

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

Olmsted Park

History

1875 A Park Act was 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.

1880 Brookline voters at town meeting approved the formation of a park commission, which, according to the enabling legislation of 1875, could act in cooperation with Boston to take land and plan a park that would be located in both municipalities. The Park Commissioners were elected by direct vote. The first three were Theodore Lyman, Francis W. Lawrence and Charles Sprague Sargent. Sargent remained a Commissioner until his death in 1927.

1881 Olmsted's first "Suggestion for the Improvement of Muddy River" and plan was published in the City of Boston in the Park Commissioners' Report for 1880. It was also published as the "Report of Committee on Muddy River Improvement," in Town of Brookline, Reports for the Year ending January 31, 1881. In Olmsted's plan, the irregular course of the Muddy River is changed to a winding stream. Later in 1881, the "General Plan for the Sanitary Improvement of Muddy River," drawn by John Charles Olmsted, is published by the Boston Park Commission in a special report. This plan is an elaboration of Olmsted's earlier "Suggestion." By this time, it had become apparent that the Muddy River would have to follow the old Boston/Brookline line. This plan was approved by both Boston and Brookline, but the appropriations were low.

1890 Olmsted published a substantially altered plan, "Outline of Revised Plan for the Parkway and Sanitary Improvement of Muddy River," which proposed a change in the boundary between Boston and Brookline and explained that, as with the Back Bay Fens, sanitary issues are particularly pressing.

1892 Olmsted published the 1890 revised plan for the

Muddy River as "Plan of the Parkway between Muddy River Gate House and Jamaica Pond." Included on the plan for Olmsted Park was the creation of Leverett Pond from a swamp.

1893 The "Natural History" pools were created adjacent to Ward's and Willow ponds for the Boston Society of Natural History's educational programs.

1890-1895 The footbridges were designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, from studies by the Olmsted firm and other smaller culverts/bridges with Roxbury puddingstone walls were designed and constructed by the Olmsted firm with construction of paths and plantings on both the Boston and Brookline sides of the Muddy River essentially complete. Olmsted retires in 1895.

1899 The natural history pools were filled, since the Boston Society of Natural History was unable to raise the funds to use them as intended for a zoological garden with aquatic birds and animals. Only one remains today west of Willow Pond and is the home of a rare fish the three-spine stickleback.

1900 The Boston Park Commission renamed the Leverett Pond section of the Muddy River Improvement and Jamaica Park as "Olmsted Park." Today only the Upper Muddy section still goes by that name.

1965 The Massachusetts District Commission built a skating rink, the Kelly Rink, with parking lot west of Willow Pond in meadow within the City of Boston.

1960s Two ball fields and a parking lot were placed on the meadow west of Leverett Pond by the City of Boston. The field was named Daisy Field and the fields today are lighted.

1971 Olmsted Park was added to the National Register of Historic Places under the Olmsted System nomination and approval.

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1984-1989 The Emerald Parks Master Plan for Back Bay Fens, The Riverway, Olmsted Park and Jamaica Pond was prepared by the Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture 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 2001 the master plan was published.

1986-1997 A series of projects were completed in Olmsted Park by both Brookline and Boston in accordance with the Master Plan, including bike path construction (in conjunction with Jamaica Pond), pedestrian path renovation, and parking lot construction at Daisy Field, rehabilitation of the Leverett Pond shoreline at the Daisy Field outlet and installation of a boardwalk at Ward's Pond southern edge. This boardwalk was repaired in 2012 with recycled plastic.

1997 The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) removed the Kelly Rink and parking lot and recreated the Olmsted meadow on the site and Brookline under Phase I of Riverdale Parkway installed a new bike and pedestrian pathway system, a gated parking area. Additionally, they upgraded benches, trash receptacles and tree and shrub plantings from Chestnut Street to Willow Pond Road.

1998 Boston restored the Leverett Cove Bridge and supporting wetland and upland planting. This existing cove was filled at some time in the 1900s and today's changed lower water level precludes full restoration by Boston.

2000 Brookline under Riverdale Parkway Phase II & III converted the parkway to a bikeway, installed a gated parking area, restored the Allerton Overlook, restored the existing pedestrian path, and upgraded benches, trash receptacles and tree and shrub plantings from Willow Pond Road to Route 9.

2007 Olmsted's "Babbling Brook" that connects Wards to Willow Pond was restored on the Brookline side.

Resources:

[Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#)

[The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#)