

1909



2009

100 Years of *Rhode Island State Parks*



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1909 - 2009

By:

Albert T. Klyberg, L.H.D.

DEM Naturalist

Kelly House Museum

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the men and women who have served and are serving the people of Rhode Island as stewards of our park, beaches, bikeways, woodlands and recreational facilities.

Their service took the form of Board of Commissioners, chiefs of the Parks and Recreation Division, planners, managers, supervisors, rangers, naturalists, office staff, lifeguards and laborers. The object of their energies is to preserve and maintain our parks while offering access and enjoyment to millions of our citizens and visitors every year in all seasons.

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Prologue

A Paradise Found: Verrazzano's Vision of a New Golden Land, 1524

“We discovered a triangular shaped island (Block Island), ten leagues from the mainland, similar in size to the Island of Rhodes; it was full of hills, covered in trees, and highly populated to judge by the fires we saw burning continually along the shore....We reached another land 25 leagues from the island, where we found an excellent harbor (Narragansett Bay)...The harbor mouth which we call “Refugio,”(the safe haven) faces south and is half a league wide; from its entrance extends for 12 leagues in a northeasterly direction, and then widens out to form a large bay of about 20 leagues in circumference. In this bay are five small islands, very fertile, very beautiful, full of tall spreading trees, and any large fleet could ride safely among them without fear to tempest or other dangers. Then going southward to the entrance of the harbor, there are very pleasant hills on either side, with many streams of clear water flowing from high land into the sea.

...We stayed there for 15 days, taking advantage of the place to refresh ourselves. ...We frequently went five to six leagues into the interior, and found it as pleasant as I can possibly describe, and suitable for every kind of cultivation – grain, wine or oil. For there the fields extend for 25 to 30 leagues; they are open and free of any obstacles or trees, and so fertile that any kind of seed would produce excellent crops. Then we entered the forests, which could be penetrated even by a large army; the trees are oaks, cypresses, and others unknown in our Europe.”

The Public Parks Movement in Rhode Island

Officially, 100 years of parks in Rhode Island began with a meeting of the Providence Metropolitan Park District Commission on Abraham Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1909. It took place in the gracious rooms of the Hearthside mansion in the Town of Lincoln, marking the acquisition of a nearby tract of land which became Lincoln Woods State Park.

Although this meeting began the formal start of the state parks system, the paths and milestones leading to the Hearthside mansion that night were almost as long and almost as old as Great Road itself. Great Road, the Quaker path from Saylesville to Woonsocket Hill, owed its origins to the revival of trade and traffic from the northern outlands of Rhode Island to the town of Providence, following the King Philip's Indian War of 1675-1676. Setting aside community-owned land for work and play in Rhode Island began nearly as long ago as that.

Ever the 'otherwise-minded,' Rhode Island's leaders, contrary to the practices of the rest of the New England colonies, declined to follow the guidelines of the widely used document, known as the 'Ordering of the Towns.' This was the village template, or model, used by Puritans from New Hampshire to the southern Connecticut border to lay out the main features of new towns. The 'Ordering of the Towns' called for a town common as the center of each new settlement and mandated, at public expense, a meeting house for both worship and government. A minister's manse, or home, was also built nearby. There was also to be a public burial ground for the town's dead.

In Rhode Island, however, 'by the custom of the neighbors,' religious services took place in private homes, not in the town house. Unlike most of New England, in Rhode Island often there was more than one religious point of view and therefore more than one 'church.' When a congregation was large enough for its own church building, a corporate society for religious purposes was formed. This body then purchased and developed a piece of private property for its reli-

gious observances. No public funds, no taxes, were to be used for these religious activities. Burial yards and cemeteries also became the responsibility of a private society, a congregation, or the rural families, scattered at some distance from the towns. They set aside small family plots. Today there are several thousand of these scattered in woodlands and fields.

In Rhode Island, religion was a private matter — strong in its own right, functioning under its own steam, neither requiring nor seeking any endorsement from government. Rhode Islanders saw no need for the taxes of citizens to prop it up. Consequently, because of this approach to religious property, Rhode Island towns did not arise on a rectangular, gridded system of real estate, around a town common, with an officially sanctioned Puritan meeting house standing in the middle. Rather, the dissenting settlements of the Narragansett Bay country grew up along linear streetscapes, paralleling a river or harbor. Grave yards were either sited on family land, or, as in Newport and Providence, they were located on the fringe of the built-up portions of the town. Thus, unlike the rest of New England, Rhode Island had few of the public spaces which would later metamorphose into public parks.

In the 17th century, throughout New England, however, public spaces reserved for play and recreation, or even for inspiration or reflection, were not high on the town agenda of either the Puritans, or the Rhode Island dissenters. There was too much work to be done; non-work time was devoted to worship and Godly works. Idleness and 'play' were not encouraged; leisure and recreation was regarded as frivolous, wasteful — even sinful.

By the time the religious refugees, led by Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Samuel Gorton, and others settled Rhode Island, their 17th century attitudes about the land also differed significantly from the golden outlook of the Renaissance navigators like Verrazzano. To the minds of the Puritan outcasts, the New England landscape was seen often as a 'howling' wilderness not

as a bountiful Eden. The New Land was a wild thing, something to be 'brought under control', its natives were regarded as heathens to be feared or won over to Christianity. Nature was to be 'subjugated.' Although Roger Williams was more generous and more kindly to the Indians than his other New England counterparts, a darker vision of a not-so-golden land characterized the outlook of many of his contemporaries. Life on earth was considered hard, cruel and short; rewards for hard work and faithfulness were granted in the next world, not in this one.

“The great advantage of open spaces in cities is that they supply the densely populated neighborhoods with pure air.”

Dr. Timothy Newell, Chair of the parks committee, Providence Franklin Society, January, 1883.

In the centuries which followed original settlement, however, several developments contributed to change in public opinion about nature and land use, leading the way to public parklands. In 18th century Rhode Island, town leaders favored the practice of establishing market squares for trade and fairs. During the colonial wars between Britain and France, open space was used for militia parade grounds, and muster training days were frequent. Washington Square in Newport, or the parade of the Old State House in Providence, were used this way. On occasion, these grounds were also employed for open air celebrations and public events such as the reading of public proclamations. At times, they took on a festival atmos-

phere that was later associated with parks, such as the gala reception for Lafayette's return to America in 1824. This occurred on the sloping lawn in front of the Old State House in Providence. Another popular gathering place was the great hill top in Providence overlooking the Cove, and site of the modern state house. It was known as the Jefferson Plain, and it was the scene of many open air rallies and ox roasts in the Constitutional popular uprising of 1842, known as the Dorr Rebellion.

The literary and artistic fashions of the early 19th century also promoted a romantic age - a time of inspiring stories and uplifting poetry and of colorful landscape paintings celebrating a luminous view of nature. From these themes, the idea of natural spaces facilitating outdoor recreation, or communing with creation came into vogue. One of those who thought along these lines was Dorr's brother-in-law, the industrialist, Zachariah Allen, who felt compelled to balance the ledger of land devoted to industrial use by adding groves and kitchen gardens to the adjacent natural setting. He built little parks for his factory villages. Allen held that rural landscape settings in factory villages would take the tarnish off the industrial grime and ugliness he had seen in cramped urban factory districts in England. He didn't want to spoil America. He envisioned something better, more aesthetic for American industry. The new American republic, according to his lights, should be a kind of Greek Arcadia, a wood-

land ideal, where industry did not have to stain the landscape with smoky, crowded, grimy cities, but rather flourish in little manufacturing villages along bountiful streams with a moral and cheerful rustic environment. One of Allen's experiments in assisting nature was the establishment of a silviculture plot (an experimental tree farm) in a portion of the land that became Lincoln Woods State Park. Allen's villages were Allendale and Georgiaville. They were patterned after the original factory villager template of Slatersville, established by Samuel and John Slater in North Smithfield on the Branch River.

At the same time as the factory village pattern appeared, the idea of the 19th century rural cemetery movement also arrived. The rural cemetery 'enthusiasm' promoted the concept of replacing the old style of formal rows of gravestones and narrow paths with scenic, picturesque burial grounds. This idea of park-like cemeteries began within the growing cities of Boston, New York and Philadelphia and rapidly gained attention elsewhere. Swan Point in Providence was the local version of this movement. Pondering mortality - life and death— across scenic views with curvilinear cart paths, flowering beds, ornamental plantings that served as backgrounds for substantial granite tablets, obelisks, and funeral urns was thought to be more elevating and inspiring than the grids of slate tomb stones bounded by stone walls. By the second decade of the 1800s, the grim death's heads that once glared their warnings to the living were replaced

by faces of cherubs and flower wreaths. The new memorial parks became a place for communing with nature rather than a place of sorrow.

By mid-century industrial fortunes allowed leading members of the community to build fine residences in rural areas on the fringe of cities and permitted leisure time to travel to Europe. There, they saw the gardens of royalty and the deer parks of the gentry. They became aware of English Victorian-era landscape designs and newly-developing interests in scientific horticulture. European styles offered a park-like example for domestic landscape planning, easily transferred to America. The experience had impact on the way prosperous Americans thought about using outdoor space.

