

The Save Victory Memorial Grove Project

A Photo Journal



Rising over the streets below with a breathtaking panoramic view of downtown Los Angeles, Dodgers Stadium, and the Hollywood sign is a lonely, forgotten memorial rock in a "park-within-a-park" that was long ago a lovingly maintained place of somber contemplation. Hundreds of

thousands of people drive their cars past this spot on their way to root on the Dodgers every year, without ever knowing it exists. This terraced hill sees runners and dog walkers, as well as dozens of residents whose homes border the space. Some may see the large stone monument that sits at the apex of the hill, but few probably take the time to read it. The place is Victory Memorial Grove.



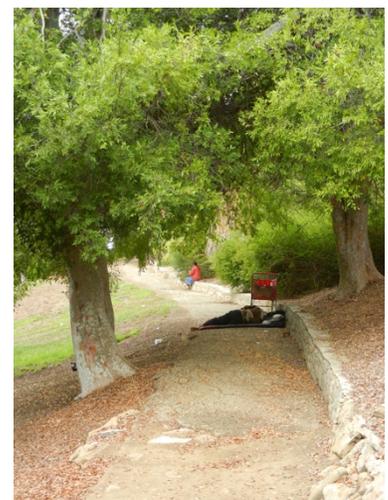
Amateur historian Courtland Jindra, resident of Los Angeles, had been tracking down memorials for Dr. Mark Levitch's nation-wide WWI Memorial Inventory Project for over a year when he discovered an article in the archives of the *Los Angeles Times* from November 12, 1920, referring to a "Victory Memorial Grove." The article included a rough explanation of where the grove was, as well as a reference to an upcoming ceremony to unveil a bronze tablet made by famous sculptor Julia Bracken Wendt, whose works adorned public places across the United States,

depicting a soldier and a sailor clasping hands, with a live oak tree in the background.¹ Intrigued by the article, he asked a new acquaintance, Melissa Angert, if she wanted to try to find it with him. She enthusiastically agreed, and little did they know that it would be the first of many hunts for history the two would share together, as they became sweethearts shortly thereafter and are still inseparable to this day.



After some fruitless driving on January 2nd, 2016, the duo eventually found the Grove and began wandering, searching for the bronze tablet described in the *Los Angeles Times* article. They found the park's once beautiful grounds to be littered with beer bottles and trash, dead leaves and tree branches. The concrete, asphalt and brick walkways were cracked, broken and eroding away. Graffiti was everywhere, from

the trees and garbage cans to the sprinklers and walkways. Many trees had been painted unnatural colors of purple, pink and gray in an effort to camouflage the graffiti. Finally, arriving at the top of the hill, they came across a massive California-quarried granite boulder, weighing two tons, with a plaque affixed. To Jindra's surprise, the plaque was not as it had been described in the article. In fact, it was



altogether different. The plaque described in that article, if it was ever completed, no longer

¹ "Poppy Seeds Sewn in Memorial Grove: Symbol of Battlefields is Planted With Ceremony At Elysian Park." *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 1920, p. I17.

resides in Victory Memorial Grove, and what happened to it remains a mystery.

The five foot high monument bears a bronze tablet created by the artist W.A. Sharp. It honors twenty-one young men and women who gave their lives “in the interest of humanity,”² whose

names are inscribed on the plaque. The tablet also bears six embedded shields: four representing the services in which the twenty-one died, Army, Navy, aviation and the Red Cross, as well as the State Flag and the emblem of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Above all is the noble image of a great eagle, the national emblem of guardianship.



² Nye, Myra. "Women's Work and Women's Clubs: D.A.R." *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1921, p. III42.

The eagle's talons clutch a banner that reads: "Honor Roll 1914-1918 World War." It then lists the following names and ranks:

Edgar H. Annear, Capt.

Byron Jackson, Jr. 2nd Lt.

Egbert W. Beach, 2nd Lt.

Elwyn H. Mannhart

Ira Campbell

John F. Morse

David Copley Collier, Lieut.

David A. Redford, Lieut.

Henry H. Cumings, Sd.

Walter E. Reno, Capt.

Gertrude Briggs Day

Ross Snyder, Capt.

Cutler Dyer, Mate, 1st Class

Dudley B. Valentine, 2nd Lt.

Kenelin Dyott, Lieut.

