

Berlin Veterans Memorial Park

Veterans Way, Berlin, CT

Reclaiming Space: How A Former Clay Pit Became a Pond, Landfill, and Public Park

Take a stroll down Massirio Drive in Berlin, Connecticut, and you might have a hard time envisioning the landfill that once occupied the site. Even less evident would be the original, unnamed pond that once meandered along the edge of Farmington Avenue. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Berlin was regionally known for its brick factories -- the production of which required gangs of men with picks, shovels, and heavy equipment to dig holes all across the country side to extract the necessary clay. When the clay pits stopped yielding workable material in sufficient quantity, they would be flooded with water to create artificial ponds suitable for fishing, boating, and other recreational activities.

In 1842, Cornelius P. Dunham established the first brickyard in Berlin, CT. Because the clay in Berlin was so perfect for brick making, the business continued for a little over 120 years. Berlin was known throughout the northeast for brick making. The salary for an average worker was 1-2 dollars every 10 hours. Over 90,000 bricks were produced each day with as many as 90 men and women working together. In 1910, Berlin had about 11 brickyards, and yearly produced about 102,500,000 bricks.

The Great Depression ended the building construction. The last brickyard to close was a flower pot company which didn't last too long. The electric shovel arm is still visible in an old clay pit on Route 72. The hole was bought by John Carbo who had a company on Christian Lane. John Carbo didn't make enough money for electricity for the electric shovel so it was never used and abandoned. Clay has made a long way in the town of Berlin, but it had to end sometime, but overall it was very successful.

Berlin Brick Company 1842
(First brickyard in Berlin)



Merwin Brickyard 1940
(By the Berlin Railroad Station)



Donnelly Brick 1957
(New Britain Rd, Kensington)



An aerial photograph of the area taken in 1934 shows a rural, agrarian community dotted with clay pit ponds and brickyards. A follow-up image from 1952 shows the post-World War II development boom spurring the filling of pond areas to create more buildable land. In one section of the pond pictured below, the Town of Berlin created a landfill and material storage yard to better service the growing community.



The Town has since removed its landfill and material storage yard from the site, and the entire site has been capped to contain any polluted materials. In 2010, with funding from the State of Connecticut's Small Town Economic Assistance Program, part of the site was rechristened as Veterans Memorial Park. New improvements included a formal entrance off the parking lot at Legion Square, a gazebo, a walkway from the parking lot and at both edges of the pond, fountains in the pond, and a bridge from one side of the pond to the other. In 2011, a Veteran's Memorial was added.

Berlin Veterans Memorial Park Entrance Phase I



Berlin Veterans Memorial



Berlin Veterans Memorial Dedication Plaque



Gazebo Donated by the Berlin Lions Club at Veterans Memorial Park in 2013



In 2015, a second phase of improvements began at the park based on a design by TPA Design Group. The portion of the site adjoining the VFW received its own formal entrance to match the masonry archway in Phase 1. New plantings add shade and beauty to the site, while the addition of paths, benches, and gazebos invite users to explore and linger on the site.



Proposed Phase II Connection from VFW Parking Lot



A strong visual axis, lined with bricks that evoke Berlin's industrial history, now connects the new formal entrance to Phase 2 with the Veterans' Memorial in Phase 1. However, a large stand of invasive Phragmites growing along the wetland obscured this view and prevented a direct connection between the two phases. A timber deck bridge was engineered to span the area, and selective control of invasive species was employed to prevent the bridge from becoming quickly overgrown again. Future plans call for continued eradication of Phragmites and other invasive plants in other areas of Veteran's Memorial Park.

Phase II Entrance



Bridge Connecting Phase II to Phase I



A new addition to Phase 1 are thirteen interpretative signs covering the history of America's Armed Forces from 1776 through the present day. Visitors are invited to stroll around the perimeter path and enjoy the pond, gazebo, and memorial areas as they follow the sequence of signage. The footings for each sign had to avoid interference with the existing capped landfill, yet also allow the sign to be mounted at an adequate height for ADA accessibility via wheelchair.

America's Wars Walkway Signs



War in Afghanistan Sign facing towards Veterans Memorial



WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

War in Afghanistan - "Operation Enduring Freedom"
From October 2001 - December 2014
Through 66,000 American Deaths 2,246
Total Casualties Afghanistan

The War in Afghanistan is the first major conflict of the 21st Century. At 8:46 a.m. on September 11, 2001, terrorist hijacked and crashed a passenger jet on the north tower of New York City's World Trade Center. As live television coverage began, Americans reacted in horror as a second plane plummeted from the sky into the Pentagon right outside the capital. A fourth jet, bound for Washington, D.C., crashed in Pennsylvania, its hijackers thwarted and hijacked on October 7, 2001 in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States.

The United States launched its war against terrorism in Afghanistan, "Operation Enduring Freedom." Allied forces unleashed a torrent of precision-guided bombs and air-launched cruise missiles against targets in Afghanistan, destroying and supporting with lasers and Global Positioning System devices. Relying on this precision weaponry and several hundred ground troops, the United States toppled the Taliban stronghold and quickly destroyed Osama bin Laden and other highly sought leaders.



In August 2010, the CIA and other intelligence officials traced bin Laden to a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. On May 2, 2011 (May 1 in the United States), a team of Navy SEALs burst into the compound. They found the al-Qaeda leader and shot him in the head and chest, killing him instantly.

On Dec. 28, 2014, U.S. Troops and their Nato allies in Afghanistan have formally ended what became America's longest war, hoisting their flag 13 years after a 2001 invasion to topple the country's Taliban regime in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In a symbolic ceremony meant to mark the transition in the role of the remaining troops from combat to support, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force, put away the green-and-white ISAF flag and unfurled the flag of "Resolute Support".



Iraq War Sign facing towards Phase I Entrance



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AMERICA'S WARS WALKWAY DEDICATION CONCERT – SEPTEMBER 28, 2016**

