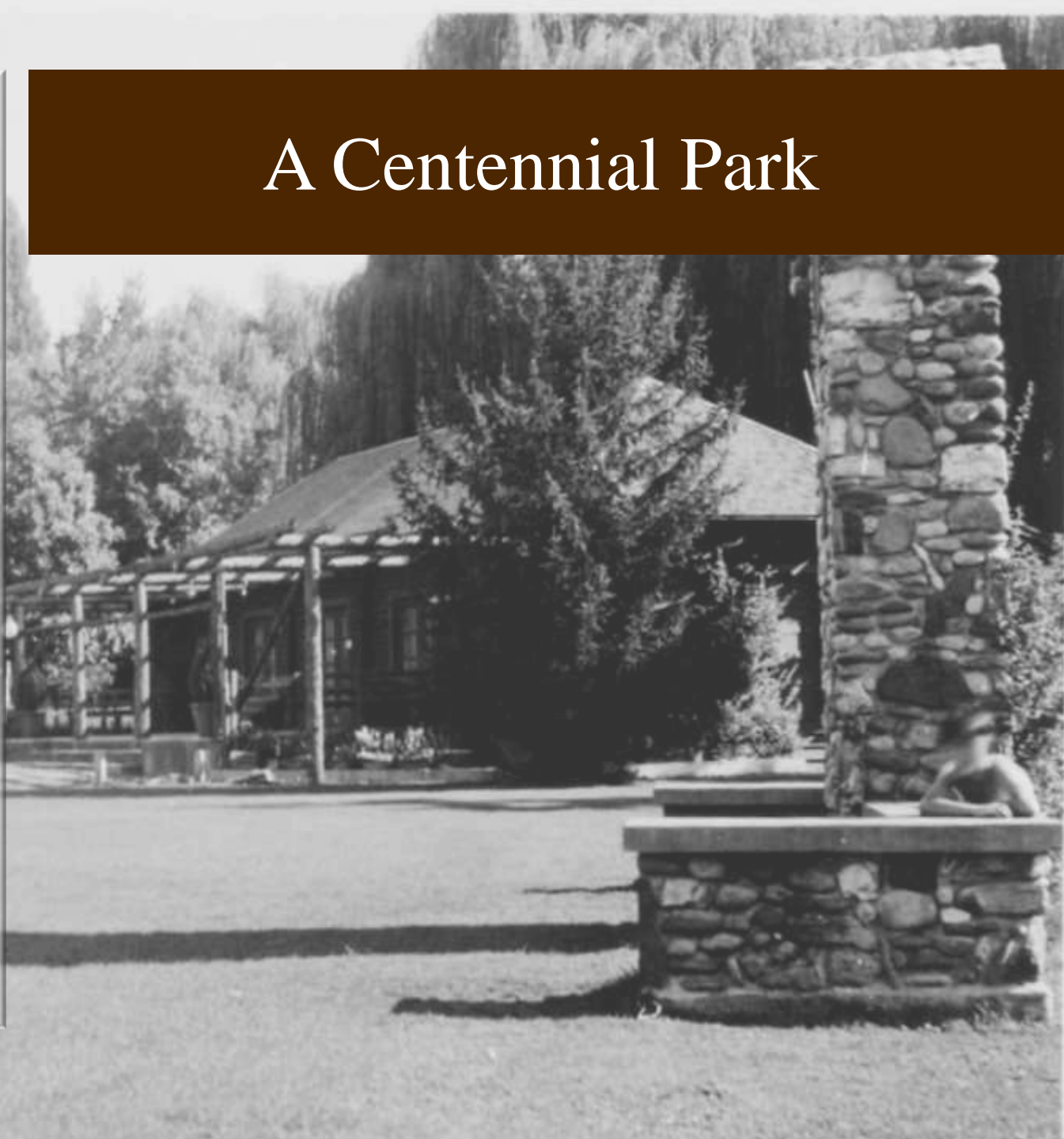
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