

HISTORY OF WAR MEMORIAL PARK

Early in 1946 after the agonizing progress of a long and costly World War II had been halted, citizens of Berkeley County began talking of an appropriate war memorial which would serve daily as a living and lasting memory to those who had donned their country's service uniforms in time of peril, who had died in their efforts to guarantee the blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to their fellow citizens. And as the months rolled by interest in such a civic project continued to mount.

Then on August 17, 1946, Paul B. Martin, who had taken over as Mayor of Martinsburg only a month previously, asked, and was granted permission to name a special committee to take the initiative in laying the ground work for a suitable war memorial. The memorial was, however, to be one honoring those who had paid the supreme sacrifice in both World Wars.

Making up this committee were: Garland L. Dunn, prominent Martinsburg industrialist and civic leader as chairman; Russell J. Scrivener, a member of the City Council; Douglas Shipley, representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post; Lovell Alderton, of the Central Labor Council; Mrs. Harry L. Reaves, of the Martinsburg Woman's Club; the Reverend Frederick F. Bush, Jr., of the Martinsburg and Berkeley County Ministerial Association; Charles V. Sullivan, of the American Legion Post; and Martin as an ex-officio member.

Public Meeting Called – After a series of meetings, this steering group decided in early September it was time to gain a definite decision from the people of Berkeley County as to what type of war memorial they felt would best serve to pay the debt of gratitude owed to those who gave their all. A public meeting was held at the Shenandoah Hotel which brought together more than fifty rural and urban civic, community, and business leaders representing some twenty-five different organizations and clubs. It was at this meeting, after a very lengthy discussion on various suggestions for a war memorial, that Berkeley County War Memorial Park was born.

After the decision had been made that the memorial would be a community and county-wide sponsored park, Chairman Dunn added Mrs. Hugh Dean, William Lee Chambers and M. L. Depenbrock to the steering committee, Mrs. Dean to serve as secretary. By October 30, this steering committee had raised enough money, through a limited financial drive, to purchase the land for the park. It was decided that the best site for a memorial park would be the tract of land formerly known as the Rosemont Park, located on the northwestern edge of the City.

Trustees Chosen – Early in November 1946, Chairman Dunn named a board of trustees for the park project. Those 34 members: Bonn A. Poland, John R. Poland, Lacy I. Rice, Trammell Hollis, Allen Emmert, Judge D. H. Rodgers, Frank C. Thomas, Philip T. Seibert, Granville Smith, the Rev. Dr. John Ward Brown, Dr. William L. Haltom, Lou Cohen. Cecil W. Wood, James E. McDonald, Harry H. Byrer, Jr., John Spickler, Frank Trammell, Father George Huber, Mrs. Harry L. Reaves, Mrs. Paul Hammann, H. Nelson Clarke, M. L. Depenbrock, William Lee Chambers, Lovell Alderton, the Rev. Frederick F. Bush, Jr., Charles V. Sullivan, Douglas Shipley, Russell Scrivener, Donald Rentch, Mrs. Jacob Schleuss, Gilbert Caldwell, Mrs. Hugh Dean, and

Mayor Paul B. Martin. Reverend Bush was named acting treasurer and Mrs. Dean, acting secretary.

At this meeting it was reported by Chairman Dunn that a total of \$24,926 had been contributed to the park fund and that more than enough money was available to purchase the Rosemont Park property. At this meeting Chairman Dunn was authorized to name a legal committee to work out details for acquisition of the property and securing a certificate of incorporation for the organization to be known as, "Berkeley County War Memorial Association, Inc,"(WMPA.). On December 14, 1946, the certificate of incorporation was received from Secretary State of WV, William S. O'Brien. On December 30, 1946, Berkeley County War Memorial Association signed a deed with the Rosemont Corporation purchasing the 19.6 acres. That same night, a special meeting of the Board of Trustees was held approving the purchase of this land for the sum of \$15,000.

On March 10, 1947, a general meeting of contributors to the park and the Board of Trustees was held to name 21 directors to serve as the park's governing board for a year as required by the organizations charter. The following were chosen as the first official board of directors: Lacy I. Rice, Judge D. H. Rodgers, Frank C. Thomas, Philip T. Seibert, Lou Cohen, Father George Huber, Mrs. Harry L. Reaves, Mrs. Paul Hammann, H. Nelson Clarke, M. L. Depenbrock, Lovell Alderton, the Rev. Frederick F. Bush, Jr., Garland L. Dunn, Douglas Shipley, Donald Rentsch, Mrs. Jacob Schleuss, Paul B. Martin, Ernest H. McKee, Harry C. Hammann, Mrs. C. A. Kitchell, and John Skelly. On March 28, 1947, this first board of directors named Garland L. Dunn, president; Paul B. Martin, vice-president; H. Nelson Clarke, secretary; and Rev. Frederick F. Bush, Jr., treasurer.

