

# The Landscape Architect's Guide to **BOSTON**

## Franklin Park

### History

**1875** A Park Act is passed by the legislature allowing the city to acquire lands for park purposes within the city of Boston and in cooperation with adjoining cities and towns. A referendum established a municipal commission and Olmsted is contacted informally and is driven through the proposed park sites with the commissioners.

**1876** The Second Report of Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks, the Commissioners recommend the inclusion of West Roxbury Park (Franklin Park) in the Boston Park System.

**1878** Frederick Law Olmsted signs a contract with the Boston Park Commission, but only for the Back Bay Park.

**1881** An appropriation is approved to purchase land for West Roxbury Park, by 1884 a topographic map is completed and Olmsted and John Charles Olmsted do detailed studies. William L. Fischer is appointed as Assistant Landscape Gardener.

**1885** West Roxbury Park is renamed Franklin Park to honor Benjamin Franklin. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and John Charles Olmsted completed "General Plan of Franklin Park". The plan includes extensive text explaining the purpose and intended character and uses of the park and is presented to the Commissioners and Mayor in 1886. The original design for Franklin Park called for active recreational uses in the northern third of the park (Ante Park) and passive recreational uses in the southern two-thirds (Country Park), with the two areas separated by Glen Lane.

**1890** The Commissioners authorize the playing of golf as an experiment within the Country Park.

**1891** Olmsted's Revised General Plan of Franklin Park adds Scarboro Pond in the Country Park to the plan.

**1895** Frederick Law Olmsted retires, but Franklin Park is not complete at the time.

**1896** The park's golf course was completed and opens in 1896. It is the first in the City and the second public course in the nation. and the 18-hole course layout is later redesigned by the world's premier golf architect Donald J. Ross".

**1897** John A. Pettigrew is appointed Superintendent for the Boston Parks and he embarks on major changes to the Olmsted plan. He turned the "Greeting" into a "Glade" and he carried through a vigorous program of tree thinning in all the parks, but especially in the Wilderness area of Franklin Park. He changed the golf course into two courses; one 9 holes for regular play and one 6 holes for beginners. He continued his controversial changes until his death in 1912, even after the Board of Aldermen held an investigation of the Park Department.

**1900** John Charles Olmsted tours the park system with Pettigrew and writes a report extremely critical of his changes.

**1910** Arthur A. Shurcliff is appointed landscape architect to the Boston Park Department and prepared a preliminary plan for a zoological garden.

**1912** Arthur A. Shurcliff designed and completed the Franklin Park Zoo. Olmsted's 1891 plan included a naturalistic area for native animals, rather than a traditional zoo. The new zoo represented a major departure from Olmsted's original plans, and included exotic animals. Shurtleff's design for the zoo was modest and was intended to be in harmony with key elements of the Olmsted plan, such as a half-mile long mall called "the Greeting" and Olmsted's concept of the Anti Park and Country Park. The zoo was managed by the Boston Parks Department and was free to all.

**1924** Arthur A. Shurcliff designed and installed a Rose Garden, and in 1930 he constructed a Rock Garden near the Rose Garden. Circuit Drive was opened for all types of traffic and very quickly became a cut through road.

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**1925** Arthur A. Shurcliff redesigned the drives around Peabody Circle. After the war many changes begin to happen. The Playstead Overlook Shelter burns in 1948 and in 1949 the George Robert White Schoolboy Stadium is built in the Playstead. This is a 10,000-seat Art Deco stadium for championship events involving Boston Public Schools and serves as a home field for schools which do not have their own fields.

**1954** The Lemuel Shattuck is built on 42 acres of the parkland.

**1958** The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) took over the zoo and installed fences and gates separating it from the park function and charged admissions. The Children's Zoo opened in 1962, and by 1970 the Boston Zoological Society assumed some control of the Zoo.

**1970-1973** The Elma Lewis Playhouse-in-the-Park holds summer performances on the Playstead Overlook and ruined shelter.

**1971** Olmsted's Emerald Necklace including Franklin Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in 1980 it is designated a Boston Landmark.

**1973** A new master plan replaced Olmsted's "Greeting" with zoo exhibits and closed the rose garden designed by Shurtleff.

**1980** Weinmayr Associates prepared a Revised General Plan for Franklin Park and an accompanying Report. Between 1981 and 1984, two phases of improvements are constructed in accordance with the Weinmayr plan.

**1984** Extensive renovations to the Children's Zoo are completed and a major building with an African theme opens in 1989.

**1984-1989** "The Franklin Park Master Plan" Vol. 1 was prepared by the Halvorson Design Partnership under the Department of Environmental Management (DEM),

Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program for the benefit of the City of Boston, Town of Brookline, and the Metropolitan District Commission, the municipalities and the state agency entrusted with the care and control of the Emerald Necklace Park System including the parks and parkways. In 1991 the master plan was published.

**1991** One hundred years after the Olmsted Plan, Franklin Park Zoo's management was handed over to a private, non-profit corporation and the 72- acre zoo now operates independently of the City of Boston Franklin Park.

**1983-1998** More projects are completed, such as the Valley Gates renovation, rehabilitated golf course, maintenance yard, cross country course, Schoolmaster Hill, and new golf clubhouse play lots.

**2000-2012** A bike lane is added to Circuit Drive and discontinued drives are opened to bikes, a Franklin Park Transit Study is prepared by Howard Stein Hudson to evaluate short- and long-term recommendations for pedestrian and vehicular circulation and to identify opportunities to make the park more accessible. Two play lots are rehabilitated, The Gates at the Greeting are removed by the Zoo, the Playstead fields are rehabilitated as is the cross-country trail, and several minor pedestrian entrances are upgraded.

#### Resources:

[The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#)

[Franklin Park Coalition](#)

[Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#)