

Memorial Grove History

Under the direction of Governor Ruth Thomas Heitfield of Sacramento, the Redwood Grove in Prairie Creek State park was purchased by the clubs in Southwestern Region. The grove, consisting of 40 acres of old growth redwood, fir, and other species of trees, was purchased through the Save the Redwoods League for \$10,000. The clubs donated \$5,000 with the State of California matching that amount.

Club members in the Region made voluntary contributions towards the purchase of the grove, and at the Region Conference presided over by Governor Ruth, there remained a balance of \$600 yet to be paid. Soroptimist International of Eureka sent a rhododendron plant to the conference to be raffled. At the Sunday morning breakfast opportunities were sold, and the balance was raised, with a surplus, and given to the Region Fellowship Fund.

The grove was officially dedicated on August 14, 1949 by Past Governor Ruth Thomas Heitfield and Governor Emily Zeigler. Many Soroptimists from throughout the Region attended the service.

In 1951 death claimed a member of Soroptimist International of Eureka. The idea was conceived to plant a rhododendron in her memory. This practice continued for a number of years and was later discontinued for the rhododendrons were not growing well in the deep shade of the grove.

In 1958, Soroptimist International of Eureka purchased and installed a bronze box and door, adorned with the Soroptimist insignia and etched rhododendron spray. In October 1958 the first Memorial Service was held at the grove. The names of 154 deceased members were placed in the niche.

It was soon after this first service the second Sunday in June was established as the annual Memorial Service.

In 1960, Wilfred Keene donated \$50 in memory of his wife to Soroptimist International of Alameda. Save the Redwoods League and the State Park Officials had a rustic bench, carved from a log placed here in memory of Eleanor Keene.

On June 13, 1971 at a special dedication a tall stately redwood was named to honor the first president of Soroptimist, Violet Richardson Ward. Many Soroptimists were

in attendance at this (50th) fiftieth Anniversary event. There were also representatives from Save the Redwoods League and the State Parks.

In 1976 Southwestern Region was divided into three regions, the Memorial Grove all allotted to Founder Region. The accumulated funds were transferred to a capital repair fund for the maintenance of the Grove and the granite marker. In 2005 following malicious damage to the monument, it was found necessary to close the niche permanently and maintain the list of deceased members names since 1956 in a perpetual Memorial Book which includes approximately 2000 names.

In June 2017, a beautiful bench was placed in the grove, with a plaque honoring Catherine “Kate” Burns, Past Governor of Founder Region (1978-1980), for her years of service supporting our Founder Region Memorial Grove and Memorial Service.