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(all spelling, punctuation and capitalization are as in the original printing)

The Birth of a Park District

Living, as they were, in one of the garden spots of the west, Fair Oaks residents were slow to see the need to formally set aside lands for parks and recreation.

The first warning that this might become necessary came in the late 30's when the county decided to cut down the great oak tree at the intersection of Fair Oaks Boulevard and Entrance, where the boulevard makes the curve around the Town House. The county Public Works Department felt the tree was a hazard to an automobile failing to negotiate the curve.

The decision so upset a number of the ladies of Fair Oaks that they linked arms in a circle around the tree when the tree-cutters came out and refused to budge. Faced with such determined opposition the workmen finally packed away their saws and axes and left. The tree finally died of its own accord in September, 1965 and was cut down.

In 1922, an enterprising businessman decided to build a used auto parts business on the site that is now Plaza Park. A number of the residents under the leadership of Lou Gearhart came to the rescue by forming the original Fair Oaks Civic Club. The club collected \$1,000 to buy the ground and give it to the school district which was the only legal entity in the community that could accept such a treasure.

Everything went along smoothly for another 20 years until 1943 when talk sprang up concerning making the plaza into a parking lot. The Civic Club was revived to ward off the new threat, but the man who really did the job was Louie Hollin, a retired army major who looked up the law, consulted the county Board of Supervisors and almost singlehandedly created the Fair Oaks Park District. The district was organized and the first board took over on Dec. 2, 1945. It was composed of E.G Prowell, Floyd Hall, W.E, Spangle, Harry Voth and Dana Bowers. Bowers, chief landscape architect for the State Highway Department, was elected chairman. Voth was elected secretary. There were 1941 residents, at the time.

At the first meeting the main subject was the acquisition of the plaza and clubhouse from the school district. A 10-year lease was obtained from the school district for \$1 a year. The lease was put into a safe which was subsequently stolen and thrown in the American River where it was found intact years later.

A further threat to the plaza came in 1954 when pressure was put on the Park Board to authorize its use for a new courthouse. It was said that the court was to be moved to Carmichael. The county was persuaded to erect the court at its present location, but not before there had been a public subscription of \$1,000 to assist in the purchase of the property. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Ardath Price, made a similar contribution by reducing the sales price of the property from \$5,000 to \$4,000.

In 1947 movement began to get a swimming pool for Fair Oaks. Robert Massey was chairman of the pool committee. There was considerable controversy over a pool location with the park board at first being opposed to having it on the clubhouse grounds. Nevertheless a site in the plaza was selected and a well drilled to produce water for the pool. After the failure of the pool effort, this well was capped, covered over and became lost. It remains unfound to this day somewhere in plaza park.

The effort to raise money for the swimming pool brought on the first Fair Oaks Fiesta of 1947. Many other fund-raising efforts were undertaken, but were not sufficient to do the job and the pool effort finally died. The swimming pool committee was instrumental, however, in obtaining the use of private pools at the houses of Fair Oaks residents, where swimming classes were conducted. The committee also actively supported the park board's project to get a swim beach on the river at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The establishment of the Fair Oaks River Beach in 1950 was made possible because of the tons of river sand deposited by periodic river flooding. Sand and silt were so plentiful that bulldozers were used to create six to eight foot high, 20 foot wide, windrows to delineate parting areas; and the river bottom at the coves was covered by a deep layer of sand. This was ideal for teaching, and some 150 Red Cross Certificates, including Junior and Senior Life Saving Certificates were issued each year. The park board hired up to five life guards over weekends and holidays and the San Juan Record reported that on a July 4th weekend, 6,000 persons had used the River Beach. Roy Pedersen, a State Fish and Game official, was a life guard at that time.

Fair Oaks River Beach was the first supervised swimming area on the American River. However, by 1955 it was closed. With the completion of Folsom Dam, river temperatures had dropped, and without the occasional high water, sand and silt were not being replaced. The beach was increasingly used by non-Fair Oaks residents and although the county contributed \$500 to help cover expenses for a year or two, the burden fell chiefly on the local district.

As original members left the Board they were replaced by such people as Bob Broadley, Alden Brock, Henry Kroeger, Don Hitchcock, Larry Bacon, Bill Sturch, Les Hannibal, Ray Stone, Jay Eller and Ernie Sagehorn. Harry Voth, an original Board member served from 1945 to 1968, most of the time as board secretary and for one year as chairman. Alden Brock came on the Board in 1948 and was elected chairman in 1950, a post he held until just before his retirement in 1967.

During Brock's regime major effort was devoted toward obtaining suitable park land areas. Mrs. Lillian Nichols became the first full time recreational supervisor when she was employed in the summer of 1951 to supervise the clubhouse playgrounds, give tennis instruction in the forenoons, and conduct swimming and life saving classes at the beach in the afternoons.

By 1953 the Park Board and the Fair Oaks School District were sharing the cost of recreation programs which included baseball, ceramics and leather craft classes and dance instruction; and in 1954 a Fair Oaks Community Recreation Council was organized to coordinate recreation programs in Fair Oaks.

During this period the board acquired Bannister Park from the county, Montview Park through donation from developers, and purchased Miller Park from George and Ann Miller for \$10,000. Because of lack of funds developmental work at the park was minimal except for the extensive grading and construction of tennis courts at Miller Park. The latter facility led to the organization of the Fair Oaks Racquet Club in 1961 with Bill Melvin as president. The Club and the Park Board co-sponsored tournaments and the board funded tennis instruction.

