



*' the jewel of Sayre,  
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### Howard Elmer Park

November 6, 1911

by Jim Nobles

Howard Elmer Park may be one of Sayre's finest treasures. It is located in the heart of Sayre Borough, the "keystone" of the Valley. Its memorials and bandstand along with its constant and varied usage convey much of the story of Sayre since its founding days.

Whereas other major identities in Sayre's history, such as the railroad and the hospital, have

changed significantly over the years, the park has always been "the park." Most residents of Sayre, living and departed, since the birth of the community, are very likely to have a recollection of Howard Elmer Park. It has been the most widely viewed, largely unchanged entity in Sayre for more than 130 years. It existed as far back as in the time of Howard Elmer, the founder of Sayre, in the later part of the 19th century. Hopefully it will be known over the centuries to come by future generations of Sayreites.



The tree-lined park was directly in front of Robert A. Packer's magnificent mansion which, following his death, became the home of the Robert Packer Hospital. Mr. Packer had been a leading industrialist and civic leader in early Sayre. The park had been developed on land owned by the Sayre Land Company and had evolved into being known as "City Park" by the late 1870s.

In 1894 the Land Company leased the area inside the streets of West Packer Avenue, Park Place, South Elmer Avenue, and South Wilbur Avenue to the Borough of Sayre as a public park. A term of the lease was that it must always remain a properly maintained public park or it would revert to the Sayre Land Company.

Initially know as "City Park," it was renamed Howard Elmer Park by resolution of the Borough Council in 1911, exactly 100 years ago, to honor the town's founder.

*While citizens of Sayre forever have seen "the park," so to the park has "seen" many events and activities of Sayre s citizens which help chronicle our history. Also, it has become the home for several very prominent memorials.*

One of the earliest memorials was placed in the park on September 26, 1881, as the nation experienced the loss of a second president to the gun of an assassin. As Sayre and the nation mourned the death of President James A. Garfield, a tree was planted near the center of the park.

The tree planting ceremony had been organized by the Sayre Arbor Association which had been organized just three years earlier and in that brief period of time was responsible for having planted 240 trees along the streets of Sayre and in the park.

The planting of the Garfield Tree included participation by nearly 100 children, grading the ground around the tree and decorating its base. A silver medal was presented to each of the children for their assistance. The medal had the likeness of President Garfield on the obverse, and President Abraham Lincoln, assassinated 16 years earlier, on the reverse.

The Garfield Tree survived for many years but was lost, along with other memorial trees, in the elm blight of the 1960s.

A memorial to Howard Elmer was added to the park in 1912 when a cast-iron fountain was donated by Mrs. Howard Elmer. It was (and is) located near the South Elmer Avenue entrance to the park, shaded by trees planted earlier by the Arbor Association. Originally the fountain had four drinking outlets. Close to the ground were drinking pots for animals. In recent years several community minded companies and their employees did restoration work, saving the fountain for the foreseeable future. The words "Howard Elmer Park" are very visible on the north side of the fountain.



Immediately following World War I, the Doughboy Monument was dedicated in an impressive ceremony in the park. The plaque on the front of the memorial lists the names of 12 Sayre

servicemen and this inscription, their **"deeds are immortal—their memory shall never die."** Below the Doughboy and to his left is a plaque bearing the names of four fallen servicemen from South Waverly.

The soldier on the monument, in the traditional World War I uniform, has been facing South Elmer Avenue since 1919. A W.W.I cannon was placed on the ground to his front and left but was removed for its scrap metal value for use in W.W. II. For many years, towering elm trees provided constant shade for this memorial.

During and for several years after World War II a large, white billboard with black lettering carried the names of all Sayre service men serving in that war. Gold stars identified those making the supreme sacrifice. It also faced South Elmer Avenue and was adjacent to the water fountain. It was not created as a permanent memorial, deteriorated, and was eventually removed.



In 1957, Dr. Donald Guthrie, longtime surgeon-in-chief of the Guthrie Clinic-Robert Packer Hospital, was honored by having the four streets surrounding the park named Guthrie Square in his honor. A plaque proclaiming this is attached to the granite boulder at the west end of the park, immediately in front of the medical facility.



*Some of the most recent memorials in the park were created at the time of Sayre's year-long centennial celebration in 1991.*

A tribute to Sayre's one-time major industry - the Lehigh Valley Railroad - was placed near the South Elmer Avenue-West Packer Avenue corner of the park. The letters "LVRR" and the date "1904" that appear on the front of the memorial had been salvaged from the huge railroad locomotive shop when it was demolished. The blocks of stone in the monument, including the date stones, came from two former Sayre bridges - the Packer Avenue Bridge and the Footbridge - both over the railroad tracks of the Lehigh Valley Railroad in downtown Sayre.





Two additional plaques were added to the W.W.I Doughboy Monument at that time. Below the Doughboy and to his right is a plaque with the inscription “dedicated to veterans of all wars.” Below and to his back is a plaque dedicated to, “those who gave their lives that we may live.” It lists 51 names for W.W.II, three names for Korea, and three names for Vietnam.



In the same year a small marker, flush to the ground, and somewhat southwest of the water fountain, was placed by Sayre Epiphany School students along with a small shrub. This also was to commemorate Sayre’s centennial. The shrub survived for only a few years. It was replaced by the Sayre Borough Shade Tree Commission in 2009.

In recent years two benches were placed in the park, one in honor of Dr. Charles Meikle, long-time area physician. The bench was dedicated in his honor in October 2004. He died two years later. The second bench was added June 12, 2009, in memory of Mary “Babe” and George Tymoski, prominent members of the Sayre business community.