An additional influence leading to the emergence of a public park ideal came at the end of the American Civil War. There was a surge of both patriotism and relief from the war's daily death-toll. This took the form of setting aside prominent new public spaces or redesigning older ones for statues to the fallen or the retirement of a Civil War cannon in a place of honor. Westerly, Rhode Island produced granite monuments that listed the war dead and outdoor 'funeral furniture' became a popular ingredient and focal point in these memorial settings. Prominent town squares and plazas assumed the function of commemorating the events and sacrifices of the Civil War. 'Decoration Day' ceremonies at cemeteries and formal orations at gazebos and bandstands became a common sight in the years following. Many city parks, like Roger Williams Park in Providence (1871), were developed containing such commemorative elements.

Simultaneous to this 'monuments' movement at the end of the 19th century, was the growing public health concern that urban areas, with large smoke-belching factories and polluted streams, required not only sanitation solutions but also new public spaces to serve as the 'lungs of the city.' This public health idea spawned a public parks movement in many parts of the

country, but particularly in the old, industrial Northeast. In the years following the Civil War, the 35 years leading up to 1900, the scale of industry, and its importance to American life, dwarfed nearly all the early attempts by Zachariah Allen and other entrepreneurs who wanted to maintain the system of small factory villages along pleasant New England streams. Industrial needs and economies of scale had begun to trump their rural competitors right from the first. Sprawling urban industrial districts within cities became the dominant model for American factory production.

From the beginning, factory interests rather than farms became national policy. Even in the 1790s of Samuel Slater and Moses Brown, the property rights of mill owners rolled over the lawsuits of farmers seeking to protect their fields from flooding caused by the erection of dams to power machinery. Also, the resulting loss of migrating fish, which were prevented from returning to their up-stream spawning grounds, was ruled on by the courts as an acceptable cost when balanced by the 'progress' offered by the new manufacturing technology. At the end of the 19th century, the pollution ravages upon the rivers of New England caused by manufacturing had clearly, and unmistakably dealt the paradisaical vision of Verrazzano and the early romantics a harsh blow. The New Golden Land of the first voyagers was tarnished. **Paradise was lost! The Machine had destroyed the Garden!**

Regaining Paradise then became one of the goals and ambitions of the various progressive initiatives aimed towards the founding of parks. At this time, the arrival of the profession of landscape architecture was another key development leading to the 'invention' of the modern state park. The assistance played in the rise of this profession by the new phenomenon of world fairs was enormous. Among the most influential of these was the Philadelphia Centennial Celebration held in Fairmount Park in 1876. Equally influential was the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893. While these fairs were famous for entertaining midways, circus-like sideshows, carousels, beer gardens and ferris wheels, they were also responsible for the stunning array of parks, lagoons and inspiring view-corridors. The accompanying exhibit buildings in neo-classical style reminiscent of Greece and Rome were heralded as America's White City.

“The Metropolitan Park movement was started to preserve already existing recreation space in danger of loss due to development.”

Henry A. Barker, Providence Magazine, 1916

The sheer size of the fair phenomenon and associated landscapes required a whole new group of planners and designers from the established typical architectural firms. Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, and Daniel H. Burnham were among the main practitioners of this new art form of pleasure grounds for the people. The White City along the shores of Lake Michigan was not just a brief moment of fair stagecraft. Its popularity evolved into a demand for more of the same by cities all over the country.

The Fair's designers had a lot of demands for their services. Coming out of this extravaganza was the architectural movement known as the City Beautiful Movement – a combination of monumental classical-style buildings and sweeping public vistas with amply-planted corridors and alleys of majestic trees and gorgeous gardens. The City Beautiful Movement also coincided with the rise of the city planning profession. While one of the characteristics of the movement was the efficient reorganizing of municipal services in central plazas, called 'civic centers,' the movement had a big effect on beautifying urban areas with a secondary effect on influencing a momentum for large public parks.

Many people from Rhode Island attended the world's fairs, and the dividends of that experience took the form of the expansion of Roger Williams Park and the formal establishment of the plaza between City Hall and the Federal Court Building to be the Providence Civic Center. Known as Exchange Place, named for the Butler Exchange building, it was another kind of exchange activity that made it the center of things. It was here that the trolleys from all over the state converged to greet the crowds exiting the trains of nearby Union Station.

Crowning and overseeing the view below was the new Rhode Island State House on Jefferson Plain. In between the new state house and the civic center was the old Providence Cove. Whether the Cove lands were to be used to supply the needs of the train station or to be converted into a public park became a controversy that spread over the decades of the 1880s and 1890s. Finally resolved in favor of the railroad interests, the struggle, nonetheless, produced an energetic, progressive public lobby that shaped public park policy long into the 20th century. The Public Park Association was the early version of Save the Bay.

The Public Park Association

1883-1903

Of all of these influences and milestones towards a state park system, the emergence of the Public Park Association was the most important turning point leading to Lincoln Woods. The Public Park Association built upon all of the other park trends and then added a momentum of its own. Begun in 1883 by a group of important business and civic leaders, the Public Park Association is best known for its battle to wrest the Cove Lands away from the railroad interests, which sought to fill in the cove with rail yards and freight terminal services.

The Public Park Association favored a public park with lagoons, pedestrian bridges and bandstands, instead. However, the park association's work eventually went way beyond that of the cove controversy. It pub-

lished a dozen pamphlets and leaflets devoted to health and social benefits of parks, pin-pointing particular locations for community action. Its advocacy for the need and desirability of parks throughout the capital city, and its far-sighted vision for a ring of parks around the rim of the metropolitan area - connected to Providence by a set of spokes in the form of scenic parkways and boulevards - truly forecast the first vision of a state park system. The work of the Public Park Association led to the establishment of a state park commission, a public bond issue, and the meeting at the Hearthside in February of 1909 which led to the acquisition of Lincoln Woods.

Their effort was directly aimed at regaining the paradise described by Verrazzano which they felt had

been lost by the excesses of industry at work for nearly a century. It took nearly another century for their vision to gain fruition and to be fully realized.

The origins of this progressive reform group were modest. The Public Park Association was the outgrowth of a committee of the Providence Franklin Society. Founded in 1821, and incorporated in 1823, the Providence Franklin Society (not to be confused with the Providence Franklin Lyceum) was an association of amateur scientists attempting to improve and advance the educated layman's knowledge of chemistry.

By the late 1820s they were sponsoring weekly lectures which expanded beyond their initial interest in chemistry and extended to other fields of science. They pub-

lished their talks in a magazine of "collections." Throughout their history, befitting the organization's namesake, Benjamin Franklin, they maintained a curiosity into a wide range of subjects, and they sought to apply that intellectual vigor into practical matters affecting the culture of the community. In the 1870s, for example, the Franklin Society became advocates and supporters for a move to found a library for the public—a free public library, which would be more accessible to a broader range of people than the Providence Athenaeum, where one had to subscribe with an annual member's fee to borrow books.

One of the leaders of the Franklin Society, Joseph Barker, made a substantial financial donation that hastened the emergence of The Providence Public Library. In

similar fashion, in the early 1880s the Franklin Society set up a committee to examine the merits of public parks. This was prompted by a proposal of the Providence and Worcester Railroad to the City Council to make over the tidal cove formed by the junction of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers.

This committee of the Franklin Society concluded that a park would be a better use of this central water feature, and spun off the Providence Public Park Association as a true public lobbying organization in 1883. The immediate goal was to get the Providence City Council to reject the report urging railroad uses for the same space.

The new Public Park Association capitalized on several decades of interest in the way parks

Rhode Island's First State Park - Lincoln Woods

Lincoln Woods was not only the first acquisition of the Metropolitan Park Commission, it was also the park system's centerpiece until the gift of Goddard Memorial nearly 20 years later. A rugged hilly, tree-lined, upland, strewn with giant boulders, it is hard to imagine today that much of the land around Olney Pond had been fields and meadows of the Olney, Arnold, Comstock, and Mitchell families for nearly two centuries prior to its set-aside as a 'nature' reserve. The pond itself is more man-made than natural, caused by a stone dam at the east end providing water power for a thread mill of the Olney family. The mill, a wooden three-story affair, had its own workers' houses and a store. The Manchester Print Works entrance to Lincoln Woods had another mill on the Moshassuck River that meanders along the park's northeastern border. Once an independent factory for the printing of cloth from nearby mills, the print works was a hard-luck operation, having burned down three times and exploding on another occasion before William and Frederick Sayles decided not to rebuild it and carried on its functions in their own bleachery and printing establishment further on down stream.

Originally, the Metropolitan Park Commission planned to incorporate the Quinsnicket Portion of Lincoln Woods and the lands

of the Olneys and Arnolds with a cluster of buildings on top of the nearby Stump Hill, overlooking Saylesville, but the latter was eventually kept out of the park and served the Pawtucket water system as a reservoir and water tower. The original park, or reservation, at first only included the land from Breakneck Hill to the northern edge of the pond. Additional purchases filled it out to the 627 acres of today. Trails and hiking paths, athletic fields, beach facilities, fire places, picnic groves and thousands of new trees were introduced over the years. Nearly all of the historic structures that once dotted the landscape have gone, giving it a much more natural setting than it had in its early years as a park.

