

ROCHESTER HISTORY

125 Years of Rochester's Parks

by Katie Eggers Comeau

Seneca Park Rochester, N. Y.



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This aerial view postcard from the middle of the twentieth century portrays Highland Park during the full bloom of lilac season. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

*Front Cover: An undated postcard from Seneca Park. Rochesterians can be seen strolling around in "pleasure ground" fashion, precisely as architect Frederick Law Olmsted envisioned.
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.*

ROCHESTER HISTORY

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Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

Rochester has long held a reputation among its peer cities for bold visions that blend business and civic ventures. In this issue of *Rochester History*, Katie Eggers Comeau explores one of the bolder choices in the history of our city: choosing to make public space a priority. Eggers Comeau traces the vibrant history of Rochester's parks, from the early days of Genesee Valley and Seneca parks, to the more recent developments of Tryon Park and El Camino Trail, revealing the passion and creativity of park designers and caretakers. Rochester continues to recognize and support bold ideas for public space, as seen by the enthusiastic response to the GardenAerial project in process in the High Falls neighborhood. As we celebrate the 125th anniversary of the creation of the Rochester Parks Commission, this publication will help you understand how Rochester's parks became a "necessity for health and well-being."

Patricia Uttaro, Library Director

About *Rochester History*

Rochester History is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley. In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

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125 Years of Rochester's Parks

by Katie Eggers Comeau

One-hundred and twenty-five years ago, Rochester embarked upon an ambitious scheme to develop a world-class network of public parks. Although modest in budget, the city's plans were vast in scope. Frederick Law Olmsted, the famed landscape architect who designed Rochester's first three major parks, commended Rochester as the first city of its size to undertake such an ambitious system.¹ The city leaders who in 1888 hired the nation's premier expert in park design and committed to his grand vision made the bold choice to make public space a



One of the iconic pedestrian bridges crossing the Barge Canal in Genesee Valley Park, ca. 1930-1950. The bridge was designed by the landscape architecture firm of Frederick Law Olmsted, as was GVP, Highland Park, and Seneca/Maplewood Park. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

priority. Twenty-first century Rochesterians are beneficiaries of their foresight and of the dedication of those who carried out the vision of a city replete with beautiful landscapes available to all.

Over the years, Rochester's park system—one of only four complete park systems Olmsted designed in the United States—expanded and adapted to national and local shifts in aesthetics, popular activities, budgets, and demographics.² The 125th anniversary of the creation of the Rochester Park Commission is an ideal time to appreciate the legacy—not only of Olmsted and those who brought him here, but of the generations who followed, implementing the values and priorities of their own eras as they planned new parks and altered existing parks.

Rochester's Earliest Recreational Spaces

The earliest public spaces in what would become the city of Rochester were created in the spirit of private enterprise. As a way to boost their prospects, early nineteenth-century founders of competing settlements near the Genesee River's waterfalls each set aside land for a county courthouse. After the courthouse was built in the One-Hundred-Acre Tract developed by Col. Nathaniel Rochester and his partners, two property owners whose sites had not been chosen donated their planned courthouse sites for public use. These became Brown Square and

Washington Square. Other nineteenth-century small parks, such as Mechanics' Square (now Susan B. Anthony Square) and Plymouth Circle (now Lunsford Square), and street malls, such as those on Arnold Park, Oxford Street, and Lakeview Park, were left open by their developers to enhance surrounding properties and increase property values. Although conceived primarily as real estate amenities, these early squares and street malls served as valuable breathing spaces as the city's density increased.

Cemeteries were likewise valued as open space, with Mount Hope Cemetery in particular providing scenic terrain for strolling and picnicking. Established on the city's outskirts in 1838, Mount Hope was the first American rural cemetery planned, developed, and maintained by a municipality.³ It eventually was expanded to include 200 acres and is still active today.⁴ The cemetery, designed in the mid-nineteenth-century Romantic style, provided not only a burial place, but also a scenic landscape the living could enjoy. In the absence of similar spaces designed for recreation, the cemetery became a popular destination for fresh air, natural and exotic vegetation, and unstructured recreational activities such as walking and picnicking.⁵ The presence of this beautiful space heightened residents' awareness of a need for recreational space.⁶

Opportunities for outdoor recreation began to appear in Rochester between 1840 and 1870 in the form of private facilities geared toward specific activities, such as fishing, bathing, hunting, and horseracing. Picnic groves, a fisherman's lodge, dressing booths at the beach, and a few horse racing tracks were among the limited recreational facilities built in and just outside the city before the Civil War. Rochesterians interested in outdoor activities could play in one of two cricket clubs established in 1847, enter a sportsmen's association organized in



An 1839 engraving of Mt. Hope Cemetery. Original squares, street malls, and burial grounds provided public spaces for recreation before the advent of the park system. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

1849 for excursions to the Thousand Islands and other locales, join one of a number of baseball teams founded in the 1850s and 1860s, or row crew with the Resolute Regatta Club created in 1858. These and several other organizations established in the mid-nineteenth century reflected an increase in leisure time, a new interest in outdoor activities, and enthusiasm for community events.

Rochester's outdoor enthusiasts found their interests aligned with others pursuing similar goals; humanitarians, business leaders, philanthropists, and public health advocates began to champion the need for extensive public space in the late-nineteenth century. The creation of Central Park in New York City in 1858 and of the Buffalo Park System in 1868 provided early examples of municipalities reserving and improving generous amounts of land for the benefit of their citizens.

A gift of land from nurserymen George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry provided the impetus for formal establishment of a commission to create parks in Rochester. In April 1888, after considerable lobbying by park advocates (and over the objections of the city's frugal Common Council) the state legislature authorized an independent Board of Park Commissioners, commonly called the Park Commission, "to float bonds for \$300,000 and to finance the purchase and development of desirable lands for a park system, which would be maintained with charges to the city not to exceed \$20,000 a year."⁷

The Olmstedian Ideal: The Origins of Rochester's Park System

One of the first activities of the Rochester Park Commission was to confer with colleagues in Buffalo, who recommended their landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted (1822–1903) was a Renaissance man. Notable as a writer, editor, abolitionist, and head of the federal Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, he had also tried his hand at scientific farming and managing a gold mine before finally devoting himself full-time to landscape architecture. He is best known as the father of the landscape architecture profession, although even that honor understates his vast influence on the development of the American landscape and urban design.

Olmsted's best-known project, New York City's Central Park, was his first foray into landscape design and the first public park in the United States. With architect Calvert Vaux, his partner on this and some of his other projects, he developed many of the design principles he would use in other landscapes and began to formulate his influential ideas about the purpose of public parks in American democracy. Having established his credentials with his innovative work at Central Park, Olmsted went on to design dozens of city parks, private estates, campuses, and residential communities across the country and in Canada, including such prestigious projects

as the Niagara Reservation at Niagara Falls and the U.S. Capitol grounds—a remarkable body of work that had a profound impact on the shape of late-nineteenth-century American cities.

