



Footbridge in Olmsted Park, c. 1895

Olmsted Park **AN EMERALD NECKLACE PARK**

HISTORY

In 1895 Frederick Law Olmsted created a “chain of picturesque fresh-water ponds alternating with attractive natural groves and meads.” A system of walks, drives, and bridle paths were designed in order to provide citizens a respite from city living. This upper portion of the sinuous Muddy River was meant to have a rustic, natural appearance, but was in truth part of a complicated engineering solution to the sanitary problem of sewage-plagued mud flats.

Olmsted Park, named for its designer, the Father of American Landscape Design, contains three ponds - Wards Pond, Willow Pond and Leverett Pond, as well as 2 small spring-fed ponds. It is a link in the linear park system and its continuous waterway now known as the Emerald Necklace. It includes picturesque water landscapes set in a narrow parkland in a densely settled area of Boston and Brookline.

FRIENDS OF LEVERETT POND

Friends of Leverett Pond was the second of the Town of Brookline’s Friends groups created as a park advocacy group in the 1970’s. Formed in 1978 as a sub-committee of the High Street Hill Association, it has worked to increase awareness of issues of park stewardship.

Friends of Leverett Pond has held neighborhood celebrations, clean-ups, and pruning workshops; as well as advocating whenever possible for the historic restoration of the Park.

EMERALD NECKLACE MASTER PLAN

In 1984 the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management was assigned the management of the Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program. In 1991 the Brookline Board of Selectmen approved its portion of a Master Plan for maintenance and capital repairs of its section of the Emerald Necklace.

The extensive process of neighborhood meetings and consultation with experts had produced a document which laid out guidelines for the maintenance and management of the watercourse, internal circulation, parkways, landscape composition, and uses, structures, and facilities in the Park. This outline for restoration is currently being used by a the Olmsted/Riverway Design Review Committee, appointed by the Brookline Park and Recreation Commission, as its blueprint for the expenditure of funds made available to Olmsted Park by the Town.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMERALD NECKLACE MASTER PLAN IN OLMSTED PARK

In 1997, about \$300,000 was expended to complete Phase 1 - removing automobile traffic from Riverdale Parkway and creating bicycle and pedestrian paths in its place between the Chestnut Street rotary and Willow Pond Road.

In 1998, Phase 2 which continued the bike and pedestrian paths from Willow Pond Road to Washington Street (Route 9) was completed. Plantings and regrading of eroded slopes were included. The cost of Phase 2 was about \$500,000, funded through the federal Community Development Block Grant funds administered by the Town of Brookline.

In addition, under a \$100,000 Mass. Historic Landscape Preservation Program grant from the Mass. Department of Environmental Management, the area below Allerton Street (known as the *Allerton Overlook*) has been recreated following Olmsted’s original intent to provide a vista across the widest portion of this part of Olmsted Park. In 1999, benches were placed on either side of the rebuilt granite stairway, and two beech trees were planted at the ends of the semicircular path. In 2002, an irrigation system was added to water the planting beds near the Overlook.



Riverdale Parkway (c. 1990)



Bicycle path replacement of Parkway

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

A number of other improvements recommended by the Emerald Necklace Master Plan were completed in Boston.

In 1998, The Boston Parks Department constructed a boardwalk in the area around Ward's Pond just downstream from Jamaica Pond, making a complete walking circuit of Ward's Pond possible.

Brookline and Boston have jointly finished restoration of four footbridges. This includes an extensive rehabilitation of the "Cove" footbridge on the Boston side of Leverett Pond, completed in Spring 1998.

Also in Boston, the severely-eroded Jamaicaway outfall at the western edge of Daisy Field has been rebuilt.

The restoration of the "babbling brook" was completed in May 2006 at a cost of over \$200,000

FUTURE PROJECTS

The Brookline GreenSpace Alliance and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy are supporting the Boston/Brookline effort to dredge this waterway system (of which Leverett Pond is a part) and to complete other Master Plan tasks. State and federal funding of about \$92 million is being sought for the Muddy River Dredging and Historic Resource Restoration Project, which is undergoing final review by the State Secretary of Environmental Affairs. State permits will assure a level of maintenance and oversight agreed to by Boston and Brookline is adhered to.

All of these improvements show respect for Olmsted's original design, and reflect intensive neighborhood participation in restoring this national treasure.



Community planting improves the landscape, and develops social interaction. Above, the High Street Hill Association teams up with Northeastern University to replant a bed in the Allerton Overlook.

Prepared by:
Friends of Leverett Pond
209 Pond Ave.
Brookline, MA 02146
Tel: (617) 232-6083
E-Mail: hmattison@aol.com

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