Development of War Memorial Park began in 1947, with construction of 1,800 feet of 30 foot wide roadway through the park. A framed concession stand was built. Picnic tables, benches, and playground equipment were added throughout the park. The park was opened for public use late that summer.

In 1948, sponsored by the Martinsburg Lions Club the Main Pavilion was built next to the concession stand. The pavilion had a three foot high brick retaining wall around its perimeter and was completely screened in for insect control. There were four screened doors allowing for ingress and egress to the pavilion. Additional playground equipment and picnic tables were added throughout the park. Water lines were installed. Bids were opened to build a new swimming pool within the footprint of the old Rosemont Park pool. In November, citizens of Berkeley County voted down a proposed tax levy to help develop and maintain the park.

In April 1949, the first concrete was poured on the construction of the swimming pool at a cost of \$25,000. In May, construction began on the filtration plant at a cost of \$10,000. On May 30, 1950 the pool opened for the first time and canvas tents were used as dressing rooms. During that summer the bathhouse was built at a cost of \$15,000 and fencing was installed around the pool for \$1,800. The total cost for the pool once completed was \$51,800.

It would have been twice this much if it were not for the donations of materials, supplies, and hundreds of man hours of volunteer labor provided by individuals and businesses throughout this wonderful community. To pay for the cost of the bathhouse a huge public auction and dinner was held on May 30, 1950 under the direction of James S. Dailey, Sr. It became an annual event for the next 40 years and was known as "The Berkeley County Reunion." The event cleared \$6,250 that first year. The "\$5 Early Bird Breakfast," Another significant fundraiser, began this same year on Labor Day under the direction of Mr. Dailey as well. The War Memorial Park Association has continued this event for over 70 plus years each Labor Day.

1952 was a banner year for the park with the creation of the Memorial Grove. In April, 162 maple trees were planted along the park's roadway. At the base of each tree a bronze marker was placed with the name engraved of one of the 162 fallen heroes from Berkeley County who gave the supreme sacrifice while serving during World War I and World War II as well as some from the Korean War. Many of those trees still stand today. Also on May 31, 1952, a new modern concession stand was completed and dedicated to serve park users, including pool users during public swimming hours. "Summer Sunday Evening Vesper Services," sponsored by the Berkeley County Ministerial Association began in 1952 and was held every year until 2020.

In 1953, two more pavilions were built on the south and north ends of the park. The pavilions were built with natural wooden logs for posts and large yellow pine beams. The stone entrances with iron gates were built at the three locations where vehicles enter and exit the park. To deter vandalism the iron gates were closed at dusk and opened at dawn each day by the park caretaker.

In 1954, the care-takers home, along Tennessee Avenue, was remodeled and modernized. The pool's filter plant was changed. More trees and shrubbery were planted throughout the park. Minor improvements were made in the park during 1955, 1956, and 1957.

In 1958, the 500 seat amphitheater was completed. On August 29, 1959 Berkeley County's War Memorial Park was formally dedicated with Senator Jennings Randolph as the principle speaker during a public ceremony. The dedication of the park had been withheld for 13 years until completion of the facility and until the entire project was in the clear financially.

During the 1960's and 1970's there were no major improvements or changes to the park. The main source of revenue was generated from the pool each summer. This revenue was complimented by funds raised from the annual Memorial Day luncheon and auction as well as the annual Labor Day Breakfast. The park received no funding from local or state government to help with the operation and maintenance of this popular venue.

In 1984 a new brick memorial was constructed and was dedicated on Memorial Day. One large bronze plaque listed Berkeley County's 196 fallen heroes (41 from WWI, 120 from WWII, 19 from Korean War, 15 from Vietnam War, and one from Beirut, Lebanon). This replaced the small

individual markers that were placed at the base of the many maple trees planted in 1952. As the trees grew some of the markers were uprooted, some damaged by mowers, some taken or vandalized.