Hascall E. Waterhouse, 2nd Lt.

Bronaugh E. Ervay, 2nd Lt.

Harry C. Woods, 2nd Class Seaman

George P. Gabb

Donald S. Worden

Elias W. Gray

Below the names, it reads: "Erected 1921 by Daughters of the American Revolution of Southern California to honor the service in the World War of all men and women from the families of the State Society and in memory of twenty one who made the supreme sacrifice."

The noble monument, like much else in the park, had been repeatedly defaced with graffiti. Its granite had been painted on countless occasions with shades of gray and pink paint to hide the vandalism, with only a small piece of the very top of the monument showing the beautiful California granite underneath. And the plaque itself bore black lettering and pink paint, and a general off-white film of grime covering the bronze. Sometime in the past, thieves unsuccessfully attempted to remove the plaque, and the top right edge remains bent back away from the rock. The original pins affixing the plaque to the rock had rusted over time.

Saddened by the state of the monument and its park, and further intrigued by this surprise plaque, sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution, of which his mother is an active member, Jindra went back to the archives to dig further into history and discovered much more to the story of this monument.



A preliminary Victory memorial grove was dedicated on a hilltop in Elysian Park on Memorial Day, May 30th, 1919 with the planting of a single tree. But the site was poorly chosen because the only way to access it was via private property, which the owners subsequently refused to sell to the

City. The site sat untouched for over a year. The Park Commissioners later apologized to the City Council for having been “bamboozled” with their choice of the first site,³ and dedicated the present roughly five-acre Victory Memorial Grove on August 2nd, 1920, with much of the land donated by a former State Daughters of the American Revolution regent. The location was a beautifully commanding one, and on a clear day it was said that one could see all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

There was great interest in making Victory Grove a proper memorial site. Poppy seeds from Flanders Fields were sewn on Armistice Day, November 11, 1920, by members of the American Legion and civilians at Victory Memorial Grove, “so that in the course of time this beautiful flower will cover the lovely park and ever remain symbolical of the sufferings of the American troops abroad and the joy that came with the signing of the armistice.”⁴ Major Frank P. Doherty, who received the seeds from relatives abroad, remarked during the ceremony that “the grown poppies will ever be a reminder of the gallantry of the American troops abroad.”⁵ Sadly, the Victory Memorial Grove hadn’t a single poppy plant left.

Captain Walter Brinkop, machine gun company, 364th Infantry, gave seventeen trees as a gift that were planted in the park before Christmas 1920. Many trees of all sizes still stand in the Grove today, along with many large stumps. Presumably, several of these represent at least some of

³ “Abandon Park Memorial Site.” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1920, p. II7.

⁴ “Poppy Seeds Sewn in Memorial Grove: Symbol of Battlefields is Planted With Ceremony At Elysian Park.” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 1920, p. II7.

⁵ “Poppy Seeds Sewn in Memorial Grove: Symbol of Battlefields is Planted With Ceremony At Elysian Park.” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 1920, p. II7.



Tjikenbang 1890-1918.”

those original trees. When the Grove was established, any person might place a tree and/or bronze plaque in perpetual memory of a deceased World War One soldier. The permits that were issued for planting a tree were kept as mementos of this tribute.⁶ Today, one of these plaques remains, discovered during the park restoration efforts by Courtland Jindra and Kimberly Ables-Jindra. It reads, “In Memory Of Charles P. Stauffer, Coxswain, USS

The following summer, several chapters of the Southern California Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated the World War Victory Memorial Grove Tablet in the Grove on Flag Day, June 14, 1921. A handmade flag bearing 900 blue stars representing all California Daughters of the American Revolution service members, with 22 gold stars representing those service men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice, was ceremoniously draped over the monument until it was unveiled. The plaque contains the names of the twenty-one relatives who gave their lives, including the son of Los Angeles’ former City Mayor Meredith Snyder, Ross Snyder. Interestingly, one of the names that was honored in the ceremony as the twenty second individual does not appear on



⁶ Gargan, Janet. “The Los Angeles Park System.” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1921, p. VIII2.

the plaque. Jindra is still researching the mysterious reason behind that omission. Another attribute that has suffered through time is a large American flagpole that was set there by the Park Commission. It is still there, at the lower entrance to the park itself, but flies no flag. Its base has also been repeatedly graffitied and painted over.