Lincoln Woods was highly popular from the first, even before its bathing beach became one of the best known city pools of Providence, Central Falls and Pawtucket. Families came by trolley from Charles Street and Louisque Pike to the Quinsnicket station; it was known as the Providence and Burrillville Railway. One could also come up Smithfield Avenue to Walker Street by trolley. The Lincoln Woods Dairy at Great Road and Smithfield Avenue was where Saylesville cows' milk was turned into ice cream right before your eyes, only adding to the treat of the trek to Lincoln Woods.

could contribute to the growth of cities, and they had much available information to ponder. The mid-century Providence Mayor, Thomas A. Doyle, who had served for 18 years, made the issue of municipal parks one of the elements he felt that any ambitious modern city should consider.

In 1868 Doyle had suggested turning Field's Point's 350 acres on the western shore of Narragansett Bay into a city park. It could be accessed easily by passenger boats from the downtown, and Colonel Atwell was already turning the bluff above it, formerly a Revolutionary Era fortification, into a shore dinner hall and pleasure ground. While the City Council weighed Doyle's recommendation in 1871, the estate of Betsy Williams' nearby 102 acre farm was willed to the City for park uses. Many reformers saw park use of leisure time as a better alternative to the popularity of the saloon.

Although at first reluctant to accept a property so far removed from the center of Providence, the City Council agreed to the gift of Betsy Williams. Horse-drawn, then later electric trolleys made Roger Williams Park a destination for all. A lake with a boat house, a menagerie which evolved into a zoo, a casino and bandstand, a natural history museum and a 'Temple to Music,' all eventually grew into a major attraction for family outings and picnics, provoking an appetite for more such experiences throughout the urban and industrialized northern region of greater Providence and environs.

This was also the age, when south of Providence, both edges of Narragansett Bay boasted shore dinner halls and amusement parks extending from Riverside in East Providence to Rocky Point in Warwick. However, many of these places were beyond the convenience of city dwellers, except for a once a year excursion.

By the time the Public Park Association expressed interest in the Cove site, the old basin, with its promenade, was showing signs of neglect and wear. Instead of adopting the park plan of walks and islands, the City Council opted to fill it in with railroad trestles and terminal sidings. The Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck

Rivers were first canalized then rendered nearly invisible by the welter of bridges and rail yards. With nearly 300 trains a day chugging in and out of Union Station, a strong case was made that the railroad was central to the sustained growth of the city as a whole, and in particular, of the Valley Street industrial corridor which included Brown and Sharpe, Nicholson File, the American Locomotive Company and a string of woolen mills all the way to Olneyville.

At the beginning of the 20th century, as the new State House went up to preside over this land use choice, the orange brick row of buildings now the home of the Rhode Island Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, and lower level restaurants, formed a wall separating the railroad yards from the civic center of Exchange Place. The flatland below the new state house was just too valuable to convert into pleasure grounds for the public, so the thinking of the time went. Central city transportation links by rail and nearby steamship piers along the crescent at the head of Narragansett Bay, now India Park, were too vital to the economy of the 12th largest industrial district in America. Parks in these areas had to wait, and they did for three quarters of a century.

Just as it had once been a fashionable choice to locate lands for cemeteries on the fringe of the colonial towns, it now became fashionable to propose locating lands for public life on the fringes of the metropolitan area. Within a 12 mile radius of the Cove lived nearly three quarters of the state's population in the year 1900. The Public Park Association shifted its attention from the mud flats of the Cove to the broad canvas of streams, hills, and woods of the greater Providence metropolitan area. The Boston Fenway network of parks became its model.

Simultaneously, in 1904, the Rhode Island legislature authorized both a system of paved highways and a ring of state parks. Interestingly enough, the driving forces for both the highway system and the park system were public lobbying groups. For highways it was not so much the owners of autos, as it was the bicycle lobby. A bicycling craze had swept through America in the 1890s, and Rhode Island was no exception. Clubs like the Rhode Island Wheelmen petitioned for paved roads. Similar to the Wheelmen, the Public Park

Association set out the case for parks and recreation. While possibly unintentional, these two programs played off one another well into the next century.

Interestingly enough, however, it was another technology that made the dispersed parks accessible to the majority of the population. By the mid 1890s trolleys went from horse power to electrification, which expanded the reach of public transportation, not only within the City, but far into the countryside as well. By the first decade of the 20th century, trolleys ran from Westerly to Woonsocket. Getting to the ring of parks around Providence for most people was first accomplished by trolleys, although designs trumpeted spokes of a scenic system of boulevards and parkways that were ostensibly to be for automobiles.

From 1904 until 1916 in the pages of the *Board of Trade Journal*, official publication of the Providence Board of Trade and later the Chamber of Commerce, there are several long articles promoting the advantage of public parks and highlighting the early accomplishments of the Metropolitan Park Commission. The most recent scholarly work discussing the rise of the park movement in Rhode Island is John S. Gilkeson, Jr.'s, *Middle Class Providence, 1820-1940*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 224-235; 286-293. The best general introduction to this topic is Lucinda Brockway's *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, 2001.

==== The Metropolitan Park Commission

1904-1934

Even though the Public Park Association lost its battle with the railroad interests, they won the war for public parks. Not only were they the driving force behind the General Assembly's law setting up a state park system under the aegis of a Metropolitan Park Commission, they actually set the agenda for the Commission and drove its activities well into the era of World War I and beyond. As was typical of many new administrative bodies in the so-called Progressive Era of American state government, the new park commission was made up of representatives from the municipalities comprising the park district. The Providence Metropolitan district as defined by the legislation was made up of three cities and six towns. The municipalities represented on the Commission were: the mayors

of Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, the Council Presidents of East Providence, Cranston, Warwick, Johnston, North Providence and Lincoln. Also appointed to the Commission were the Presidents of Brown University, the Providence Art Club, the Chamber of Commerce and the Director of the Rhode Island School of Design. Then there were six members of the Public Park Association. Tellingly, it was all the members of the Park Association which comprised the Commission's Executive Committee. The six members from the Public Park Association framed policy and drove the program. The agenda adopted by the Commission had been gathering momentum for 20 years. Appointed in late summer of 1904 for the attention of the General Assembly in its 1905 session, the Commission rolled out a program of action straight out of the Park Association's pamphlets and tracts of the previous decade.

==== "The Commissioners believe that the universal and marvelous growth of the park movement is due primarily, not so much to the desire to adorn cities or to add to their taxable value, as to the fact that public reservations furnish the only means by which the masses of the people may continue to enjoy the bounties of nature which are indispensable to the mental, moral, and physical well-being of the race."

Second Annual Report, _____
Metropolitan Park Commission, 1906 _____

The Association's delegation to the new Commission included: two prominent local architects - Alfred Stone of the firm of Stone, Carpenter and Willson and Edward F. Ely; engineer John R. Freeman who had built a dam for the Boston public water supply

and another at Yosemite and was also the developer and designer of Freeman Parkway near Blackstone Boulevard; Amasa Eaton, a prominent jurist; and Henry A. Barker, the manager of the Rhode Island Electric Protective Company and founder of the Barker Playhouse. Although listed as assistant Secretary of the Commission, Barker really played the role of executive secretary to the Commission and was one of its leading proponents for years. The chair of the Commission's executive committee was also the President of the Park Association and a prominent physician, Dr. Fenner H. Peckham.

The head of steam they generated and their grass-roots support was key to the first fund-raising that made their ambitions a reality. It took the form of a state-wide bond issue in 1906; the voters approved \$250,000. It was the proceeds from this campaign that enabled the purchase of the Lincoln Woods acres. The purchase of Lincoln Woods was a goal of the Park Association even before the Commission was formed.

Early Additions to the System

Because they were clearly identified with the public interest, some early parkland acquisitions came as gifts to the state after the acquisition of Lincoln Woods: Haines Memorial in East Providence and Barrington, Meshanticut Park in Cranston, and Nausauket Beach in Warwick. From 1894 to 1904 the MPA spent considerable time in the field inventorying locations which had recreational value and were begging to be rescued. When given the authority, and later the money, they acted boldly to secure these sites. To their good fortune, some of the parcels they sought eagerly had scenic value only. Because of awkward terrain or other detracting physical attributes the alternate uses for residential, commercial, or industrial applications were minimal.