Fundamental to Olmsted's work was his goal of making each landscape a coherent whole, in which every detail was subordinate to the overall aesthetic effect and contributed to the emotional experience he wished to cultivate. His two basic landscape styles were the "Pastoral," a peaceful landscape intended to calm and restore the visitor's spirit, and the "Picturesque," suitable for rugged, complex terrain where he sought to inspire a sense of mystery and awe. In contrast to what he saw as the artificiality of garden-design styles of his day, Olmsted based each of his compositions on the unique character of the site, enhancing existing topography and vegetation to produce a specific effect. Although his designs often required extensive earth moving and replanting, the desired impression was of a landscape untouched by human hands—the opposite of highly formalized, geometric French or Italian garden styles.⁸



This ca. 1890 photograph from Highland Park looks towards the Children's Pavilion and captures Olmsted's preferences for blending his parks with nature. Built in 1890, the three-story open-air pavilion sat on the summit of a hill by the reservoir. It was circular, made of wood, and was 62 feet in diameter and 46 feet high. The pavilion was demolished in 1963. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

Olmsted's work in Rochester, coming near the end of his illustrious career, was undertaken at a time when his design skills and characteristic styles had been fully developed through hundreds of previous projects. His advice to the Rochester Park Commission was to focus first on acquiring and developing generous public parks along the Genesee River, the city's greatest natural asset. His two riverfront parks highlighted the contrast between the dramatic river

gorge north of the city and the gentler terrain to the south. The gentle meadows in what he called "South Park" (Genesee Valley Park) were designed in his signature Pastoral style, while the rugged gorge in "North Park" (Seneca Park) was an example of his Picturesque approach. Less characteristic of Olmsted, yet still masterfully executed, was the hilltop arboretum in Highland Park, which protected views of the city and distant Bristol Hills while respecting the wishes of the donors Ellwanger and Barry for a world-class plant collection. To connect the parks and foster residential development around them, Olmsted planned a network of parkways—broad,

tree-lined boulevards, often with landscaped central street malls. Seneca Parkway, which remains today, is the best example.

When Olmsted designed Rochester's park system, the rural sites of what would become Genesee Valley and Seneca parks were considered remote, and some people doubted whether sites several miles from downtown were practical. These concerns proved unfounded, as the parks soon became readily accessible. Regular train service was established to Genesee Valley Park in 1891 and to Seneca Park in 1892; streetcar service was extended to both parks in 1892. Crowds of thousands thronged the parks for special events such as concerts (sponsored by the Rochester Railway Company and the Chamber of Commerce), fireworks, and May Day celebrations, or simply to admire the flowering shrubs in Highland Park. Just a few years into the vast project of establishing the park system, the park commissioners reported that "our citizens have come to have a strong personal and civic pride in our public pleasure grounds. Nothing possessed by the municipality is so especially owned and occupied by the people as the parks."⁹

Olmsted envisioned parks as restful retreats from urban life, but he also recognized the power of his parks and parkways to shape city development. He expected that they would encourage high-quality, suburban-style development in the surrounding areas, whose property values would inevitably rise once the parks were established. In Rochester, as in other cities



A bandstand on the western bank of Seneca Park's Trout Lake. Also visible is one of the famous swan paddle boats that offered Rochester park-goers rides around the lake. The attractiveness of the pavilion reflects Rochester's willingness to challenge the Olmstedian ideal of naturalism.

From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

that embraced Olmsted's designs, well-built, single-family houses soon lined the streets in neighborhoods named for the parks. Not coincidentally, the street railway lines that provided access to the parks facilitated this growth by also functioning as commuter lines for the "streetcar suburbs" that developed between the parks and downtown. The parks thus proved fundamental to the direction and character of the city's growth from the last decade of the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth. Neighborhoods near the Olmsted parks remain some of the city's most desirable today.

"Active Agencies for Social Service": Reform Park Philosophy and Practice

The Olmstedian ideal of tranquil, naturalistic settings where visitors could immerse themselves in calming scenery was soon challenged by a new vision of the purpose of public parks in American life. The emerging "Reform Park" philosophy was a byproduct and manifestation of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Progressive Era, a period of social activism and reform that encompassed politics, social welfare, education, economics, and many other aspects of American life.¹⁰ Causes such as temperance, woman suffrage, public health, and education reform all fell within the purview of progressive activists.

With missionary zeal, reformers sought to eradicate poverty by imparting middle-class values and living conditions on families—often immigrants—living in crowded city neighborhoods. Activists believed exposing the poor to classical music and great literature, educating them in scientific hygiene and cooking, and providing them with access to constructive and socially acceptable recreational activities would help curtail the social ills they associated with poverty, unstructured time, and, to some extent, immigrant culture. Promoting civic welfare had always been the goal of public parks, but to reformers, passive immersion in naturalistic scenery—Olmsted's antidote to the stresses of urban life—was insufficient to promote social change. Parks would have to do more.

By the turn of the twentieth century, even as Olmsted's pleasure grounds were still under construction, the Rochester Park Commission began to adopt the progressive Reform Park philosophy. The park commissioners' break with the Pleasure Ground concept was made explicit in their 1911 report, in which they noted that "it has been the purpose of the Park Commission to make the parks of Rochester not simply beautiful pictures, which would serve the people in a passive way, but to make them active agencies for social service." The commissioners noted that concerts of classical music performed by the park band were being used to educate the taste of Rochester residents, while at supervised playgrounds children were "mothered and fathered



*Probably taken in the 1910s, this picture from Maplewood Park captures the Progressive-era shift in Rochester parks philosophy. In this instance, the Parks Department sponsored a series called "Rochester Playground Library" in which librarians read stories to children. The program matched the pledge of the 1911 Park Commission report that children in Rochester parks be "mothered and fathered."
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.*

and...taught to play and many other good things," and taking classes in sewing and industrial arts, nature, reading, sports, and music.¹¹

The emergence of Reform Park philosophy occurred just as Olmsted's plans for Rochester were being implemented and also coincided with a transitional period for the Olmsted firm. Olmsted's declining health and eventual incapacity forced him to reduce his workload; he retired in 1895. The firm continued under the leadership of Olmsted's protégés, including his stepson, John C. Olmsted (1852–1920), who had been a partner in the firm since 1884.¹² In 1898, John C. Olmsted and Olmsted's son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870–1957), formed a partnership known as Olmsted Brothers. The firm would survive until 1961.¹³

As the trend toward providing ever-larger and more structured activities in the parks grew in the early twentieth century, the park commissioners asked the Olmsted firm to provide designs for bandstands, pavilions, sports facilities, and other new additions to the large Pleasure Ground parks to accommodate new interests. John C. Olmsted, who visited Rochester throughout the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century to supervise park development, sought to balance the original pleasure ground designs with the increasing demand



*This photograph of a bandstand in Genesee Valley Park was printed in the Rochester Herald in March 1922. Progressive Parks Department planners organized concerts to enrich and improve the cultural tastes of Rochester citizens.
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum and Science Center.*

for reform-oriented facilities. Although he tried to ensure adherence to the aesthetic ideals of his stepfather, the younger Olmsted was thoroughly attuned to Reform Park theory, in its ideological and practical aspects, and he tried to help with the sensitive integration of newly popular park facilities into Rochester's park system. For example, in a letter responding to a query as to the appropriate size of running and bicycle tracks and whether these were likely to be short-lived fads or lasting interests, John C. Olmsted revealed a detailed knowledge of the requirements of the various sports and provided some guidance as to their implementation in Rochester. He advised the Park Commission that while bicycle races were likely to wane in popularity, track and field appeared to have more longevity; thus the Commission should "provide a running track and field for running, long and short jump, pole vaulting, shot-putting and other field athletics, but...postpone the bicycle track on account of the expense."¹⁴

