

Hello my name is Ben Brown, Director and Curator of the Clarke Historical Museum. In our Community Case is an exhibit on the 110th anniversary of the Sequoia Park Zoo.

Sequoia Park Zoo: 110 Years of Change

Sequoia Park Zoo is the oldest zoo in California, founded in 1907 – nine years before the San Diego Zoo. Few accounts exist about its formation, but the zoo likely began with a few enclosures containing tame deer or elk.

At the turn of last century, zoos were considered a status symbol of a modern city and Eureka was eager to make its mark. The zoo was one of many recreational attractions at Sequoia Park, and its purpose was purely to display wild animals for amusement.

It housed a hodgepodge of exotic animals that came from circuses, shows, or even the docks of foreign lands. Animals such as African lions, polar bears, wallaroos, kinkajous, camels, baboons, plus dozens of bird species had a home at the zoo during this century. In those early decades, little thought was given toward education or appropriate animal care and well-being.

The 1970s was a time of change for the zoo as the community rallied to revive and modernize the zoo. A major renovation removed the small barred cages to make room for larger primate, chimpanzee, bear and prairie dog exhibits and added a perimeter fence to protect and close the zoo at night. The zoo ended a popular but dangerous tradition of allowing the public to feed the animals. These changes allowed keepers to take better care of the animals and greatly helped clean up the grounds. An unfortunate decision by City officials during the renovation was to euthanize two bears during which caused a national outcry and brought pressure to either close the zoo or change how it operated. The community chose the latter and formed the Zoo Society who implemented responsible management practices and focused on education.

The most famous and celebrated zoo residents were two male chimpanzees abandoned by the entertainment industry: Bill and Ziggy. Bill, an extroverted and exceptionally engaging chimpanzee, became a true icon of the zoo and the community. He touched the lives of generations of Eureka's up to his death in 2007.

The Zoo Now

Sequoia Park Zoo is in the midst of another transformation, with plans on modernizing the facility

Accredited in 1995 by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, helped set the stage for the zoo to become the well-respected facility we know today. The professional animal care staff is passionate about animal welfare and it shows in the quality of care the animals receive 365 days a year.

In 2006 a plan for the zoo's future was created, which groups animal exhibits strategically to tell specific stories about wildlife, conservation and science. The animals at the zoo are very carefully selected for compatibility with our small size and resources, our climate, and the conservation stories they represent. Today, the Sequoia Park Zoo Foundation raises funding necessary to make this new zoo vision a reality, in partnership with the City of Eureka.

Please visit the Clarke Museum to see our exhibit on historic quilts from the museum's collection and the exhibit on the zoo's 110th anniversary, we are open Weds-Sat 11-4 and every Arts Alive until 9pm.

This is Ben Brown with Community Comment