As time moved into the 1980's the average local household income increased allowing many residents to install residential pools. Local developments provided pools for their home owners. Funding became more difficult each year with shrinking pool revenues along with significant increases in the cost of liability insurance. In 1987, the War Memorial Park Association Board of Directors made the decision to deed the park over to the City of Martinsburg. The deed contained a restriction that the park would always be maintained in perpetuity as a public park. The City turned over the operation and maintenance of the park to the Martinsburg-Berkeley County Parks & Recreation Board. After forty years of developing, operating, and maintaining this community park with a volunteer board of community members it was a very difficult decision to make. But for the future of this "Living Memorial" to our fallen heroes, it was the right decision. The M-BC Parks & Recreation Board was able to provide staffing and funding to properly maintain and operate this wonderful park. For the first time local government tax revenues were used to support the park. The War Memorial Park Association remained in place to serve as a "Friends of the Park" organization. Along with continuing to sponsor the annual Labor Day Breakfast as a significant fund raiser, many donations to the WMPA are received each year to support the park. Several estates have bequeathed revenue to the WMPA for the benefit of the park. Many major improvements to the park have been made since 1987, thanks to grants secured by the staff at M-BC Parks & Recreation, the City of Martinsburg, Berkeley County Commission, and State of West Virginia. In 1988, a large public restroom was built in the center of the park near the concession, stage, and main pavilion. The most heavily use area within the park. In 1989, two sand volleyball courts were added.

In 1990, an eighteen-hole miniature golf course was built with funds provided by a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant. The course was designed by staff member, Mike Hoffmaster and Steve Catlett, executive director. The course continues to provide a source of revenue, being a wonderful leisure activity opportunity for residents of all ages. Also in 1990, the Fulk Pavilion was built in the center of the park to complement the existing four other pavilions that are reserved every Saturday and Sunday, along with many weekdays, in May through September each summer.

In 1991, due to high demand another pavilion, Hollow Pavilion, was added at the lower south end of the park. Materials were donated by Roach Energy and labor provided by the parks and recreation staff for the construction.

In 1995, the pool was not opened that summer due to its age and inability to safely filter and treat the water to assure public safety. It remained closed during the summers of 1996 and 1997 as well. Even though the park continued to have heavy usage with its other amenities and events, it was just not the same venue. In 1997 the City of Martinsburg and Berkeley County

Commission agreed to provide \$500,000 each so a new pool and bathhouse could be built. Plans were developed and the project went out to bid.

In 1997, the outdoor stage at the Main Pavilion was covered with a permanent laminated wood structure to protect those performing, along with their equipment, for various events and the park's summer concert series. This was made possible from a very generous donation from Mrs. Claire Swanson in memory of her late husband, retired Navy Captain H. E. Swanson. Mrs. Swanson loved the park and spent many volunteer hours helping to beautify the park along with many other community garden club members. Even though spending many years living in Wheeling, before she passed in recent years, Mrs. Swanson bequeathed funds from her estate to benefit the park.

In 1998, a new pool and bathhouse were built at a cost of \$1,000,000, and was dedicated opening on July 4th that summer. The new pool, still in use today, has a leisure zero-depth pool with several water features as well as a lap pool. The park felt whole and complete again. The pool continues to be used not only for public swim hours, but used for private rentals after hours. The pool is used for swimming lessons each summer, teaching hundreds of children the proper and safe way to swim. Senior Swim is held Monday through Friday each pool day before public hours begin, at no cost to our senior residents.

In 1999, a second public restroom was built on the south end of the park. This serviced the section of the park where a large pavilion, two tennis courts, a sand volleyball court, and a large playground is located.

In 2001, the old wooden bleachers complimenting the stage area were replaced with new aluminum bleachers for those viewing the many special events and concerts throughout the year. Other minor projects during the early 2000's were completed. The old caretakers home located on the southeast corner of the park, which was no longer needed, was demolished. An addition was added to the maintenance garage. A much needed storage area was built as an addition to the main restroom. A single hoop basketball court was built on the north end of the park and a new entrance sign surrounded by a stone planter filled with shrubbery was built at the southeast corner.

In 2002, a third public restroom was built on the north end of the park servicing the large Norwalk Pavilion and playground area near the Tuscarora Creek. Funds from the estate of Ms. Ethel Dunn were used to finance this project.

In 2005, using significant funds bequeathed to the park from the estate of Ms. Ethel Dunn, the two dilapidated undersized tennis courts were renovated to two new regulation sized courts. New playground equipment was installed throughout the park with this funding as well. Also in 2005, a new modern concession stand was built and dedicated on Labor Day. The Honorable US Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito, who helped secure the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to finance half of the \$200,000 needed to complete the

project, was our special guest and speaker. A covered deck area with picnic tables was built on the pool side of the new concession for the benefit of pool users during public hours and private rentals to enjoy food and drinks.

In 2006, thanks to the efforts of long time parks and recreation board member, Ted Morgan, the administrative and maintenance staff at parks and recreation, Steve Ashton with Hammaker Memorials, and many others throughout our community, a new "War Memorial" honoring our fallen heroes was built and dedicated on Memorial Day May 29th. This new memorial replaced the brick memorial built in 1984. It was strategically placed in the center of the park to be within view from the stage area. With the elevated new location, the memorial can be seen regardless of whichever of the three entrances one might drive through to enter the park. The Honorable US Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito was again our special guest and main speaker for the dedication. There was a huge turnout for the event. This project received more attention and appreciation than any other project ever completed in this wonderful complex. The dark granite with the white etched lettering offers a tribute of great dignity to our fallen heroes.