Genesee Valley Park experienced the greatest pressure to accommodate the kinds of outdoor activities and programming that became popular in the Progressive Era. The original Olmsted plan designated a peripheral area on the west side of the river, north of Elmwood Avenue, for modest, low-impact athletic facilities, such as ball fields and a small cluster of boathouses, leaving broad swaths of meadow east and west of the river and the great majority of the river's edge on both banks free from development. Even before the original plan was fully implemented, the Park Commission began fielding requests from private boat clubs and

athletic organizations which, undeterred by the original plan's intent to minimize waterfront development and preserve unspoiled river views, wanted to construct new facilities on the west river bank south of Elmwood Avenue. Although Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. strongly advised the Commission to reject any proposals for waterfront structures in that area, he and other members of the firm nevertheless attempted to provide the Commission with some guidance as to the location and design of new buildings to minimize their obtrusiveness. Within a few years boathouses and other public and private athletic facilities lined the west river bank.¹⁵

The Olmsted firm also advised the Park Commission on projects such as development of Lamberton Conservatory in Highland Park and the Maplewood Rose Garden. Meanwhile, the Commission also proceeded with projects with little or no input from the firm, such as golf courses in Genesee Valley and Maplewood parks and a zoo and bandstand in Seneca Park. After one visit to evaluate the system's progress, John C. Olmsted noted, "It seems a pity we should not have been consulted as to plans of the various buildings built this year... They seem to be getting a lot of comfort for the money, but the architects are entirely out of harmony with all our ideas of style and fitness and the designs are markedly commonplace and crude."¹⁶

Although the Commission's work was not always up to John C. Olmsted's standards, the firm's assistance proved invaluable during the process of rerouting the Erie Canal to create the Barge Canal System, announced by the state in 1903. After considerable study of ways to divert the canal from downtown Rochester, the state settled on a route that would take the waterway directly through Genesee Valley Park. Although bemoaning the bisection of the park,



Copyright 1905 by the Rotograph Co.

5665 Zoo, Seneca Park, Rochester, N. Y.

Some popular parks features, such as the Seneca Park Zoo and Genesee Valley golf course, were developed without input from the Olmsted firm. This 1905 postcard depicts the early zoo. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

the firm provided recommendations that helped to “make the best of a bad job,” as Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. put it.¹⁷ Particularly notable were the five graceful arched bridges that elegantly spanned the Canal and Red Creek to connect the circulation systems on the waterway’s north and south sides.¹⁸ While Canal construction “temporarily render[ed] the park useless,” enthusiastic park use resumed after completion of the project in 1918.¹⁹

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., who in the early twentieth century established a national reputation as a leading landscape architect and urban planner in his own right, was one of three authors of *A City Plan for Rochester*, a report prepared for the Rochester Civic Improvement Commission in 1911. His contribution was a section titled “The Park System,” which melded the values of his father’s Pleasure Ground philosophy with new Reform Park thinking, and proposed building on the existing system by, for example, creating new parkways to link existing and new parks.²⁰

Emergence of a Modern Park System

The fruitful, 27-year partnership between the Park Commission and the Olmsted firm came to an end in 1915 after the Park Commission was abolished and responsibility for maintaining and improving the city parks was given to a new Department of Parks, headed by a commissioner appointed by the mayor. This reorganization had been proposed in 1900 when other city functions were brought under the control of the mayor, but the Commission had retained its independent status.²¹ Upon hearing of the commission’s dissolution in March 1915, John C. Olmsted noted,

I need hardly say that my sympathies are all on the side of the Park Commission. I have repeatedly advised persons interested against the well nigh universal modern movement to put parks in charge of a Commissioner of Public Works or directly under the charge of the Mayor or some other single official.... In a general way I think it is true that to create a work of art a single designer must be responsible, but to preserve the parks from unwise alterations, a board of men of good taste is more apt to act conservatively and wisely than a single official who is selected primarily either for political reasons or on account of his general business efficiency rather than for his good taste.²²

The Department thereafter kept park design work in-house and no longer employed the Olmsted firm. Fortunately, the new department retained a number of individuals with extensive experience in the park system who had worked closely with the Olmsted firm and absorbed the principles that had guided the Park Commission. Alexander B. Lamberton, named the second president of the Park Commission in 1902, was appointed Commissioner of Parks; other key

staff members who stayed on and made lasting contributions were William S. Riley, Calvin C. Laney, John Dunbar, and brothers Bernard and Patrick Slavin.

Reform-era trends in park programming and design were manifested particularly well in the city's smaller parks and playgrounds, which brought the benefits of park facilities and programming into urban neighborhoods. These parks were intended to be within easy walking distance—"a distance so insignificant that it will not deter the little child, or the tired mother with a baby, from going to the park for half an hour's recreation when the chance comes"—of every family in the city.²³

Playgrounds were particularly important to social reformers, who saw them as educational facilities where children would be "taught systematic playing." The city's first official playground was developed at Brown Square, a mid-nineteenth century public square redesigned by the Olmsted firm in the 1890s and converted into a playground in 1903. New facilities were added, including a brick shelter, toilets, a wading pool, swings, teeters, basketball courts, and other playground equipment. More playgrounds soon followed throughout the city. Thousands of children participated in structured activities in these playgrounds. Indeed, according to a 1911 Park Commission report: "At Brown Square, Washington Playground, and Hartford Street—inner playgrounds in the congested district—there are 12,000 children a week in summer on the average; and sometimes 2,500 on a single day."²⁴

These numbers continued to increase, with well over 400,000 children (more than 8,500 per day) using the playgrounds in the summer of 1915.²⁵ By 1929, there were 29 playgrounds in the city of Rochester, a figure that included 10 playgrounds on school property, one on private property (at the University of Rochester, accessible to city children during summer vacation),



Brown Square Park, 1903. This was the first official playground within the city of Rochester; Progressive planners wanted children to learn "systematic playing" on this equipment. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.



The opening of Durand-Eastman Park, summer 1916. A brass band led a parade of eager citizens to the park's formal opening ceremonies. The land for the park was given by Henry Durand and George Eastman. From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum and Science Center.

and seven in the large city parks.

In addition to the playgrounds, four substantial parks were added to the system during the Reform Park era: Durand-Eastman Park and Cobbs Hill Park in 1908, Exposition Park (now Edgerton Park) in 1911, and Ontario Beach Park in the early 1920s.

In 1907, Dr. Henry Durand, an accomplished local surgeon, persuaded George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company, to purchase land adjacent to Durand's lakefront estate in Irondequoit so the two could together donate a major new park to the city. The gift, made final in February 1908, encompassed 512 acres, including a substantial amount of beach land. The Olmsted Brothers provided valuable advice on the location of roads, grading, and a dam in 1908, but as development of the landscape took place over the next two decades, implementation and further elaboration of the plan was constructed around the designs of Bernard Slavin, assistant superintendent of parks from 1910 to 1926 and superintendent from 1926 to 1942. A self-taught horticulturist, Slavin took a particular interest in Durand-Eastman Park, which, of all the parks acquired during this period, offered the most diverse natural landscape and needed the most extensive horticultural treatment. Slavin turned this originally barren area into a lush, naturalistic arboretum so much in keeping with Frederick Law Olmsted's design principles that it is often

mistakenly believed to have been designed by Olmsted himself. The park's popularity flourished in the 1910s and 1920s with the development of a nine-hole golf course in the mid-1910s (expanded to 18 holes in the 1920s and redesigned by famed golf course designer Robert Trent Jones in the 1930s), a popular vacation camp for boys, a refectory, a 1,000-locker bathhouse, and a zoo.²⁶

Cobbs Hill Park was developed around a new city reservoir in a former quarry. The park was located in the southeast quadrant of the city on a prominent glacial hill. In 1908, the same year the city began construction of the 144-million gallon reservoir, George Eastman donated 15 acres of land around the reservoir for the creation of a public park that would offer panoramic views. Local residents donated money for the purchase of an adjacent forested area, now known as Washington Grove, and the city purchased additional land, for a total of 61.5 acres. Plans created by the Olmsted Brothers for the reservoir area guided the plantings, grading, circulation system, and location of small buildings. In keeping with Reform Park trends, additional facilities soon followed, including tennis courts, a winter skating shelter, and ball fields.