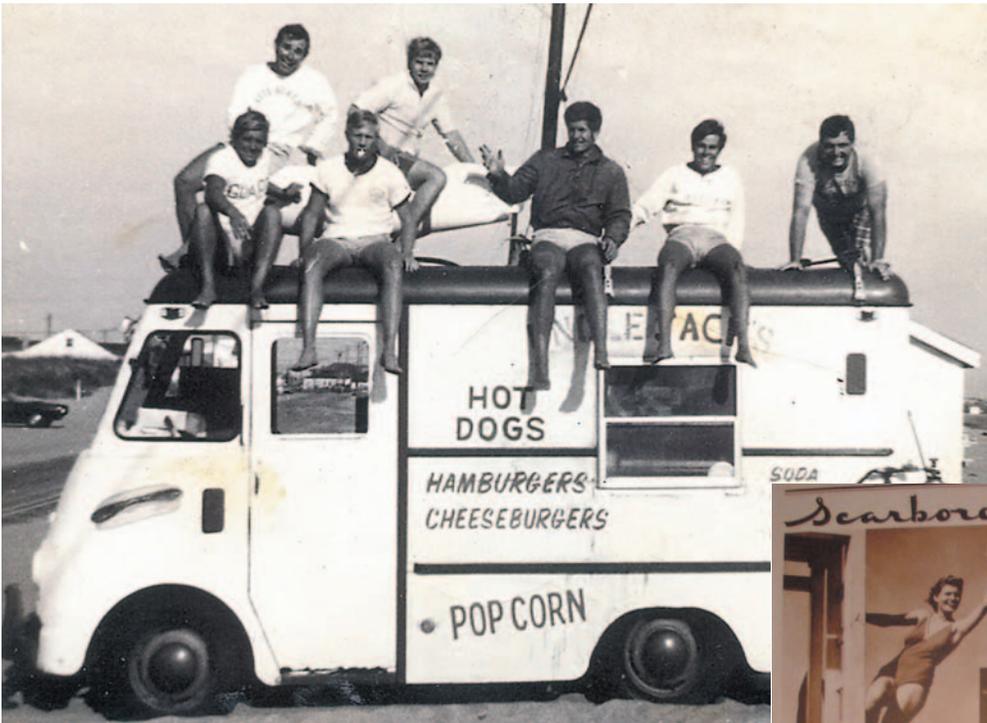
Through their public relations initiatives over the years, the Commissioners arrived in office with a considerable cultivation of the opinion leaders of business, government, church and other civic groups. They had won over many to their point of view that urban areas needed parks as ventilators and air-holes, that parks were the 'lungs of the city.' Their pamphlets and lectures by scientists and health experts convinced

many that industrial pollution of streams and dumping areas bred sickness and increased chances for epidemics. The idea of park areas as a moral alternative to the saloon rang true for many Rhode Islanders on the side of temperance. They also enjoyed support from other groups pushing the value of neighborhood playgrounds such as newly-formed YMCAs and church sports leagues and recreation facilities.

They successfully promoted the idea that the new park system would favor the urban/industrialized part of the state in the form of an arc. It started in the north at the Ten Mile River on the eastern border with Massachusetts and stretched to Valley Falls on the Blackstone.

The river fingers formed by the Moshassuck, West and Woonasquacket streams and related mill ponds were ribs in this fan. Then, the arc went west to the high vantage point of Neutaconkanut Hill and extended to the metropolitan portions of the Pocasset River. This region included in the industrialized villages of Cranston Print Works, Knightsville and Thornton. Further along this southern rim of the arc were the state institutions at Howard and Sockanosset, and the Pawtuxet River which wound east to Narragansett Bay. Within a few years the southern portion of the ring was expanded as far as the Warwick shore of Cowesett Bay, Apponaug, Buttonwoods and Oakland Beach. Again the momentum of this concept was largely attributable to the argument that parks were an effective antidote to the negative results of industrialization and that these destinations were within reasonable distance from the inner city. Focus on this particular area of the state was further justified by the demographic fact that this metropolitan region, so described, encompassed some two thirds of the state's population in 1900. Within this ring were numerous existing ponds and municipal parks, like Roger Williams, as well as a significant set-aside of open spaces like Swan Point Cemetery and Butler Hospital grounds.

For the first third of its 100 year history, then, the new state park program was centered around the design of a ring of parks and reservations surrounding Providence. This system would be served by a series of spoke-like parkways and improved highways. Route 146 (Louisquisset Pike), Veterans Memorial Parkway in East



East Matunuck State Beach

Providence Journal , July 24, 1938



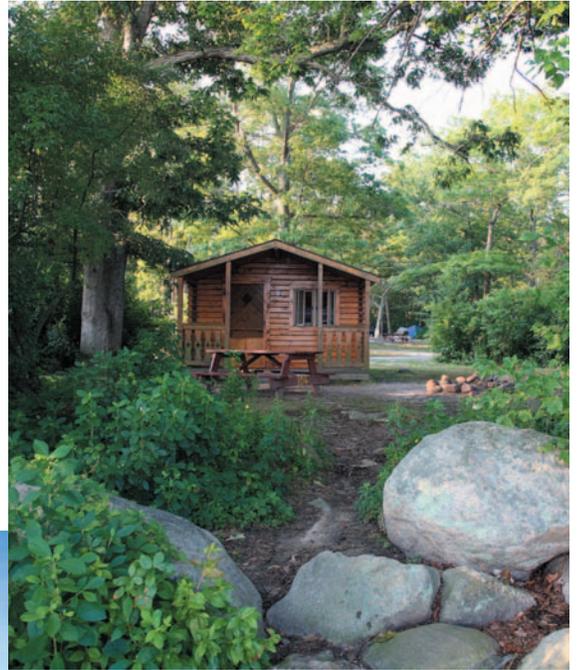
Scarborough State Beach



Goddard Park Clubhouse and Golfers



Lincoln Woods Covered Bridge



Burlingame Campground Cabin



Misquamicut State Beach



Scarborough State Beach



Kelly House Museum, Blackstone River State Park

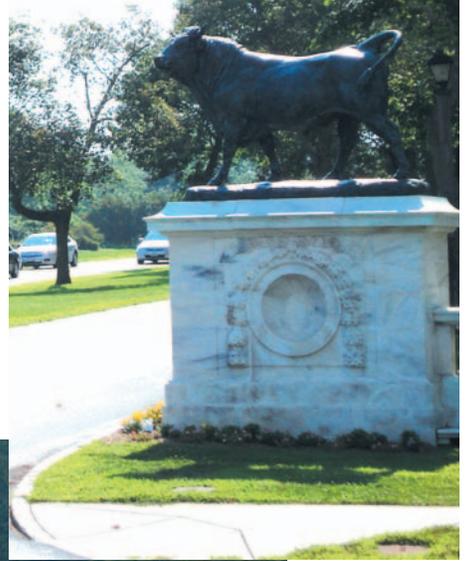
Charlestown Breachway



Colt State Park



Beavertail State Park Naturalist Program



Goddard Memorial State Park Beach, 2006



East Bay Bike Path

Providence, and Narragansett Parkway in Warwick became part of this scenario. The banks of major streams would be improved as leafy water parkways, also part of the hub and spoke design. At the outer circumference of this Metropolitan Park system would be large clusters of parklands, typified by Lincoln Woods, the first of the ‘reservations’ to be put into place. Later in the century, as beaches became the new fringe, or outer circle, the state roads to the beaches would feature a kind of stepping stone path of public picnic groves.

By 1915 and 1916, just prior to World War I, in less than a decade from the purchase of Lincoln Woods, the state parks were already a success, and the pattern of the Commission was clear. Major parks or ‘reservations’ around the rim of the arc were linked to the center of Providence by parkways, and the banks of rivers and streams within the arc were the canoe corridors. So, by World War I, the Ten Mile, the Seekonk, the Moshasuck, the West River, the Woonasquatucket, the Pocasset, the Meshanticut, and the Pawtuxet Rivers were all either employed or proposed as stems or ribs for the internal structure of the Metropolitan Park Commission. On the Ten Mile, for example, were clusters like Slater Park and Hunt’s Mill. Canada Pond, Corliss Park, and Metcalf Field were on or near the West River at Wanskuck. Dyerville and Marino Flats were on the Woonasquatucket. Stillhouse Cove and Arnold’s Neck were at the mouth of the Pawtuxet, and the Pawtuxet Reservation stretched all the way to Warwick Avenue.

The pattern of donations of properties continued to parallel the purchases of the Commission. Herbert Calef of Johnston, a prominent realtor, made donations of Nausauket Beach (1908), Arnold’s Neck (1911), Chepiwanoxet (1911), all in Warwick and sold the Commission Neutaconkanut Hill in Johnston in 1917. Similarly, John M. Dean, a prosperous Providence merchant, developing land in southwestern Cranston, donated Dean Parkway and Meshanticut Lake and Park in a series of gifts, beginning in 1910.

Following World War I, with the increasing popularity and use of automobiles, the original focus on the Providence metropolitan area expanded. Cars put the southern Rhode Island beaches within reach. As more

middle class residents began taking summer rental cottages from Warwick Neck’s Rocky Point south to Point Judith and along Rhode Island’s Atlantic coast, the Park Commission began assembling a string of people’s beaches, too. Up until World War I, a considerable part of that coast immediately abutted South County farms. Shore resorts for wealthy ‘summer people’ cropped up at various locations. When their interest declined, the Park Commissioners acted to save beach front land for the people, perhaps a notion as old as the King’s Charter that guaranteed citizen access to the mean high tide waterline of the state’s waters. During the Depression, the closest many distressed Rhode Island families came to having a ‘free lunch,’ was their right to harvest shell fish for chowder. The Commission acted to preserve that right by acquiring beach front land. Other factors pointed to new beach development. Twin forces of continued industrial pollution and hurricane damage impacted the beaches in the upper Bay. To the existing portfolio of Edgewood and Nausauket came Scarborough in 1925 with additions in the following decade. Sand Hill Cove was added in 1929 and Beach Pond Park in 1936. A high point of this period was the magnificent gift of Goddard Memorial Park, which included beach, golfing, and horseback riding facilities.