Hope for the potential of Victory Memorial Grove echoes from the past, as written in 1921 by Myra Nye of the *Los Angeles Times*: “Undoubtedly as other flag days come other memorials will be erected, thus making the grove one of the fine memories of patriotism.”⁷ Sadly, since those words were written, no other memorials have been erected in Victory Memorial Grove, and the one that has stood sentinel for nearly a hundred years was badly in need of restoration. What was once, as Nye described, a “splendid monument to the high ideals and the lives of 900 men and young women, children of the State Daughters,” was now in danger of being lost to history. Over the decades, it was weathered by exposure to the elements and fell victim to repeated vandalism. The Grove extends over several acres, but section in the most distress is the top of the hill where the monument sits. One looks upon it and imagines what the space looked like nearly one hundred years ago, and can see why it was chosen as a memorial site. Even then, or especially then, before a city of a few hundred thousand became a city of millions, the views would have been spectacular.

⁷ Nye, Myra. “Women’s Work and Women’s Clubs: D.A.R.” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1921, p. III42.

Jindra realized that acting now was of urgent necessity to physically restore the monument to its former glory and to symbolically restore our connection to and respect for the valiant men and women memorialized on the monument, who served our nation in the first World War. His goal became to restore it to the fine symbol of patriotism it was intended to be.

The importance of this monument cannot be overstated. Though there are thousands of World War One Memorials across the country, this one stands out. The Grove and its monument are dedicated not only to the individuals commemorated on its plaque, but to the ideals of service and freedom of 900 servicemen and servicewomen from the state of California and beyond. Nearly one hundred years after the dedication of the Victory Memorial Grove monument, we must realize it is our turn to keep the memory of their service and their sacrifice alive. The eagle on the monument, the symbol of guardianship, reminds us of our responsibility to be guardians of this special place. As Czeslaw Milosz famously said, “The living owe it to those who no longer can speak to tell their story for them.”

This memorial is a living symbol of our local history and heritage. Some of its trees were rooted soon after the war as perpetual memorials to soldiers who fought in it. It promotes a sense of respect in our youth for those who served, and continue to serve, to defend our freedom. Los Angeles isn't just where millions of residents call home, it is a magnet for the world's travelers. They enjoy experiencing the spirit of our history as much as we do. What better place to do that than in a beautifully restored public park with breathtaking views of the City? Elysian Park is used and enjoyed by picnickers and families for celebrations, runners, walkers and hikers, and people

simply seeking to escape the hustle and bustle of the City and enjoy nature, much like it was a century ago.

Jindra had previous experience trying to get local memorials in town repaired with little success. To his chagrin, World War One tends to be a truly forgotten and overshadowed war, and apathy toward the care of its monuments abounds. But thanks to the Hundred Cities/Hundred Memorials program of the World War One Centennial Commission, and the Pritzker Military Museum, the opportunity to have Victory Memorial Grove restored became a real possibility.

Jindra brought the memorial to the attention of his mother, Kimberly Ables-Jindra, an active member of the Los Angeles - Eschscholtzia Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution of Southern California, which is two of the original chapters that put up the monument that later merged. Several months later, he had a professional assessment for the restoration of the monument done. Around the same time, Lester Probst, an active member of the Hollywood Post 43 of the American Legion, contacted him asking if there were any memorials to the Great War in Southern California. Jindra sent him a list he had compiled through his extensive research, and highlighted the needs of Victory Memorial Grove in particular. Soon, both the Hollywood American Legion Post 43 and the Los Angeles – Eschscholtzia Daughters of the American Revolution recognized its potential and grew excited about the prospect of restoring the monument.

As Jindra continued his research into the history behind the monument, he discovered the existence of a book written specifically about the plaque and its dedication ceremony, including biographies of each of the individuals listed. He eventually obtained a copy from The Sons of the Revolution American Heritage Library in Glendale, CA. This book assisted not only in educating the entities and public involved about the Grove and its honorees, but Jindra and the Daughters of the American Revolution used it to design the rededication ceremony which took place on June 14th, 2017, including excerpts of the original speeches and specific information about those twenty two who were honored. The book also featured a single photograph of the monument on its dedication day with the handmade flag of 900 stars. This assisted



Jindra's girlfriend Melissa in making a handmade replica of the flag, which was used during the rededication ceremony to dramatically unveil the fully restored monument.