In 1911, the city acquired the 42-acre former site of the Western House of Refuge, a reformatory school established in 1846 and renamed the State Industrial School in 1886. The site, which the city renamed Exposition Park (now Edgerton Park), contained substantial residential and school buildings. The park was conceived as a major cultural center for the city,



*Exposition (now Edgerton) Park during the 1910s. The original compound included a library, museum, bandstand, aquarium, and even an indoor zoo, which can be seen in this postcard.
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.*

with space for the Museum of Arts and Sciences (the precursor of today's Rochester Museum and Science Center), a library branch and office space, and the Rochester Historical Society, as well as a bandstand, zoo, aquarium, buildings for industrial exhibits, a restaurant, midway, and a large playground. Expositions and other special events were held each year until Depression-era funding cuts brought them to an end. The buildings associated with the reform school and with the park's early development were gradually lost, with the exception of one former wing of the school that became an assembly hall for the expositions and then was used as a gymnasium before becoming part of a recreation center.²⁷

The last major park added to the system was Ontario Beach Park in Charlotte, at the mouth of the Genesee River. Long a popular recreational destination for Rochester residents and visitors, the village of Charlotte and its adjacent beach became easily accessible when a railroad connected the village to downtown Rochester in 1853. Commercial attractions at the beach began to develop in the Civil War era, starting with a restaurant with boating and bathing facilities. Restaurants, hotels, and cottages followed in the 1860s and 1870s. The beach and surrounding area developed into a popular amusement park, coming to be known as "the Coney Island of Western New York." Featuring rides such as "Slide the Bumps," "Helter Skelter," and "The Whip," as well as exotic architecture, large hotels, food stands, and an auditorium and band shell, the park typically drew 70,000 visitors on hot summer weekends, with stunts and concerts drawing particularly large crowds.

Progressive-Era reformers viewed Charlotte, with its lax liquor laws, seedy hotels, and beer gardens, as an affront to their vision of orderly society. A desire to bring Charlotte under the purview of the Rochester police was a major motivator for the city's annexation of the formerly independent village in 1916, as was the goal of controlling Charlotte's commercial port. After annexation, the city purchased the amusement park, demolished all the rides except the carousel, and substituted what were seen as more wholesome public recreational pursuits—swimming, bathing, and picnicking—for private commercial activities. Unlike the other large city parks, Ontario Beach Park's historic composition was the result of gradual development rather than a planned design.²⁸

The acquisition of Ontario Beach Park marked the close of the period of major expansion of the city's park system. Although not part of Olmsted's original plan and, for the most part, not designed in accordance with his aesthetic ideals, the development of Cobbs Hill, Durand-Eastman, Exposition (Edgerton), and Ontario Beach parks was consistent with his goal of providing public access to a wide variety of landscape types, with an emphasis on natural topography and water features. The city's ability to acquire and improve four more large parks,

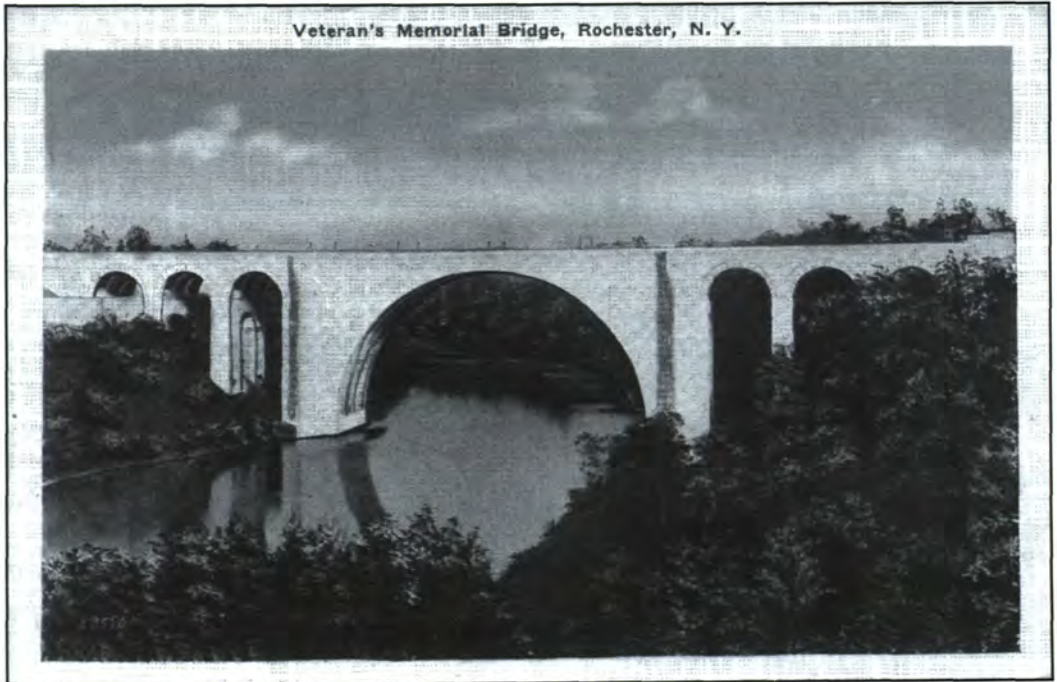
only decades after purchasing hundreds of acres for the original system, is a testament to the public's embrace of Rochester's parks in what proved to be their heyday.

Depression and War: Challenges and Opportunities

The golden age of Rochester's parks, encompassing the first quarter of the twentieth century, waned in the late 1920s, when the end of the Progressive Era and the financial shock of the Great Depression forced a reconsideration of priorities in park development and programming. This shift again aligned with national trends, as park leaders abandoned their Reform Era-idealism for budget-conscious pragmatism.

Although austerity budgets imposed by the city at the outset of the Depression forced sudden cutbacks in park employment and services, the advent of state and federal relief programs in the early 1930s provided welcome opportunities to initiate park maintenance and construction projects. State and national parks received the largest share of funding and manpower from programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, setting an example for similar activities, on a smaller scale, at municipal parks.²⁹

Construction projects undertaken under the auspices of New Deal work relief programs displayed certain common physical characteristics. The architects and landscape architects who



Transportation and infrastructure projects, like the erection of the Veteran's Memorial Bridge in 1931, were a key part of New Deal federal relief programs. Although highly acclaimed for its elegant design, the Veteran's Memorial Bridge seen in this mid twentieth-century postcard had the unfortunate effect of bisecting Seneca and Maplewood Parks. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.



An image, ca. 1955, depicting the refectory at the top of Cobbs Hill. Photograph provided by Ann Baker.

designed these major park improvements, particularly in the national parks, developed a characteristic rustic style, featuring such distinctive elements as low fieldstone walls, log-cabin or similar construction, and simple wood picnic and restroom shelters. Harkening back to the Pleasure Grounds of the late nineteenth century, some projects in national parks, such as parkways and bridges, involved elaborate engineering and large-scale construction, but were designed to complement and blend with the natural environment.³⁰ Examples of this style in western New York still can be seen today

at Letchworth and Stony Brook state parks.