The largest addition to the park system during this period was the purchase of Burlingame State Reservation with its more than 3,000 acres of woodland and camp grounds. The acquisition process for Burlingame, named for Edward Burlingame, former chairman of the Board of Commissioners, began in 1930 and lasted until 1934. Burlingame was originally a wildlife preserve but evolved into a park and campground. Other additions at this time included the gift of 36 acres in the Peter Randall Reservation of North Providence (1929), the gift of 200 acres for the Dawley Memorial Park in Richmond (1933), and the gift of 373 acres of Diamond Hill in Cumberland (1936).

By the mid 1930s, having reached statewide proportions, the Metropolitan Park Commission went out of business. Its demise had nothing to do with the completion of its mission, but rather the un-related political reshaping of the structure of Rhode Island state government. On January 1, 1935, in what has since been dubbed “The Bloodless Revolution,” the 80 boards and commissions responsible to the General

Assembly for the business of state government were abolished in favor of ‘departments’ of state. The work of the independent Metropolitan Park Commission was folded into the new Department of Agriculture and Conservation as the Division of Forests, Parks, and Parkways. Instead of being run by appointed commissioners, beholden to the legislature, the parks became an administrative department answerable to the Governor.

Although the administrative change in park management in the ‘Bloodless Revolution of 1935’ had more to do with state politics than the philosophy of ‘open spaces for the public’ which had characterized the work of the Metropolitan Commission, the transition in some ways did mark a milestone in the agenda in the state park system. The Commission’s work, indeed, had been focused on the center of state population within the ten mile radius of downtown Providence. This focus not only addressed rescuing marginal scenic areas that were threatened by industrial blight and urban sprawl, but it also served to get city and factory district dwellers out into fresh air and the countryside. Thus, the agenda centered around simple outdoor pursuits: picnics, team sports, hiking trails and swimming; the initial infrastructure development was fairly easy. Canoeing

along the Ten Mile and the Pawtuxet, particularly near Rhodes, also made the early lists of favorite park pastimes.

Most of the early park-related swimming was in fresh water, but this changed in the late 1920s and into the 1930s. Two external phenomena leading to the growth of state parks influenced this direction. From the time of the Civil War until nearly World War II, Narragansett Bay soared in popularity as a people’s resort. While this time period is justly famous for its Gilded Age fame of Newport, and, to a lesser degree, Narragansett Pier, it was also an era that opened the joys of the Bay to those of modest income as well, thanks to the proliferation of little steamboat companies. As many as two and a half million riders a year were carried to upper Bay shore dinner halls and amusement parks. Until highway development in the 1930s, and decades following, the people’s access to salt water was largely limited to Narragansett Bay, however. Coastal roads and Atlantic beach development, as a definite state policy, were a necessity in order to reach the goal of opening the southern beaches to all.

Until then, from Riverside to Bullock’s Cove in East Providence, from Field’s Point to Rocky Point on the western shore, upper Narragansett Bay was the Coney Island of New England. Carousel and ferris wheel rides, dozens of bathing beaches and as many clambake grounds raised the appetites and fueled the memories of thousands of Rhode Island families.

Less well recognized than the fleets of little steamboats that ferried weekend and holiday city excursionists to places like Crescent Park is the role played by the electric trolleys of the Warwick and Sea View Railroads. The Warwick Railroad was converted from steam to electric cars around 1900. It ran from Auburn in Cranston to Hoxie and then along the Warwick shore communities to Rocky Point, swinging west through Oakland Beach to Buttonwoods. The Sea View ran from East Greenwich through Wickford, down Boston Neck to Narragansett. It was connected at East Greenwich by the United Electric Railroad to downtown Providence. On the east side of the Bay, the Providence, Warren and Bristol Railroad served the same purpose. Today, this right-of-way forms the base for most of the East Bay Bike Path. These transportation systems played an enormous role in popularizing all

Godard Memorial Park

Godard Park - a 472 acre estate in the Potowomut section of Warwick where Cowesett Bay joins Narragansett Bay - was a gift to the MPC that filled the need for a major waterfront property and played into the strategy of taking the park system into the southern part of the state, following the growing appetite of the public for more bathing areas. The park also offered the chance for a public nine-hole golf course as well as bridle trails.

The Godard estate history stretches as far back into the earliest days of Warwick. Originally land in the Greene family, it was confiscated from Richard Greene, a British sympathizer in the American Revolution. Purchased after the war by John Brown of Providence it passed down in the family into the Ives branch. With the marriage of Hope Brown Ives to Henry Grinnell Russell of New Bedford, “The Oaks,” as the estate became known, began to develop into a famous landscaped setting. The US Department of Forestry described it at the time as “the finest example of private forestry in America.” The Russells died without children and the estate went to a cousin, Colonel Robert Hale Ives Godard. The Colonel had been an aide to General Ambrose Burnside in the Civil War. He was a senior manager of the Lonsdale Company of Lincoln and Cumberland, much of whose property now comprises the Blackstone River State Park and Bike Path. In 1927, Colonel Godard’s children, Robert and Madeleine, gave the estate to the Metropolitan Park Commission in memory of their father.

of Narragansett Bay and the southern Rhode Island coast, making our state park bathing beaches some of our most magnetizing recreational attractions. The developments at Goddard, Scarborough, Sand Hill Cove, and later Matunuck and Misquamicut, played off

of this deeply ingrained affection for salt water bathing. The growing popularity of the salt water beaches and their accessibility by means of public transportation shifted the center of recreational gravity away from the metropolitan area towards the shores of South County.

Division of Forests, Parks and Parkways

1935-1952

In the years following the administrative move away from the Metropolitan Park Commission, there were new contexts for the park program. It was set within a larger statewide agenda for public land. While the overall commitment to people's recreation did not change, each successive administrative move added a new cluster of activities alongside the park program. In the sequential redrawing of the departmental boundaries, to the basic structure of parks and recreation, forests and highway picnic groves were included, and there was a new emphasis on the conservation of natural resources.

Another element surfaced in the park landscape after 1935, however. It was the element of opportunism, the seizing of an unplanned event or circumstance and its incorporation into the existing program. In the mid 1930s, this involved the extensive use of the parks to celebrate and commemorate the year 1936 as the 300th anniversary of Rhode Island's founding, the landing of Roger Williams. Public pageantry in the form of re-enactments, Indian encampments, people walking around in Pilgrim suits, documentary films and open air celebrations took place at the larger reservations like Lincoln Woods and Goddard Memorial. Part of this opportunity was the logical adoption of historical commemorations; part of it was just good public relations, self-esteem building, and simple diversion of attention away from the grim realities in that Depression era. Out of a work force of 400,000, more than 100,000 people were out of work. It became another way to use the parks in the public interest.

The addition of an historical component in the parks division scene began in the late 1920s with the Metropolitan Park Commission. The responsibility for caring for series of historical sites and monuments was

transferred to the Division. This began in 1929 with the Indian Burial Ground, the General Stanton Monument and the Stephen Hopkins Monument. It was followed in 1933 by the adoption for management purposes of the Rhode Island Historical Society sites of the Queen's Fort, the Jireh Bull Blockhouse site, and the Great Swamp Fight Site. In 1935 the Oliver Hazard Perry Monument in Newport was added and four years later Devil's Foot Rock and the Bell School House in Richmond completed the picture. There was little recreation possibility at any of these locations. They represented an expanded sense of custodial duty on the part of the state; decades later they would have more likely become the responsibility of the Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Another example of an expanded activity for the parks was the adoption of the Arbor Day exercises involving school children. Arbor Day was an early version and fore-runner of the same environmental impulse that is reflected in Earth Day presently. Essentially its purpose was to encourage the notion of tree-planting among the young.

Another one of the unforeseen opportunities which came along during the Depression was a spate of public works projects in state parks and forests. Under the aegis of several Federal agencies young men were put to work on state lands making new paths, building roads, clearing debris, building fire places, picnic shelters, and solving erosion problems. Thousands of new trees were planted. Hurricanes in 1935 and 1938 also created great needs for public work-type enterprise. The clearance of storm damage to the public lands was extensive. Among the programs coming out of the New Deal to stimulate the economy of the 1930s, the one best suited to public parks needs was the Civilian

Conservation Corps (CCC) which functioned from 1935 to 1942. Ultimately there were five CCC camps in Rhode Island. Organized along military-style lines there were some 900 young men who were processed into the outdoor life of public land management.