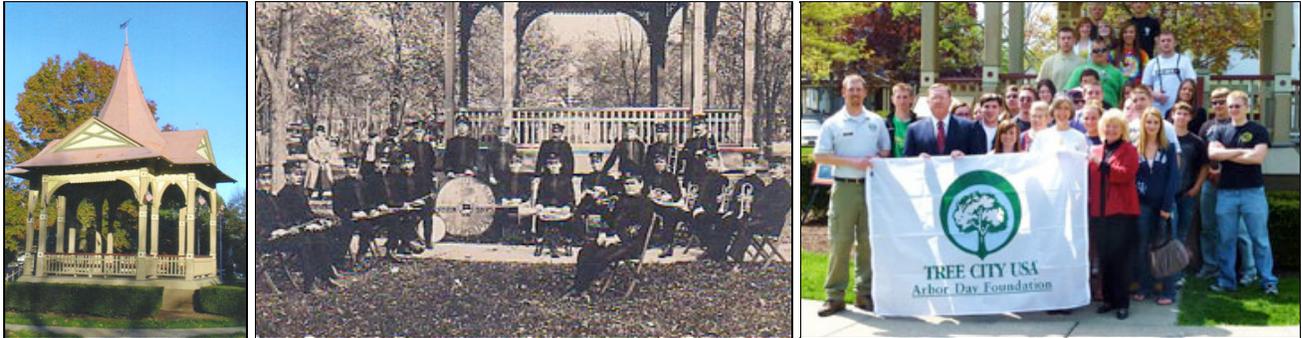


The latest memorial in the park is the Firefighter’s Monument, dedicated on October 10, 2009, by the Valley Firemen’s Association. This \$53,000 monument honors all Valley firefighters and lists the names of all the fire departments and fire companies in the Valley.



The final and most noticed feature of Howard Elmer Park is the bandstand, largely unchanged since construction began in 1885. It has served as a platform for hundreds of concerts and events and has been in continuous prominence since its completion in 1886. In 1931 and again in 1986 it received extensive restoration work.

Various bands, including the Lehigh Valley Railroad System Shops Band, the Moose Band, and the Sayre High School Marching Band have presented concerts there on a regular basis. Currently a full summer of concerts maintain this old tradition.



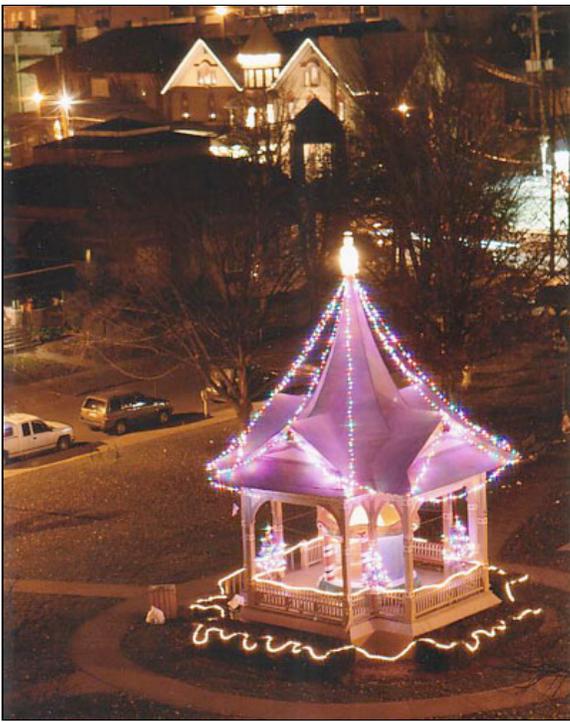
Since May 2009, a Tree City USA flag has flown from the flagpole nearest the bandstand in recognition of the Sayre Borough Shade Tree Commission's encouragement of tree planting and care.

Other activities at the bandstand and within the park's canopy, across the calendar and over the decades, have included weddings, memorial services for individuals and for major national tragedies, Flag Day programs, ceremonies for Memorial Day and Veterans Day, Easter Egg hunts, political rallies, appearances by the governor and other elected officials, arts and crafts shows, Little Miss Sayre Contests, farmers' markets, and many other events.



Following Thanksgiving and until New Years Day, decorations to celebrate Christmas create a sea of colorful lights and holiday symbols in keeping with the festivities ending each year. This tradition has been sponsored by various organizations over the last half-century. Santa Claus pays his official visit to Sayre each year with an evening stop at Howard Elmer Park's bandstand. His helpers set up his throne on or near the bandstand from which he has greeted thousands of youngsters.

Throughout the year, but especially during the warmer months, people are frequently found relaxing, reading, or eating lunches on the park's many tree-shaded benches. Some feed the squirrels as the park's many trees provide a home for them. A series of 10-foot high Victorian posts and lamps provide just the right lighting for quiet evenings in the park. The three lighted flagpoles near the Doughboy and Firefighter's Monuments proudly display Old Glory,



the POW/MIA flag, and the fire fighters' flag. The flagpoles were the gift of the Valley Firemen's Association and were dedicated in 2010.



*Taken as a whole,  
the park embodies  
small town America.*

Howard Elmer Park is the jewel of Sayre, a small green space in the midst of a busy little town. It is filled with memories from the distant past to the present day. It is now in the hands of its fifth generation of caretakers who have a very long tradition to uphold.

I encourage everyone to find someday the time to walk through the park and look at all the features just described – the treasures of Howard Elmer Park. – *Jim Nobles*



Sayre Historical Society appreciation to the following for the use of their photographs: Jim Nobles, MaryBeth Lynn, Sayre Borough Shade Tree Commission, Fred Mader, Maryanne Mader, Brad Zehr