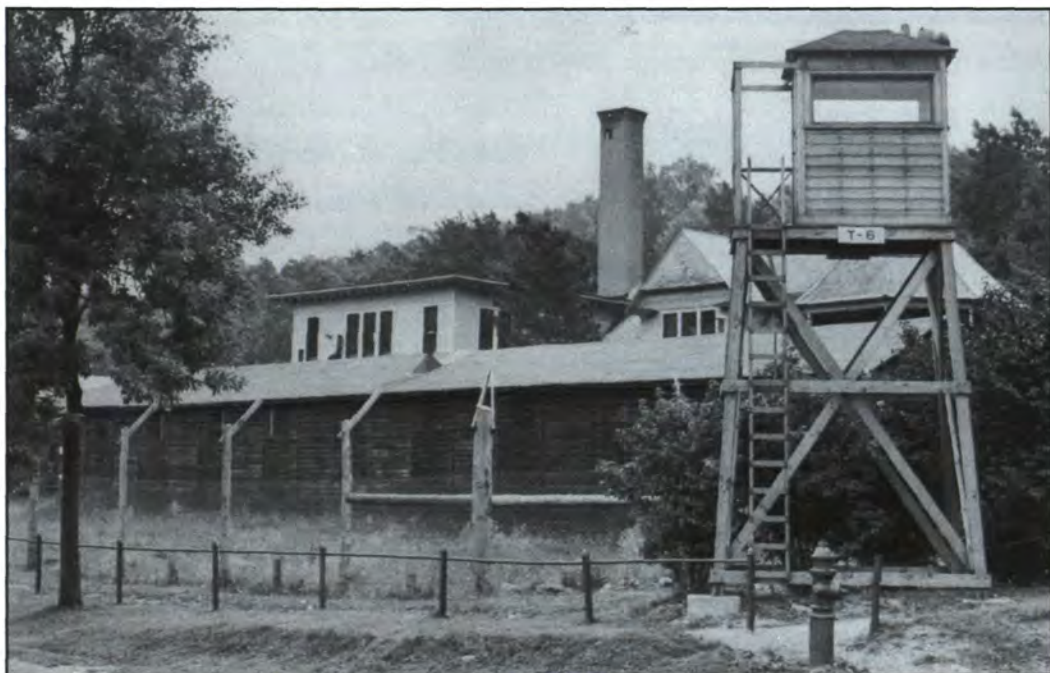
New design elements in large municipal parks were typically scaled-back versions of the type of rustic design elements found at state and national parks. At the level of small neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and individual projects within parks, designers were constrained by minimal budgets and compelled to work quickly due to uncertainty about the future availability of funding. Designs at this scale were often standardized for efficient execution, and typically relied on inexpensive materials that were easy to use and maintain.³¹

With the onset of the Great Depression, Rochester, like other American cities, was forced to make drastic reductions in park budgets; most dramatically, in 1932, deep budget cuts required nearly all Rochester parks employees to be laid off. Yet local, state, and federal work relief programs also allowed some park improvements to continue; Patrick Slavin (Bernard Slavin's brother), who became city parks director in 1928, coordinated an influx of manpower funded by state and federal relief programs, including the Civil Works Administration (CWA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), Emergency Work Bureau of Rochester and Monroe County, and National Youth Administration (NYA).

Together with volunteers, who took on some of the functions the city could no longer handle (such as event coordination and promotion), workers employed through these programs constructed substantial edifices, such as bandstands at Highland and Ontario Beach parks and an observation tower and refectory at Cobbs Hill Park, as well as smaller structures, such as picnic

shelters, comfort stations, tables, grills, benches, and pavilions throughout the system. They also made landscape improvements, such as enhancing the beach, enlarging the Maplewood pond, building swimming pools at Seneca and Genesee Valley parks, and modifying the area in Cobbs Hill Park around Lake Riley, the former canal widewaters. Designs were less innovative than the projects associated with this era at state and national parks, displaying an interest in classical architecture (seen, for example, in historic photographs of the Cobbs Hill refectory and observation tower). Among the most notable of the major projects was the Veteran's Memorial Bridge, which was highly acclaimed for its elegant design. Designed to carry a parkway linking Seneca and Maplewood parks, it had the unfortunate effect of bisecting both, an impact exacerbated when the road was converted to a high-speed highway in the mid-1960s. Smaller-scale construction and landscape projects, meanwhile, reflected the era's typical attention to natural materials and labor-intensive engineering. The earth-moving projects undertaken at Durand-Eastman Park in this era are good examples.

The temporary influx of funding and labor provided by the New Deal came to a halt with the outbreak of World War II, forcing a return to the austerity approach of the early Depression. Expenditures on park programming could be justified only to the extent that they supported the war effort. Municipal parks were sometimes pressed into service as sites of training activities, morale-boosting rallies and other patriotic events, victory gardens, day-care



Cobbs Hill Park, 1944. During World War II the park was used as a camp for prisoners of war, initially Italian and then German soldiers. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

centers for the children of defense workers, or even housing of soldiers or prisoners of war. Rochester witnessed the latter when prisoners of war were confined in Cobbs Hill Park.

“A Necessity for Health and Well-Being”: The Recreation Era, 1945-1980

Park systems that had grown and flourished in the first quarter of the twentieth century when they were central to urban cultural life, that had seen notable development under Depression-era work-relief programs, and that had been pressed into patriotic service during World War II, were left behind as the urban middle class largely moved to the suburbs starting in the late 1940s. City parks in general began to experience a long period of neglect, never returning to the budgets and staffing levels of the first two decades of the century.

The post-war period also lacked the idealism of earlier eras when parks were hailed as a vehicle for promoting psychological welfare and progressive social reform. The “Recreation Park” approach of this era shifted from a narrow focus on “play” as an educational activity for poor children to a broader emphasis on “recreation” aimed at all ages and social classes, with growing attention given to services for adolescents and the elderly. The purpose of parks was no longer to improve society through either idyllic scenery or didactic programming, but rather to provide the active recreational facilities the public wanted and expected—a response to a demand rather than a proactive pursuit of a philosophical mission.³² Rochester’s City Planning Commission expressed this approach perfectly in the late 1940s:



*“A Sign of Progress” from 1955, part of a promotional campaign for the city park system, extolls of the virtues of ample parking lots at Ontario Beach Park. The proliferation of the automobile drastically transformed how Rochesterians used parks by the middle of the twentieth century.
Courtesy of the City of Rochester.*

One of the major considerations in the development of a master plan of a city is provision for adequate recreational facilities. No longer is recreation thought to be an agreeable luxury, but rather a necessity for the health and well-being of citizens, young and old.³³

In line with national trends toward using usage and acreage statistics to justify park expenditures, the emphasis of the report was squarely on quantifying existing park facilities and measuring them against national standards by comparing them to similar-sized cities such as Columbus, Memphis, and San Antonio, which served as benchmarks for the adequacy of Rochester’s parks.³⁴



A picnic shelter in Genesee Valley Park, 1954. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

Even as the post-war economy recovered, park departments in Rochester and other American cities never returned to their early-twentieth-century peak in terms of staffing and budget, and annual cutbacks in services and maintenance became the norm. To reduce costs, park departments nationwide turned from custom-designed park features to standardized elements with minimal maintenance requirements, favoring practicality over aesthetics. Paved surfaces were popular due to their suitability for multiple uses, easy maintenance, and ability to accommodate the cars that now brought most visitors to the parks. Modern architectural materials, such as concrete and cinderblock, were preferred over the rustic aesthetic of the 1930s because they were inexpensive and easily maintained and reflected the simplified lines and lack of ornamentation of post-war modern architecture.