One of the larger CCC camps was in Burlingame State Reservation. The upshot of the extra man-power during this era was that Rhode Island's parks received a tremendous infrastructure boost. Living in tents and barracks, the young men not only had a paying job, but also enjoyed the side benefits to their personal health and education. By 1942, the demands for filling military ranks and the needs of wartime industry reduced the Rhode Island unemployment rolls to nearly nil and the CCC camps were closed.

By 1940 the pattern of the parks responding to unanticipated opportunities was well established. When the Park Commission went over to being a department in 1935 and the division expanded to include state forests, there were only two such preserves, George Washington Memorial in Glocester and Wickaboxet in West Greenwich.

During the war, lands originally leased by the United States government for public works projects—Arcadia in Exeter, West Greenwich, Hopkinton and Richmond; Bowdish in Burrillville and Glocester; Carolina in Richmond; and Woody Hill in Westerly - became part of the state forestry program. Following the end of World War II, other Federal property no longer needed for the war was transferred to the state for park use, and in the 1970s, when the Navy presence in Rhode Island was drastically changed for supporting fleets and ammunition storage, the surplus land around the rim of the Bay and on many of the islands was eagerly taken by the state and to form the nucleus of the concept for a Bay islands park system.

In fact, without the transfer of surplus Federal land to park uses, there would have been no major additions to the park system from the late 1930s to the mid 1950s. The gap in parkland acquisition began in 1935 with Beach Pond and Scarborough and lasted until 1954 with the purchase of Galilee (later Salty Brine State Beach), followed shortly by East Matunuck

State Beach (1956) and Misquamicut State Beach (1958).

In an effort to bring some order out of the dispersed small public lands, the state planning board recommended getting rid of scattered, small, inefficient parcels which required frequent maintenance. Such de-accessioning was recommended for Arnold's Neck, Chepiwanoxet, Canada Pond, Corliss and Metcalf Fields, West River, Dyerville, Neutaconkanut Hill, Mashapaug Pond, Pawtuxet River Reservation, Troop C Park, Meshanticut Park, Merino Park, Ten Mile River and Seekonk Reservation. No action was taken by the General Assembly, and the recommendations stood for years. Representatives were reluctant to close services to the voters of their districts. Over decades, however, many of these sites were transferred to the municipalities where they were located. Diamond Hill, for instance, eventually became a park for Cumberland. Turning World War II Park over to Woonsocket is presently at issue today.

==== Picnic Groves in the 1950s ====

Ashaway Grove, Hopkinton
Barber Pond Grove, South Kingstown
Beaver River Grove, Richmond
Bassoqutogaug Grove, Exeter
Blackstone Grove, Cumberland
Brenton's Grove, Narragansett
Bulgarmarsh Grove, Tiverton
Esek Hopkins Grove, Scituate
Exeter Grove, Exeter
Grand Pre Grove, Charlestown
Hannah Robinson Grove, South Kingstown
Jerimoth Hill Grove, Foster
Lehigh Hill Park, Portsmouth
Matantuck Grove, North Kingstown
Miantonomi Grove, Richmond
Mixano Grove, Richmond
Pine Grove, North Kingstown
Ponagansett Grove, Scituate
Post Road Grove, Westerly
Quantumpic Grove, Exeter
Red Brook Grove, Westerly
Richard Smith Grove, North Kingstown
Rocky Hill Grove, East Greenwich
Shady Lea Grove, North Kingstown
Stony Brook Grove, North Kingstown
Tiverton Beach, Tiverton
Waites Corner Grove, South Kingstown
Warwick Downs Grove, Warwick
Washington Grove, Smithfield

The fact that there were no major acquisitions for nearly 20 years is no indication that these decades were ones of status quo. The nature of outdoor recreational infrastructure - paths, trails, picnic benches, fireplaces, beaches, bathhouses, shelters and woodland - requires constant attention, repair and replacement. While new sites were not added, programs were. Recreation became year-round. Beginning with CCC

improvements to Diamond Hill, skiing and sledding became part of the recreation repertoire; at other locations ice skating and ice fishing were introduced. At the conclusion of its stay in the Department of Agriculture, the Division offered bathing at 10 locations, camping at two, golfing at Goddard, and horseback riding at Goddard and Lincoln Woods.

Department of Public Works

1952-1965

When the Parks and Recreation Division became part of the Department of Public Works in 1952, it left Forestry behind. In its association with the Highway Division, however, its long-standing task of maintaining scenic parkways found new support. In exchange, Parks and Recreation found itself maintaining the roadside picnic groves that had sprouted up to serve Rhode Island motorists on their way to the beach. Before the advent of popular back yard swimming pools and outdoor barbecue grills, the beaches and the state parks were the destination of choice for thousands of residents of modest means.

As private automobiles began to compete with public transit as the mode of choice, stopping at a picnic grove on the way to the beach became part of the recreation pilgrimage. Before the arrival of the interstates and limited access highways, the trek to the beach was more time consuming, and the attraction of a road side picnic was as much a necessity as it was a feature of the fun. A handful of the groves still exist.

The mid 1950s, under the Department of Public Works, saw a prioritization to the major parks and reservations: Arcadia, Beach Pond, Burlingame, Casimir Pulaski, Dawley Memorial, Diamond Hill, Fort Greene (picked up as a transfer from the Federal government, and later renamed, Fishermen's Memorial), Haines Memorial, Lincoln Woods and Merino State Park. Such attention bore results in five years of increased public attendance. It was during these years that the first mentions of the role of park police appear in the annual reports.

The 1957 annual report of the Department of Public Works is a useful index to the park program of the 1950s. Among the forward-looking projects first discussed were Fort Adams in Newport, Fort Burnside in Jamestown, East Matunuck Beach in South Kingstown, Second Beach in Middletown, Misquamicut in Westerly, Charlestown Breachway in Charlestown, and Warwick Downs in Pawtuxet. In 1960, the possibility of the World War II Memorial in Woonsocket was broached.

Department of Natural Resources

1965-1975

Few reorganizations of state government reflected the signs of the times as well as the creation of the Department of Natural Resources in 1965. A decade earlier, Rhode Island suffered a long twilight of de-industrialization as one textile company after another either closed or moved southward to be near to the cotton fields and free of the trade union movement.

While Federal efforts, like the CCC, had bolstered the job scene in Rhode Island up to the outbreak of World War II, out of the more than 100,000 Depression era unemployed, only about 60,000 people found work on the government payroll, leaving 40,000, or ten percent of the workforce on the welfare lines. By 1941, as anticipated wartime production picked up there were 21 companies in Rhode Island with a thou-

sand or more workers, and another 47 firms employed five hundred or more. Forty years later, in 1981, only two of the big manufacturers would be left (Brown and Sharpe and Gorham), and only seven of the 49 medium-sized manufacturers would still be in the state, and that as mere subdivisions of national corporations. The jewelry industry of small shops employing 30,000 workers would shrink to about 5,000 workers. World War II, however, temporarily bucked this long-term trend.

During the War, Rhode Island, almost more than any other state, turned virtually all its efforts to the military crisis. Over 100,000 Rhode Islanders served in uniform. Quonset Point was transformed from a little national guard camp to a sprawling port, air field, staging and military manufacturing center, the largest such facility on the Atlantic coast. Nearby in Davisville, the all-purpose prefabricated building, the Quonset Hut, was turned out by the thousands. In Providence, the Walsh Kaiser Shipyard built nearly five dozen Liberty Ships and Combat Loaded Cargo ships in record time. Bristol produced PT boats. Goat Island hosted a torpedo factory. Charlestown Naval Air Station dispatched airplanes to hunt submarines. Woonsocket's U.S. Rubber Company turned out lifeboats and created an entire phantom inflatable fleet of jeeps, guns and tanks to be scattered on the meadows of England to fool the Nazis as to the Allies' intended invasion plans. Machine shops throughout the Blackstone Valley made parts for a 20 millimeter anti-aircraft cannon that was tested at a firing range at Diamond Hill. A dozen of the smaller islands in Narragansett Bay stored munitions and extensive fortifications bristled at the mouth of the Bay to ward off attacks. It was one of the few times since the heydays of industrialization just prior to the development of the Metropolitan Park System that Rhode Island had such high employment.

But then, as in a twinkling of an eye, when the war was over, the jobs were gone. To make matters worse, loss of the basic textile industry which had begun to trickle off to the South in the 1920s and 1930s increased to a steady flow from 1947 to 1951. As the state cast around to replace lost jobs, one of the possibilities surfaced in the form of building oil refineries in Narragansett Bay.

First in Tiverton and later on Jamestown, a huge struggle emerged over the future direction of the Bay - oil refineries vs. recreation. It was the issue which produced Save the Bay. Coupled with the new environmental movement largely inspired by Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, and the new land-use planning concepts like cluster zoning, it was the age of 'Green Acres Programs.' John Chafee was Governor of Rhode Island.

The new department of Natural Resources was comprised of the Division of Agriculture, the Division of Conservation (Forests, Fish and Game), the Division of Enforcement, the Division of Harbors and Rivers, the State Pilotage Commission, the Division of Planning and Development and the Division of Parks and Recreation. By this time, Parks and Recreation supervised 80 areas and 9,000 acres.