Many interesting facts are learned from this historical document. Most notably, not everyone listed on the plaque was from California, as originally assumed. Some individuals were from out of state, and one was from Great Britain. This makes the Victory Memorial Grove Tablet not only a local World War One memorial, but an international one.

Another mystery was at least partially solved by reading the document. *The Los Angeles Times* had mentioned that the dedication ceremony of the monument paid tribute to 22 individuals.

However, only 21 are listed on the plaque. The final name, Frank Garrison Davis, was honored during the ceremony but not engraved in bronze. The reason behind this is still uncertain. We do know that Davis was from California and was killed in action September 28th, 1918 in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and today lies in Plot D Row 17 Grave 2 of our overseas cemetery in Romagnous-Montfaucon, France.

In reading the biographies of those commemorated on the plaque, one gains a deeper appreciation for the myriad dangers of war. Those honored died from a range of causes, including drowning on leave, being killed in action, airplane crashes, disease, being lost at sea, etc.



Jindra and the other leaders of the project, including Lester Probst of the Hollywood Post 43 of the American Legion, and Jan Gordon and Kimberly Ables-

Jindra of the Daughters, continued to tirelessly promote the project in community meetings and worked hard to fundraise. They met several times with the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department as they



moved forward with the endeavor, and obtained Rights of Entry in order to do





work in the park. Probst coordinated the participation of The Mission Continues, a veteran's organization that does community projects such as park cleanups, and Disney Salutes, which supports those endeavors financially. The City Council also offered to help, and were not offended in



the least when told that the most urgent need for the project was the availability of a porta-potty on site.

Despite the trenches and hardships along the way, and thanks to a lot of hard work, dedication, and undaunted resolve, on Saturday, June 3rd, 2017, volunteers and the aforementioned organizations came together and spent several warm, sunny hours participating in a community-based clean-up day. The Mission Continues and Disney



Salutes provided donations of supplies, trash bags, topsoil, plants, dedicated, hard-working military veteran volunteers, and water and pizza to hydrate and feed them.

This did wonders for the park's general state. Volunteers picked up dozens of trash bags full of trash and organic litter, both of which are unsightly and posed brush fire hazard. They swept walkways and pathways clear of debris, loose soil and rocks. They fought soil erosion with plantings and rock stabilization. They applied fresh soil and mulch and planted hundreds of native and/or regionally



compatible, drought-resistant flowering plants to attract butterflies and other pollinating insects to the grove and beautify the appearance of this honored place.



Then, from Tuesday, June 6, 2017 through Friday, June 9, 2017, professional conservationists from Rosa Lowinger & Associates completed the painstaking monument restoration plan. They removed over 40 layers of paint and graffiti from the monument, treated the bronze, and successfully restored it to its original, noble appearance.





Finally, on Flag Day, Wednesday, June 14, 2017, exactly 97 years to the day from the original setting of the monument by Daughters of the American Revolution, a heartfelt Rededication Ceremony was presented by the Los Angeles-Eschscholtzia Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It included the Los Angeles Police Department Honor Guard, music sung by a barbershop choir The Oceanares, period poetry, a Doughboy re-enactor from the Great War Historical Society, a bugler, and wreath laying, and was attended by numerous members of the community, the Legion, the Daughters, other community organizations, and even the Consul General of Belgium. Segments from the original dedication ceremony, as well as a “roll call” of historical biographies of each of the individuals commemorated on the plaque, were also presented, and members of the Daughters laid carnations atop the monument at the reading of each biography. The plaque was appropriately unveiled with the handmade replica of the same Service Flag that unveiled it 97 years before.



The project will continue with more plantings and care taken of Victory Memorial Grove, so that it will remain a place of honor for these brave men and women for many generations to come. The conservation of the monument and beautification of the park has already inspired the neighbors in the vicinity to commit themselves and their children to taking better care of this space. The restoration of the historic flag pole is a goal that the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion are willing to take on next.

We will continue to honor the memory of these Southern California servicemen and servicewomen who made the ultimate sacrifice in the first World War, so that today, a century later, we all could enjoy freedom and peace.





BEFORE



AFTER



Courtland Jindra



BEFORE



AFTER



Courtland Jindra &
Melissa Angert