

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

The Riverway

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 have acted 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 are 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 was 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 publishes a substantially altered plan, "Outline of Revised Plan for the Parkway and Sanitary Improvement of Muddy River," that 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."

1890-1895 The footbridges and bridle path bridge were designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, from studies by the Olmsted firm. By 1895 Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge had designed and constructed the Longwood Avenue Bridge, the largest bridge in the Muddy River Improvement with construction of paths and plantings on both the Boston and Brookline sides of the Muddy River essentially complete. Olmsted retired in 1895.

1958-1959 The City sells the first link of the Muddy River Improvement to Sears Roebuck for use as a parking lot. The actual site of the Sears parking lot was a lovely lagoon crossed by a handsome stone bridge, which carried the parkway to Park Drive in the Fens. Both bridge and lagoon were buried.

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

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.

1986-2000 a series of projects are completed at the Riverway by both Brookline and Boston in accordance with the Master Plan, including restoration of the Island Bridges and landscape, the Chapel Street and Bridle Path bridges and landscape as well as, the Brookline Avenue Bridge, and Boston re-roofed the round house and restored the stone dust pedestrian path from Park Drive to

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

The Riverway

History

Netherlands Road.

1998 The former Sears parking lot was transferred to City of Boston Parks Department ownership. The Sears Roebuck Company bore the cost of removing the parking lot and creating a lawn area as part of the redevelopment of the former Sears building by a new owner.

1999 The proposed scope of work of the Emerald Necklace Environmental Improvements Master Plan (ENF) for the restoration of the Muddy River from Ward's Pond to the Charles River included mitigating flood hazards, improving water quality, historic landscape preservation, and enhancing habitat. The estimated cost for these improvements was \$93 million. The first phase of construction of the dredging and day lighting of the Muddy River included the Sear's parking lot to Louis Pasteur. This project is currently under construction by the Army Corp of Engineers with projected completion in 2014 will again create the Olmsted lagoon.

Resources:

[Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#)

[The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#)