Among the highlights of this moment was the opening of Colt State Park. The huge Bristol estate had been recommended as a state park as early as 1935, but was tied up for years in a family trust of the Colt family. Prior to the establishment of a Division of Planning and Development within the department, park plans originated in Statewide Planning. The inclusion of a planning element in Natural Resources accelerated the process of new parks. One such acquisition in 1969 was Snake Den State Park with its Dame Farm in Johnston. With nearly 750 acres of woodland and open fields, the Dame Farm continued to be operated by members of the Dame family as a living history farm. Within the park is another former farm house on Hartford Avenue serving as the headquarters for the Parks and Recreation Division.

New park planning and the reshuffling of the deck of existing facilities was part of a larger process that was going on in Rhode Island in the 1960s. The closing of urban factories, particularly in the industrial neighborhoods of Providence, the housing blight of aging triple deckers, and experiments in public housing led to an out-migration from the city to surrounding suburban towns like Cranston and Warwick. During the years from 1950 to 1970 Providence lost about 90,000 residents to the suburbs, the largest percentage loss of any city in the country.

The introduction of limited access super highways accelerated the move in two ways. Old neighborhoods were demolished to make way for the roads; the roads made it easier to live outside of the city but still get back conveniently for office jobs, entertainment, and retail shopping. As to the latter, it was only a matter of time until the retail center of gravity, once focused along Weybosset and Westminster Streets, followed people to the suburbs, shifting several miles south to the malls at the junction of Routes 95 and 295. All of these trends were incorporated into new plans to expand the park system south of Providence and out into the countryside now more accessible from the circumferential loops like Routes 116, 295 and 102.

Highway upgrades of Routes 1, 2 and 4 also facilitated these changes. The towns of Narragansett, South Kingstown and Charlestown were among those with the highest percentages of population increase. These changes also took into consideration that one of the original purposes of the parks, to provide picnic sites in leafy surroundings was largely replaced in thousands of suburban households by the backyard barbecued and pools.

Another shift of major proportions to the Rhode Island economy and demographics came in 1973 when the Federal government pulled the destroyer fleet, supporting elements and military families out of Newport and Quonset. Rhode Island faced the catastrophic loss of 18,000 jobs – both civilian and military – and about a billion dollar impact on the local economy. While the idea of oil refineries on the Bay was not revived, there was a scurry of other ideas to shore up the economy. Enhancing the Port of Providence by connecting it directly to the hinterland of Hartford by

way of Interstate 84 was one idea entertained for a while; a nuclear power plant was also discussed.

In the end, the loss of the fleet was balanced by the substantial expansion of the Naval War College and related training programs. Parts of Quonset became a jumping off point for off-shore oil exploration and the building of hulls for atomic-powered submarines at Electric Boat. The real change, however, which had occurred during the years of the Department of Natural Resources were the new ideas about protecting the environment, the pro-active stances against the future pollution of the Upper Bay from the discharges of the jewelry industry, and a whole new appreciation for ‘green’ ideas, not an easy transition for a largely blue-collar state with high unemployment.

Part of the reason for the change in attitude was a growing appreciation for the natural assets of the state, cultivated by the opening of new sites like Colt State Park and Brenton Point on Ocean Drive in Newport. As the enlisted men and their families left Newport, some of their place in the economy was taken up by concert-goers at Fort Adams for the Jazz and Folk festivals. The American Revolution Bicentennial, America’s Cup Races and Tall Ships Festivals gave momentum to the hospitality and tourism industries. Another impact was the surprising growth of the historic attractions, like the Mansions of Bellevue Avenue. In the summer of 1949, there was only one tour bus from New York City. By the 1980s there were 2,000 buses to Newport. Scenic values for Rhode Islanders became a matter of civic priority as they consistently and regularly approved open space and recreational bond referendums, ranking right up there with highways as popular expressions of the public will.

Department of Environmental Management

1977-Present

In 1977, the General Assembly created the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) with a broader mission to protect air and water quality as well as the state’s natural resources. The DNR and its divisions became the Bureau of Natural Resources within the new agency.

Annual reports for Parks and Recreation of the last quarter of the 20th century might suggest that public land acquisition and park expansion occurred largely by chance, depending on corporations closing industrial sites or the Navy’s decision to leave unneeded coastal defense stations. A closer reading, however, suggests

“Our design and maintenance goal for the Rhode Island State Parks was always to create for the general public the same scenic woodlands and water vistas that were enjoyed by those who were wealthy enough to afford memberships in private clubs at the beach or in the country.”

Robert Bendict, DEM Director, 1985 – 1991

that while the decisions to make land available may have been made elsewhere, when the opportunity availed itself, Rhode Island had a plan to take advantage of such unforeseen opportunities.

As stated earlier, during World War II, the lower coast line and entrances to Narragansett Bay were fortified. Actually, a more accurate statement would be that existing fortifications were improved, expanded, and updated. With the exception of Fort Adams, most of Rhode Island’s World War II defenses actually originated during the Spanish American War, some four decades earlier. The designs for these defenses began in the 1880s under the leadership of Secretary of War, William C. Endicott, whose name was applied to the system which included Forts Wetherill, Getty, Greble, Kearny and later, Forts Benjamin Church and Nathanael Greene. These installations, at the far extremes of the approaches to Narragansett Bay were able to fire at approaching ships 26 miles away. A Fire Control station on Beavertail governed their operation. Then, between the extremes was Fort Burnside on Beavertail, Fort Varnum, off Boston Neck Road, and Brenton Point on Ocean Drive.

Exactly what made these sites valuable in wartime made them also of importance in the peace that followed: their commanding view of the water. When they were deemed surplus after the war, and offered to the state, their scenic value and military heritage made them attractive for park development. Fort Greene at Point Judith, Forts Burnside and Wetherill on Jamestown and Brenton Point in Newport offer some of the most spectacular water views and have become part of the public’s front yard.

The same idea of regional park development operated within the Bay as well. As island munitions storage facilities aged in the 1970s and 1980s, the need

for coastal defenses dating back to the Spanish American War lost their usefulness. A study, launched by the DNR in 1974, looked into the feasibility of a ‘Bay Island Park System’ that included Northern Jamestown, Fort Wetherill, Beavertail, Plum Beach Light, Fox Island, Gould Island, Rose Island, the north and south end of Prudence Island, as well as the islands of Patience, Hope, Hog, and Dyer. The study also explored potential ferry-connections at Goddard, Haines and Colt State Parks as well as Federal surplus land at Allens Harbor, Quonset and Middletown.

In 1977, the Coastal Resource Center at the University of Rhode Island published a report, *The Bay Islands Park: A Marine Plan for the State of Rhode Island*. Through incremental development, many of the various study reports recommendations have been adopted. This ‘gradualist’ strategy has moved the dial from simply holding the land for future development to development and *some* use by the public. The chief hold back has been the absence of a public ferry system. Up to now, access to most sites has been limited to private boat owners. However, the prospect of an inter-island park system remains strong in the minds of boaters, naturalists, and fishermen.

A more successful execution of plans and implementation has occurred in the network of bike paths. In 1985, anticipating by a year a nation-wide idea of using former railroad rights of way for bikes, this technique was employed in the East Providence portion of the former Providence, Warren and Bristol rail line. The 14.5 mile East Bay Bike Path opened in 1995. Its success was quickly apparent.

Hardly was the striping dry when a similar path was proposed along the banks of the Blackstone River, which in 2009 extends 42 miles to Worcester and will soon connect the East Bay Bike Path at India Point Park. Another path extends from Wakefield to the Narragansett Pier. And a path is under construction along a tresle trail of the Pawtuxet Valley Railroad from the former Brewery site in Cranston to West Warwick and Coventry. What began in the 1980s as several unconnected bike paths, is becoming an integrated system of connecting natural greenways, bike paths and trails radiating out from urban areas into the suburbs, echoing the Metropolitan Park Commission’s idea of the radiating parkways.

An interesting collaboration of two state agencies, the bike paths are built by inter-modal Federal Highway money through the Department of Transportation and operated and maintained by the DEM. The Lincoln portion of the Blackstone Bikeway represents the intermodal concept in a variety of ways. From Lonsdale to Ashton it follows the historic Blackstone Canal, the first critical transportation link enabling mills to thrive along a river that was not navigable due to some 35 dams and waterfalls. A park ranger station in Ashton is the former homestead of Captain Wilbur Kelly, commander of the China Trade ship, Ann and Hope. The trail has scenic vistas and lush plant life. The river is stocked with game fish and has rejuvenated itself from less than half a dozen species to nearly two dozen. Current plans call for the installation of fish ladders at the four lower dams, allowing anadromous species to return to the Valley Falls and Lonsdale marshes. An additional access point was added in 2007 when a highway full-service visitor center on Route 295 opened.