Parks were designed or redesigned to accommodate as many baseball fields, basketball and tennis courts, playgrounds, and other facilities as possible. Landscapes were often modified to improve safety, or the impression of safety, for example, by removing dense understory shrubs and creating open, well-lit areas. The demands of the newly ubiquitous automobile forced physical changes to the parks, such as construction of new roads and widening of existing ones. Parking areas were added throughout the system, particularly around popular attractions such as the Seneca Park Zoo, the golf courses in Durand Eastman and Genesee Valley parks, and the recreational complex in Genesee Valley Park.³⁵

The extent to which city parks were devalued during this period was exemplified by several projects that repurposed parkland for other public uses. Public housing developments were constructed in Cobbs Hill, Genesee Valley, and Seneca parks in the 1950s and 1960s, first

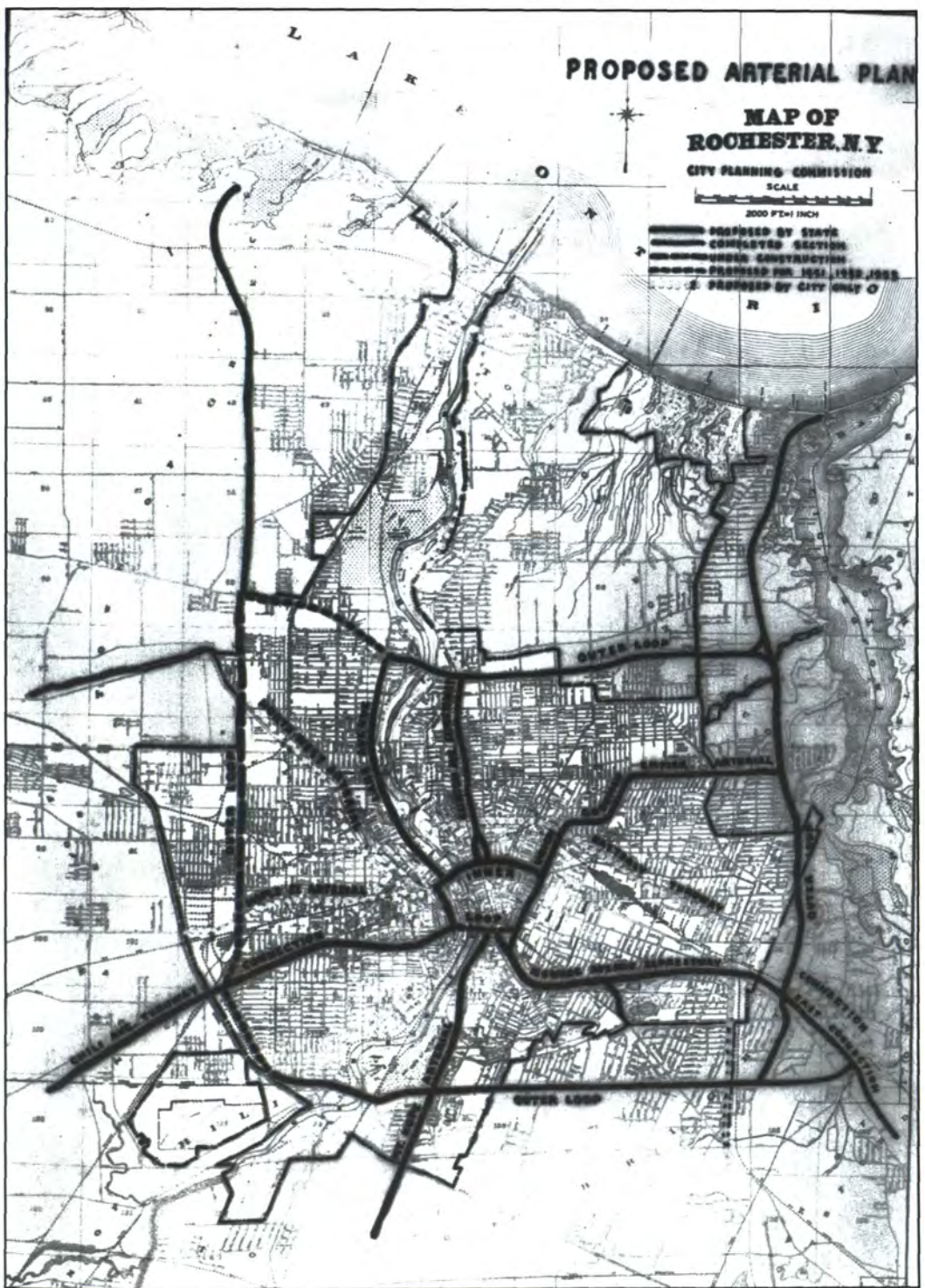
Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, Washington Square, Rochester, N. Y.



Image above: A postcard showing the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Washington Square Park during the early twentieth century. Note the enclosing presence of shrubbery. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.



Image to left: By contrast, this 1988 picture of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument reveals a park landscape cleared of shrubs, redesigned to promote an open, well-lit atmosphere of safety. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.



This 1951 map of a proposed new highway system for Rochester privileged the construction of new inner and outer loop expressways over the existing landscape. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.



A 1994 "Blues in the Night" concert at Manhattan Square Park, now called Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

providing housing for low-income veterans and then the elderly. Expressways built through Seneca/Maplewood Park (Route 104, which traverses the Veteran's Memorial Bridge) and Genesee Valley Park (I-390) were also examples of the attitude that parks were essentially available public land. While the Route 104 expressway project provoked little outcry, I-390 was met with strenuous objections from preservation and environmental groups, who bemoaned this second bisection of the park some 60 years after the Olmsted firm so carefully mitigated damage wrought by the Barge Canal. Less-intrusive changes to the parks in the late twentieth century, such as the construction of unsympathetic maintenance buildings and recreational facilities, also suggested that concerns for utility were considered more important than the preservation of historic landscape characteristics, although in a few cases, such as a sleek but short-lived skating shelter built in Genesee Valley Park, there was an attempt to adopt contemporary architectural fashions.

It is notable that during a period when the city's historic parks were generally undervalued, a "sterling example of Modernist landscape architecture" took form in downtown Rochester.³⁶ Manhattan Square Park (recently renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Park) was designed in 1972 by renowned Modernist landscape architect Lawrence Halprin as part of the Southeast Loop Plan, an ambitious effort to redesign the entire southeast quadrant of downtown

Rochester. The park was meant to function as a common outdoor space for residents of a densely developed neighborhood of apartment towers. It was designed to be viewed from above by high-rise residents, as well as from the ground. A focal point was the multi-level plaza featuring a complex concrete fountain, restaurant, and amphitheater, surmounted by a distinctive space frame. The massive angular forms in the plaza contrasted with the adjacent undulating grassy meadow area. A hockey rink/basketball and tennis court provided all-season recreational opportunities. The park was part of the first and only phase of the Southeast Loop Plan to be completed; the rest of the intended context was never built, leaving the park something of an island in a mainly commercial, rather than residential, setting.³⁷

Expanding the System: New Directions in City Parks

The founding of both the Central Park Conservancy and the National Association for Olmsted Parks in 1980 heralded a rediscovery of Frederick Law Olmsted's incomparable, yet under-appreciated, legacy. Long-term projects to restore or rehabilitate his most notable works, such as ongoing rehabilitation work in Central Park, have drawn attention to his unique design philosophy. A local example occurred in the early 1990s, when Olmsted's original plan for Seneca Park guided restoration of the Trout Pond area after an ice storm in 1991.