In October of 1954 the then State Recreation Commission had submitted a plan for development of recreation services in the Park District, but it wasn't until 1964 that the district had its first master plan for the development of park and recreation services prepared by Wayne Bartholomew, a recreation consultant. At that time the district had a population of 12,000 people living in an area of 11.5 square miles.

The original district totaled approximately 4000 acres. In 1961 the residents voted to annex an additional 3,530 acres, or 5 1/2 square miles, almost doubling the size. The annexation consisted of two widely separated parcels. The largest was in the southeast corner consisting of the neighborhood around Phoenix Field, the Sacramento, Sailor and Mississippi bar areas, which had little population. The other area, smaller but more densely populated, was in the northwest corner and included the North Ridge Country Club. The annexation was supported by the county director of parks as a means to fill out gaps that existed in areas between different park districts.

The present Community Clubhouse was built on the foundations of the original Fair Oaks school as a WPA project during the great depression in the 30's. It was owned by the school district but leased at \$1 a year to the park district. In 1949 the insurance premium came due for the property and the school district was charged \$387. The park district thereupon offered to buy the clubhouse from the school district for the amount of the premium, This offer was accepted.

For a number of years park board members did all of the administrative and supervisory work for the park district, and some of the physical work. Mrs. Voth and Mrs. Brock provided free secretarial services. The 1948-49 budget showed \$2,400 for salaries and wages for the clubhouse custodian, \$800 for maintenance, and \$3,744 for capital outlay.

However, the community gave assistance. For example, Arthur Odman, a local contractor, made structural repairs to the clubhouse for \$2,000 after the Park Board had rejected a low bid of \$12,000 for the job. Another rebuilt the fireplace for \$100. A third, Ted Mitchell, did a massive grading job on Miller Park for \$1,800. Frank Brugger of Pacific Cement and Aggregates, provided advice and assistance at the river beach. Many individuals assisted in recreation, including Mae Dunham, who chaired the Fair Oaks Community Recreation Council, and Mrs. Leslie Roediger and Mrs. Guy Roediger who for several years gave instruction and conducted a dance program for up to 150 teenagers.

In early 1957 George Hauseman was hired part time as a buildings and grounds superintendent, and the board later hired Harold MacQuarrie as an office supervisor. He had served as a board member during 1959-60. It wasn't until 1965 that the district hired its first full-time professional administrator. He was Lawrence L. Seifert who had previously been executive director of the Chico Park District. Seifert had considerable experience in teaching recreation programs and had served as president of the California Park and Recreation Society in 1962.

In 1964 the district made its largest park site purchase when it bought the 85-acre Sailor Bar site from Russell Gallaway Jr. for \$85,000. This single park was 50 percent larger than the entire Fair Oaks park system prior to its purchase. It gave the community a total of nine different park sites totaling 143 acres. Two years later the board launched a development plan for Sailor Bar costing \$120,000. Of this amount \$60,000 came from the federal government and \$28,875 from State Park Bond funds. The development included creation of a man-made lake which failed when vandals punched holes in the gunnite bottom. There were other problems too and the lake never came into existence.

In 1972 the Sailor Bar property was traded to the county for a 30 acre site south of Phoenix Field which had been acquired by the county through an inverse condemnation suit. Sailor Bar then became part of the American River Parkway system. The Phoenix Field site provided acreage for a community park for the residents in the eastern part of the district which was developing rapidly.

In November, 1967 a dinner was held honoring Alden Brock on his retirement from the board after serving 19 years of which 16 were as chairman, and Earnest Sagehorn who had been on the board for over 10 years. Harry Voth, a member of the first park board who became chairman after Brock left, noted that "The district has never floated a bond and never owed any money except for very short periods of time."

In 1969 the board budgeted \$7,000 for the present amphitheatre. When the bids came in they were so high that the board threw them all out and contracted to build the 600-seat amphitheatre itself, using park employees on some of the tasks. The board voted to dedicate the amphitheatre as a memorial to Fair Oaks war veterans.

Larry Seifert retired as district administrator in 1974 and was succeeded by Jerry Steinke. Steinke was a graduate of San Juan High School and Sacramento State College where he received his master's degree in recreation administration in 1973. He worked as recreation supervisor for the city of Vacaville for three years before returning to Fair Oaks in 1967 to join the local park staff. Under Steinke's regime, the district expanded rapidly in programs and services. Where in 1964 the district didn't even have a full time administrator, by 1977 it had 12 full-time employees - an administrator, secretary, clerk-typist, recreation superintendent, recreation supervisor, park superintendent and six maintenance people for a payroll expense of \$152,160. In addition it budgeted \$25,000 for part time help during the summer. All this came to a screeching halt in 1978 when California passed Proposition 13 reducing revenues from property taxes by almost two-thirds. The Fair Oaks Park District revenues plummeted from \$708,000 in 1977-78 to \$358,754 in 1978-79 to \$277,781 in 1979-80. Among the drastic actions taken was the contracting of the recreation program out to a private corporation made up of former recreation leaders in the district. This corporation was called Leisure Pro and supported itself by fees paid by those participating in recreation activities.