By the late 1980s, the range of public programming at the parks grew to include naturalist programs, historic tours, festivals, farmers' markets and a multitude of special events. Beach bussing for low-income families and improvements to nearly all state parks in 1978 and 1979 also reflect a return to the ambitions of the Metropolitan Park Commission to make state facilities both available and attractive for those without the means to own their own boat on our rivers and streams, or have a slip at a marina on Narragansett Bay.

Hurricanes and other disasters, like oil spills, notwithstanding, repairs and maintenance of sites continued as the parks became a key portion of Rhode Island's tourism industry, the number two employer in the state. Major improvements included: new beach pavilions and parking lots at Scarborough, Misquamicut, Roger Wheeler and East Matunuck; new equestrian facilities at Goddard and Lincoln Woods; upgrades and improvements at Burlingame, Goddard, Lincoln Woods, World War II, Fort Wetherill, Fort Adams and Pulaski; and, construction and enhancements of numerous boat ramps and fishing piers throughout the state.

Attendance at parks and beaches grew from two million visits in the 1990s to over seven million in 2002. One symbol as to how far Rhode Islanders have come in underscoring the public will for preserving open space and setting high environmental standards was the creation in 2001 of the John H. Chafee Nature Preserve at Rome Point, a site once slated for a nuclear power installation.

In the 100 years since Lincoln Woods became the first state park, Rhode Island State Parks have evolved from a visionary plan to a statewide network of historic and magnificent greenspaces and greenways devoted to the public enjoyment of the outdoors. Today, in 2009, the park system and natural resource areas comprise over 123 sites and 60,000 acres. Major challenges include severe budget reductions and persistent staffing shortages, along with a generation of children who are spending more time indoors watching television, playing video games and surfing the internet and are disconnected from nature.

Despite these challenges, the Division of Parks and Recreation, with the support of citizens and partners, continues to maintain and improve the quality of parks. Major renovations underway at Salty Brine State Beach in Narragansett include sustainable, energy efficient features such as a small wind turbine to generate power and solar hot water heaters. The Division also began the Great Outdoors Pursuit to re-unite children and their families with the great outdoors with the hope of building the next generation of environmental stewards who will champion our state parks and forests through the next 100 years.

100 Year Anniversary Time Capsule

On July 23, 2009, a time capsule was buried at Goddard Memorial State Park in celebration of the 100 Year Anniversary of Rhode Island State Parks. It was buried in honor of past, present and future State Park employees who have been or will be entrusted with these precious natural resources.

The capsule is slated to be opened in celebration of the 200th Year Anniversary of Rhode Island State Parks in 2109.

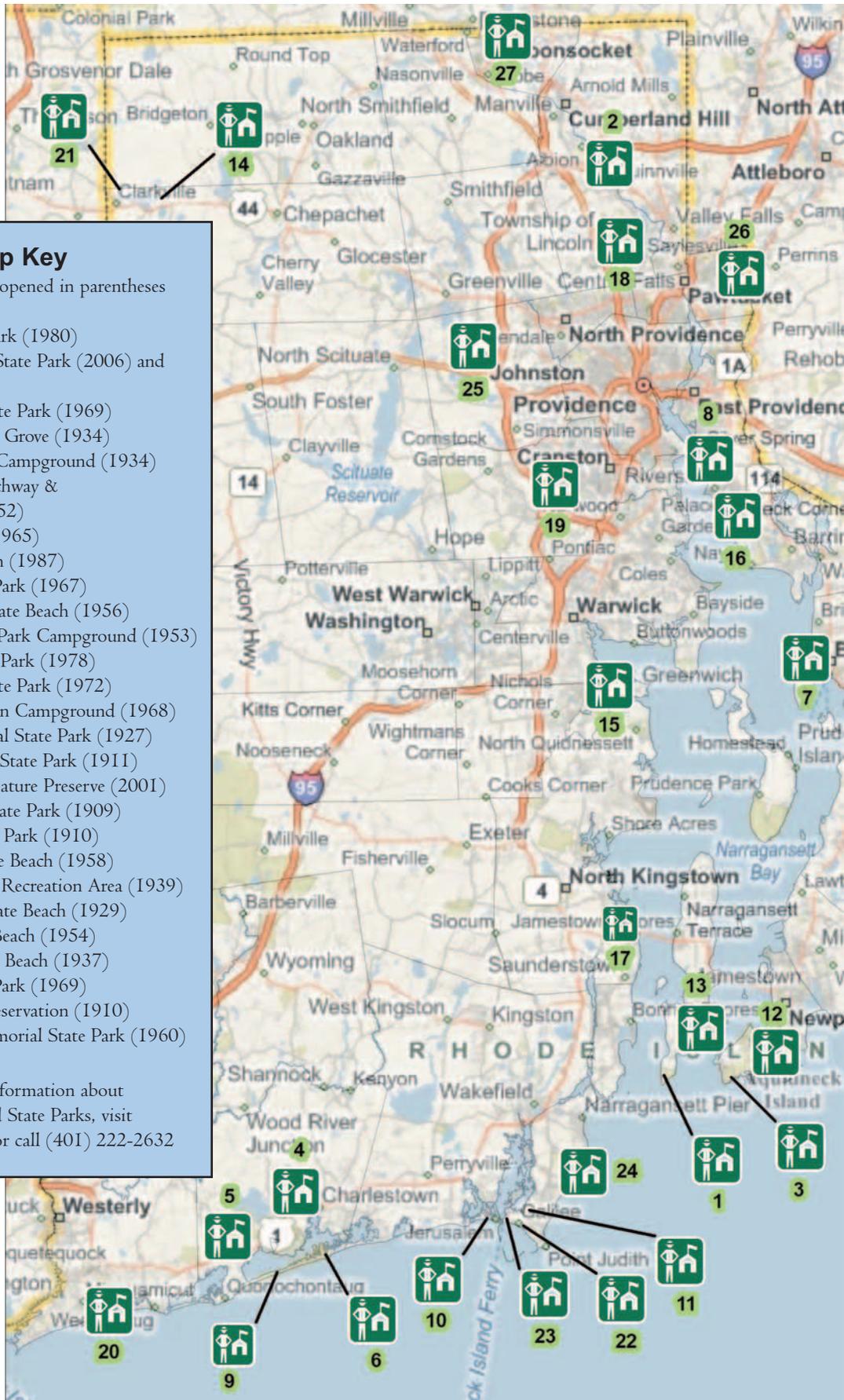
Epilogue

A Century Cycle

While the century chronicle of any institutional enterprise rarely returns to its origins upon its hundredth year anniversary it is curious how it's possible to view the public park movement in a cyclical fashion. A century ago one of the motivations for a parkway system of scenic vistas was the popular pastime of bicycle riding. Today, one of the key elements in the continued enthusiasm for our state parks is the bikeway. Recreational exercise as a part of general community health is as strong a public policy as ever. A century ago, the idea was to get industrial workers and their families out of congested, unhealthful conditions into fresh air, sunshine, and restful, natural settings. The bikeways of today offer the similar incentives; they parallel several of the original parkways. Public beaches scattered along a 400 mile shoreline, once marveled at by Giovanni de Verrazzano, add to the allure.

Interestingly, when the Metropolitan Park Commission issued its original reports and proposals they were replete with warnings and alarms for the need for public action to rescue sites endangered by sprawl, pollution and short-sighted development. With the passage of time, some of their favorite areas which their reports wrote off as irredeemable have staged a spectacular comeback. The very public policy fight that brought the Commission into existence was losing the argument for a 'water place' park at the old cove and train station. A century later it has happened. They lamented the loss forever of the Lonsdale marshes; the same marshes are now intersected by the Blackstone Bikeway. The East Providence shore likewise was lost to them. All of these places are back, in some cases better than ever.

Rhode Island State Parks - 2009



Map Key

Date acquired or opened in parentheses

- 1 Beavertail State Park (1980)
- 2 Blackstone River State Park (2006) and Bikeway (1998)
- 3 Brenton Point State Park (1969)
- 4 Burlingame Picnic Grove (1934)
- 5 Burlingame State Campground (1934)
- 6 Charlestown Breachway & Campground (1952)
- 7 Colt State Park (1965)
- 8 East Bay Bike Path (1987)
- 9 East Beach State Park (1967)
- 10 East Matunuck State Beach (1956)
- 11 Fishermen's State Park Campground (1953)
- 12 Fort Adams State Park (1978)
- 13 Fort Wetherill State Park (1972)
- 14 George Washington Campground (1968)
- 15 Goddard Memorial State Park (1927)
- 16 Haines Memorial State Park (1911)
- 17 John H. Chafee Nature Preserve (2001)
- 18 Lincoln Woods State Park (1909)
- 19 Meshanticut State Park (1910)
- 20 Misquamicut State Beach (1958)
- 21 Pulaski Memorial Recreation Area (1939)
- 22 Roger Wheeler State Beach (1929)
- 23 Salty Brine State Beach (1954)
- 24 Scarborough State Beach (1937)
- 25 Snake Den State Park (1969)
- 26 Ten Mile River Reservation (1910)
- 27 World War II Memorial State Park (1960)

For more information about Rhode Island State Parks, visit www.riparks.com or call (401) 222-2632



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