In 2010, the 62 year old Main Pavilion was replaced with a beautiful 40' X 60' laminated wood structure that included a nonslip exposed aggregate concrete surface and green metal roof. Eighteen new all metal picnic tables and two serving tables were purchased as well. The old concession near the pavilion and only used for storage was demolished several years earlier. This created a much better appearance to the center of the park. The new pavilion was built by the Parks & Recreation staff along with volunteers. All materials used for this project were paid for by donations from many organizations, businesses, and residents throughout our community. Several families donated funds in memory of loved ones. Major contributors were W. Randy Smith (\$35,000), Martinsburg Lions Club (\$10,000), and \$5,000 each from the City of Martinsburg as well as long time park supporter Claire Swanson.

In 2016, the McKee Pavilion (the smallest shelter in the park) was replaced with a new all-metal hexagon shaped structure. The new pavilion was two and a half times larger than the old structure and created much easier access for those with disabilities and elderly users.

In 2018, a new wheelchair accessible playground was installed on the south end of the park near the State Farm Pavilion. The new play structure was purchased with funds from the WMPA as well as a significant donation from "Our Class" at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in loving memory of, Linda A. Ghion, teacher, classmate, and friend.

The new 24' X 60' all metal Norwalk Pavilion opened in May of 2018. The old wooden structure built in the 1950's was demolished in the late fall of 2017. Minghini's General Contractors began work in February to build the new structure. The project was funded by a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant matched by funds provided by the WMPA. The concrete slab was constructed at an elevation 6" higher than the old structure to keep flood water from the nearby Tuscarora Creek from entering the pavilion area. A new stone-faced retaining wall was

built on the south side of the shelter. Twelve new all metal eight foot picnic tables along with two serving tables were added. The new structure created much easier access for elderly and those with disabilities.

The World War I Doughboy Memorial was formally dedicated to its new home on a cold rainy Veterans Day, November 11th, 2022, with hundreds in attendance. In the spring of 2020, the bronze statue and plaques were removed from federal property at 300 West King Street in Martinsburg before the property was sold and ownership would have been lost. The nine-ton granite base was removed as well. In 2021, funding was secured from the State of WV, Berkeley County Council, and City of Martinsburg (\$17,500 each). The statue and plaques after 95 years of exposure were in serious need of restoration and were taken to Matthews International in Pittsburg, PA. Work began in late summer to prepare the grounds and footer for the memorial's new home. Work continued through the fall, winter, spring and summer of 2022 until completion. This special memorial could not have found a better home than our beloved War Memorial Park.

The new State Farm Pavilion opened for use in the spring of 2022. The old wooden structure that was built in the 1950's was demolished in the fall of 2021 and work began soon after that by Minghini's General Contractors to build an all metal 24' X 60' structure. This new pavilion, just like the Norwalk, created easier access for the elderly and those with disabilities. The project was financed with a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant matched with funds provided by the State Farm Insurance Company, along with donations from local agents (spearheaded by the late long time MBCPRB member, Jerry Williams). The WMPA contributed significant funds as well, to complete the pavilion. Later that summer, the WMPA also purchased 12 new eight-foot commercial grade all metal picnic tables for this new shelter.

The hardwood trees of War Memorial Park have been a special part of its landscape over the years. As mentioned, in 1952, 162 maple trees were planted. As they have matured over the years their fall foliage of red, yellow, and blazed orange colors continues to create one of the most beautiful settings in our community. In the 1990's the inventory of large hardwood trees in the park totaled over 350. On hot summer days, the shade provided by these trees has been enjoyed by the thousands of park users over the years. Many were damaged along Tennessee Avenue when drastic trimming along power lines occurred by utility subcontractors over the years. As those trees eventually died off, they were replaced with flowering ornamental cherry trees to avoid future drastic pruning. Their beautiful blossoms are enjoyed each spring. The maples from the 1952 plantings began to die off an average of 4 or 5 per year beginning around 2012. In 2020, we lost 20 in one year. In an urban setting, the expected life of maples is approximately 70 years. So we can expect more to die as time passes. In recent years, there has been a significant effort to replace those lost trees. The replacement trees have included maples as well as oaks and other species creating a more diverse variety throughout the park. The hope is to always have a healthy population of mature trees to provide shade throughout the hot summer months and beautiful foliage each fall