

Mansfield Memories: Memorial Park dedicated to war veterans

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MANSFIELD - This is the first in a two-part series about Memorial Park

The story of Memorial Park traces all the way back to 1837. In that year the town purchased 98 acres of farmland off East Street from Charles Day, Herman Hall and Hiram Copeland. The tract included 18 acres rocky woodlands that would sit idle for almost a century.

By 1923 Mansfield was looking for a way to memorialize its World War I **veterans. Town Meeting approved a committee to study “the best form of memorial together with an estimated cost.” The committee concluded that a park and playground dedicated to our war veterans would be appropriate.** They advanced the idea of using the rocky town-owned woodlands near Hope and Church streets.

A special Town Meeting of July 2, **1923, approved the committee’s concept. The only stipulation was that the park shouldn’t be too large, as part of the land might** be used as the site of a school or municipal building in the future. The following year \$1,000 was appropriated to study the issue, but nothing more came of it. The project lost momentum and the idea was tabled.

The Great Depression arrived in the 1930s. By then any prospect of reviving the **park project was dim. But with FDR’s New Deal federal money began to flow.** Hundreds of Mansfield residents were put to work on projects such as improving roads, painting town buildings and building sewer lines.

It now seemed possible to revive the park project. In autumn 1933 the **government approved Town Manager Harold Everett’s request for \$4,000** to employ 30 men to clear brush at what would become Memorial Park. That was soon followed by another \$3,000 to build Hope Street from Church to Pratt Street which was deemed essential for access to the park. The winter proved bitterly cold and slowed progress until springtime.

The delay allowed planners time to consider the park’s design. Town Manager Everett and Superintendent of Highways William L. Currivan conferred many times with the Board of Selectmen to discuss the park layout.



Construction of Memorial Park began in the autumn of 1933. The town employed 30 men to clear brush and funded construction of Hope Street. The winter proved bitterly cold and slowed progress until springtime.

Work progressed rapidly in 1934. By summer about 70 laborers, carpenters and stonemasons were on the job. Several buildings with stone exteriors were completed. A large bandstand made of fieldstone was constructed just below what would become the south end zone of the football field. One of the most enduring features of the park was constructed that summer.



Master stonemasons James Garland, John Scaldini and Ruggiero Baldelli built pair of four-foot walls that curved at the entrance to Hope Street and stretched out to a length of 40 feet. Observers marveled that it was **built “with great speed.”** About every 10 feet the masons added a design that some said resembled the limbs of a tree



One of the most enduring features of Memorial Park is the pair of four-foot walls that curve at the entrance to Hope Street. About every 10 feet the masons added a design that some said resembled the limbs of a tree branching out from a trunk. The long stone wall entrance remains an enduring Mansfield landmark.

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The Board of Selectmen officially approved the name “Memorial Park” in October 1934. They purchased a bronze plaque to commemorate the name at a cost of \$175. It was installed on the fieldstone entrance on Hope Street where it remains to this day.

The new park was not met with universal praise. Some felt it was an unnecessary waste of taxpayer money. Others thought there were more pressing needs. But as the finishing touches were added to Memorial Park in 1935, public opinion began to change. Townspeople visited the spacious park and began to see value in the project. As the year drew to a close town officials began to consider how to dedicate the new facility.