Beyond their value as works of art, the designs and principles of Olmsted and his successors are proving relevant to contemporary issues. For example, flood control, water quality improvement, and habitat enhancement are goals of Boston's ongoing Muddy River Restoration Project, which is rehabilitating a portion of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s Emerald Necklace park system.³⁸ In Boulder, Colorado, a city plan by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. is the basis for a decades-long project to implement flood control along the Boulder Creek and to establish a citywide network of linear parks and trails. In Boston, a panel discussion in April 2013, titled "Climate Change: What Would Olmsted Do?," examined how Olmsted's principles offer strategies for dealing with that daunting environmental issue.

As we have seen, designs by Frederick Law Olmsted and his successors were the foundation of a long and rich relationship between people and urban parks in Rochester, a relationship that evolved over the decades in tandem with changes in urban conditions and park philosophies. That story continues to unfold, most recently in an era of urban population decline, abandonment of obsolete industrial infrastructure, increasing concerns about environmental degradation, and public health crises such as the high rate of obesity, as well as renewed interest in bicycling, desire to counter "nature-deficit disorder" by exposing children to the outdoors, and growth of housing in the core of downtown.



*Turning Point Park, 1991. An example of a “forever wild” approach to parks.
Courtesy of the City of Rochester.*

An inventory of Rochester’s city parks in 1991-92 identified 22 different categories of parks and park facilities in the system, suggesting how broadly the concept of “park” had come to be defined. These ranged from types familiar to Olmsted, such as the street mall, to new categories such as the “tot lot,” “festival site,” and “forever wild” park.³⁹ Parks added to Rochester’s system in the past few decades fall into two broad genres, representing alternative responses to contemporary urban conditions. On the one hand, an “Urban Wild” approach promotes acquisition and preservation of small, relatively untamed spaces. A variation of the “Forever Wild” philosophy that guides vast wilderness reserves like Yosemite National Park, “Urban Wild” describes “unorganized scraps of nature,” often sites that were once used but have been abandoned and reverted to a semi-wild condition.⁴⁰ Examples in and around Rochester include Turning Point Park and Tryon Park, former industrial spaces that were turned into parks.⁴¹ Not coincidentally in an era when park funding has been a relatively low priority in municipal budgets at all levels, an “urban wild” park does not demand the high level of maintenance that a more highly designed park requires to ensure retention of its design integrity; the point is to let nature continue to take its course.

Another new direction, inspired by the historic preservation movement that seeks to save and reuse historic buildings, has been the conversion of abandoned industrial infrastructure into opportunities for recreation and interpretation. A 1991-92 inventory of parks in Rochester

identified two linear parks (the Driving Park Avenue and Pont de Rennes bridges), one festival site (in High Falls), and one Urban Cultural Park (also High Falls/Brown's Race, now the High Falls Heritage Area) in the city. Like the more recently developed Lower Falls Park, these sites recast and interpret the city's early industrial heritage, and highlight intersections between industry and nature. Reflecting the importance of the Genesee River in Rochester's industrial history, these sites all engage with the river in some way, a twentieth-century twist on Olmsted's goal of protecting the city's river assets. Rails-to-trails projects that turn abandoned rail rights-of-ways into trail systems, of which the Genesee Valley Greenway and the El Camino Trail are excellent local examples, also feature conversion of industrial artifacts for modern uses.

These new types of parks share a goal that motivated Olmsted, his sons, and those who inherited his vision throughout the twentieth century: creating a livable city rich with opportunities to enjoy the benefits of the great outdoors. Generations of Rochesterians have benefitted from this ideal, which has survived even as it has evolved over the decades. Looking ahead to the next anniversary, future stewards of the Olmsted legacy would do well to remember the special, historic bonds linking the people of this city with their parks.



*The High Falls Center and heritage area in 1993, as seen from atop Kodak Tower.
Courtesy of the City of Rochester.*

End Notes

1. Olmsted designed Highland, Genesee Valley and Seneca parks; Seneca Park included park land on both the east and west sides of the river. In the early twentieth century, Seneca Park West, part of Olmsted's original design developed a distinct identity as Maplewood Park and has been known by that name ever since. The firm, both before and after Olmsted Senior's retirement, also provided designs for a number of smaller city parks and parkways.
2. The other three were in Buffalo (1868), Boston (1875), and Louisville (1891).
3. Earlier examples of the rural cemetery type, such as Mount Auburn in Cambridge, Massachusetts, were private ventures.
4. Richard O. Reisem, *Mount Hope: America's First Municipal Victorian Cemetery* (Rochester, New York: privately published, 1994), 13-14.
5. Nurserymen George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry promoted the sophisticated horticultural character of Mount Hope Cemetery when they donated 50 shade trees, including European purple, fernleaf, and weeping beeches, Nikko fir, Caucasian spruce, Norway maple, and variegated sycamore maple trees, to the cemetery at its tenth anniversary in 1847. These specimen trees complemented the magnificent old red, black, and white oaks and other trees preserved as the original forest on the site was only partially cut to prepare the cemetery for burials. See Reisem, *Mount Hope*, 10.
6. For an interesting discussion of the horticultural industry and Mount Auburn Cemetery as precursors to the parks movement and Olmsted park plans in Boston, see Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 15-17.
7. Blake McKelvey, *A Growing Legacy: An Illustrated History of Rochester's Parks* (Rochester: Parks Centennial Committee for Education and Interpretation, 1988), 13-14.
8. For an excellent overview of Olmsted's design principles, see Charles Beveridge, "Olmsted—His Essential Theory," *Nineteenth Century* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2000), 32-37, reprinted at www.olmsted.org.
9. Rochester (NY) Board of Park Commissioners, "The Public Parks of Rochester 1888-1904" (Rochester: Board of Park Commissioners, 1904), 12.
10. For an excellent analysis of the evolution of park philosophy, as well as related social and political issues pertaining to parks that are beyond the scope of this article, see Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Urban Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1982).
11. Rochester Board of Park Commissioners, *Rochester Park Commission: The 1911 Report* (Rochester: Board of Park Commissioners, 1911), 29, 34-35.

12. John C. Olmsted was both nephew and stepson to Frederick Law Olmsted. His father, John Hull Olmsted, was Frederick Law Olmsted's brother; after John Hull Olmsted died his widow, Mary, married Frederick Law Olmsted.
13. For a detailed history of the Olmsted firm, see Charles Beveridge, "The Olmsted Firm—An Introduction," available at www.olmsted.org.
14. John C. Olmsted to C.C. Laney, January 16, 1905, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress.
15. Extensive correspondence between the Olmsted firm and the Rochester Park Commission is compiled in the Records of the Olmsted Associates at the Library of Congress, available on microfilm (see Reel 56).
16. J.C. Olmsted, "Rochester Parks," September 28, 1904, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress.
17. "Rochester Park, Visit by F.L. Olmsted, Jr.," July 16, 1908, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress.
18. Of the five original bridges, four—three spanning the canal and one spanning Red Creek—survive; these four are concrete arch bridges modeled on the elegant bow bridge in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The original bridge that carried Moore Road over the canal has been replaced.
19. "Rochester Department of Parks: The 1917 Report" (Rochester, 1917), 26; and "Planning busy aquatic season on river," *Democrat & Chronicle*, April 22, 1922.
20. Arnold W. Brunner et al., *A City Plan for Rochester: A Report Prepared for the Rochester Civic Improvement Committee* (New York: The Cheltenham Press, 1911), 33-39.
21. Blake McKelvey, "His Honor, The Mayor of Rochester 1900-1928" *Rochester History* 21, no. 1 (January 1969), 1, 20.
22. John C. Olmsted to C.C. Laney, March 26, 1915, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress.
23. Brunner, et al., 33.
24. "The Origin of the Permanent Establishment of Playgrounds in the City of Rochester," undated manuscript at the Rochester Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Division; and Rochester Board of Park Commissioners, 1911, 34.
25. Bureau of Playgrounds & Recreation, *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Playgrounds & Recreation*, Department of Parks, City of Rochester (Rochester, 1916), 10.
26. Elisabeth Keiper, "Woody Plants Unique and Notable in the Rochester Parks; A Survey and Appraisal of the Work of Bernard H. Slavin," *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden* 48, no. 576 (December 1947), 269-279; Reimann Buechner Partnership, *Durand Eastman Park, Rochester, Monroe County, New York: Final Report, Comprehensive Plan*, n.d. [mid-1980s], 11. See Catherine Salber, "Henry Strong Durand," *Rochester History* 61, no. 2 (Spring 1999), for an

- overview of Durand's life and brief information on his relationship to the park.
27. See Sean Kirst, "An arts center in Edgerton," *City Newspaper* (Rochester, NY), January 10, 1985; Sean Kirst, "The cradle of culture," *City Newspaper* (Rochester, NY), April 12, 1984; Bob Marcotte, "What was the Museum of Arts and Sciences?" *Democrat & Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), January 12, 1998; and Arch Merrill, "Edgerton Park's Early 'School'—Leg Irons, Barred Windows," *Democrat and Chronicle*, August 29, 1965.
 28. Victoria Schmitt, "Once Upon A Carousel . . . In Rochester," *RMSC Focus*, undated clipping in Landmark Society files, 12-17; and "P.S.: On the beach," *Upstate Magazine*, June 24, 1984.
 29. Cranz, 105.
 30. Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture & the National Park Service* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 7.
 31. Phoebe Cutler, *The Public Landscape of the New Deal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 15-22.
 32. Cranz, 101-104.
 33. City Planning Commission, *Public Recreation in Rochester* (Rochester: City Planning Commission, 1949).
 34. The report deemed Rochester's park system adequate in total acreage and in recreation budget per capita, but deficient in its acreage devoted to "playgrounds, playfields, and small parks for passive recreation."
 35. Projects in the later twentieth century returned roads in Genesee Valley and Seneca Parks to their original alignments and narrowed them, adding curbs to prevent inadvertent widening and off-road parking.
 36. Charles Birnbaum, "Fertile Ground for Design: A Context for Rochester's Public Park Legacy," preface to Bayer Associates, et al., *A Survey of Rochester's Historic Parklands*, Prepared for the City of Rochester, December 2009, iv.
 37. JoAnn Beck, Senior Landscape Architect, City of Rochester, multiple conversations with author; and The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Manhattan Square Park," in *Landslide 2008: Marvels of Modernism*, accessed at www.tclf.org, August 28, 2013.
 38. "Muddy River Restoration Project," Emerald Bay Conservancy, <http://www.muddyrivermmoc.org/restoraton-overview/>, accessed December 16, 2013.
 39. City of Rochester Department of Parks Recreation and Human Services, *Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program Assessment*, 1991-92.
 40. J. Green, "Boston's Evolving Urban Wilds," *The Dirt: Uniting the Built & Natural Environments* (blog), American Society of Landscape Architects, December 4, 2013, <http://dirt.asla.org/2013/12/04/bostons-evolving-urban-wilds/>, accessed December 13, 2013. The phrase "unorganized scraps of nature" is attributed in the post to Jill Desmini.

41. Tryon Park West, devoted to athletic fields, in typical “Recreation Park” fashion, is in the City of Rochester; adjacent Tryon Park is part of the Monroe County park system and is characteristic of the “Urban Wild” approach.

About the Author



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A Century of Change: Ontario Beach Park's Playgrounds



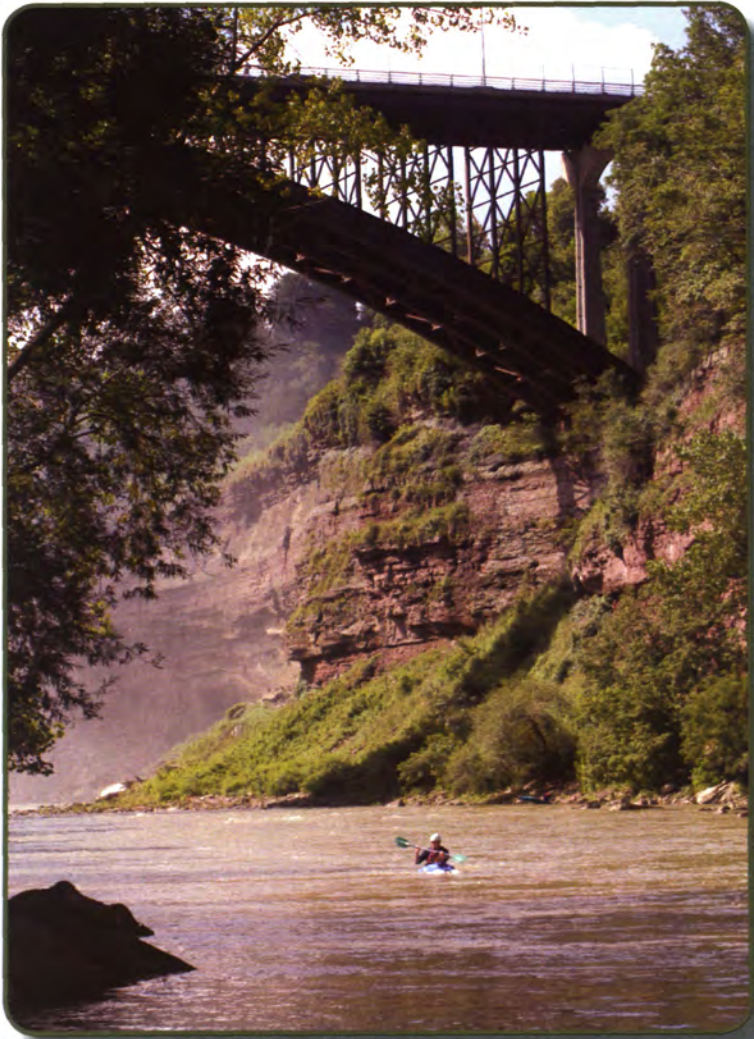
*The Ontario Beach Park playground in 1920, shortly after the amusement park there closed.
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum and Science Center.*



*The playground at Ontario Beach Park in 1956.
From the Collection of the Rochester City Hall Photo Lab.*



Ontario Beach Park playground, 1992. From the Collection of the Rochester City Hall Photo Lab.



A kayaker paddles along the Genesee River, north of the Driving Park Avenue Bridge, during the summer of 2008. Tryon Park and Turning Point Park are examples of Rochester's "Forever Wild" parks philosophy. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.



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