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# ROCK CREEK PARK

## AN ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

by

Barry Mackintosh





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Barry Mackintosh


History Division  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

1985



"One of the largest urban parks in the world, this wooded preserve contains a wide range of natural, historical, and recreational resources in the midst of metropolitan Washington, D.C."

--Index, National Park System  
and Related Areas, 1982



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## PREFACE

The late Jim Redmond had a deep appreciation for the park he superintended. He valued its importance as a natural oasis in the nation's capital, and he also valued its historical significance. Looking forward to its centennial in 1990, he spoke to me several times about nominating Rock Creek Park to the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1983, shortly before Jim's death, Regional Director Jack Fish of the National Park Service's National Capital Region asked if I could do an administrative history of the park. The history was needed to provide background for a park general management plan. It could also serve as documentation for a National Register nomination, if responsible managers and staff in the park and regional office wished to pursue that course.

The resulting product, like other park administrative histories, relates how Rock Creek Park was envisioned and established and how it has been managed to the recent past. Unlike some such histories, this one does not attempt to treat every aspect of the park story, and it does not exhaust those aspects it does treat. It is a broad overview that focuses on some of the more prominent features and attributes of the park. My hope is that more readers will be attracted by its relative brevity and informed by its selective nature than will be disappointed by its omissions and inattention to detail.

During my research I enjoyed the excellent assistance of Bob Kvasnicka and his colleagues in the Natural Resources Branch of the National Archives, where I combed the records of the Rock Creek Park Commission,

the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, and the National Capital Parks office of the National Park Service. At the Park Service's National Capital Regional Office, I found recent files and obtained older ones ordered from the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. Files at the park headquarters and the Nature Center proved valuable, as did the information, aid, and review comments I received from the park staff--notably Georgia Ellard, Joe Lawler, Bob Ford, Peggy Fleming, and Dave Smith.

My two severest critics, Chief Historian Ed Bearss and Gay Mackintosh, scrutinized my draft and caught more errors than I had thought remained. To them as to those mentioned above, I am grateful.

Barry Mackintosh  
June 1985

## WHENCE THE PARK

### The First Vision

The first official interest in creating Rock Creek Park stemmed from dissatisfaction with the White House.

By the 1860s the executive mansion, less hallowed by tradition than it would later become, was judged to have serious shortcomings. As yet unexpanded by wings, the house accommodated offices as well as rooms of state and living quarters, yielding presidents and their families little privacy. The pestilential Washington City Canal along present-day Constitution Avenue disgorged its wastes in the shallows of the Potomac River directly below the mansion grounds (reclamation of the Potomac flats to fill in the Washington Monument grounds and create Potomac Park was a generation away). To escape this crowded and unhealthful situation, President Abraham Lincoln often removed to a cottage at the Soldiers Home, north of the Capitol beyond the old Washington City limits.

On June 25, 1866, the United States Senate directed its Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds "to inquire whether a tract of land of not less than three hundred and fifty acres, adjoining, or very near this city, can be obtained for a park and site for a presidential mansion, which shall combine convenience of access, healthfulness, good water, and capability of adornment." Sensing that it may have overly limited its options, the Senate passed another resolution five days later lowering the minimum size to 100 acres. Then realizing the need for professional

help, on July 18 it authorized the committee "to employ a practical landscape gardener or topographical engineer to examine the different tracts of land offered to the committee" and to report on their suitability for the desired purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Sen. B. Gratz Brown of Missouri, chairman of the Public Buildings and Grounds committee, asked Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to detail a Corps of Engineers officer to the task. The assignment fell to Maj. Nathaniel Michler, a West Point graduate who had been breveted brigadier general for Civil War service. After examining "the many beautiful localities to be found in the vicinity of the capital, and having caused an accurate and detailed survey of its environs to be made," Michler submitted his report to the committee on January 29, 1867.<sup>2</sup>

Departing from the apparent intent of the Senate, Michler chose to separate the subjects of the presidential mansion site and the park. The mansion should be a secluded retreat, he suggested, whereas the park should be generally accessible. His primary interest was evident from the greater attention and eloquence he lavished on the park proposal, beginning with his brief for urban parks in general:

Where so much has been written on so interesting a feature to any large city as that of a park, and where the necessity of public grounds, either for the sake of healthful recreation and exercise for all classes of society, or for the gratification of their tastes, whether for pleasure or curiosity, has become apparent to every enlightened community, it would seem to be unnecessary for me to dilate further upon the matter, to say nothing of the natural or artificial beauties which adorn a park, and so cultivate an appreciative and refined taste in those who seek its shades for the purpose of breathing the free air of Heaven and admiring nature. It certainly is the most economical and practical means of providing

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<sup>1</sup>36 Congressional Globe 3379, 3502, 3894.

<sup>2</sup>Letter, Michler to Sen. B. Gratz Brown, Senate Misc. Doc. 21, 39th Congress, 2d Session, Feb. 13, 1867.

all, old and young, rich and poor, with that greatest of all needs, healthy exercise in the open country.

To accomplish these ends there should be a spaciousness in the extent of the grounds, not merely presenting the appearance of a large domain, but in reality possessing many miles of drives and rides and walks.... There should be a variety of scenery, a happy combination of the beautiful and picturesque--the smooth plateau and the gently undulating glade vieing with the ruggedness of the rocky ravine and the fertile valley, the thickly mantled primeval forest contrasting with the green lawn, grand old trees with flowering shrubs. Wild, bold, rapid streams, coursing their way along the entire length and breadth of such a scene, would not only lend enchantment to the view but add to the capabilities of adornment. While nature lavishly offers a succession of falls, cascades, and rapids to greet the eye, as the waters dash through some romantic dale, the hand of art can be used to transform them into ponds and lakes as they gently glide through the more peaceful valleys.... What so useful as an abundance of water, or so ornamental when converted into fountains and jets to cool the heated atmosphere? It furnishes, also, opportunities for the engineer and artist to display their taste in constructing ornamental and rustic bridges to span the stream.<sup>3</sup>

The valley of Rock Creek in the District of Columbia, Michler found, lent itself admirably to park treatment:

All the elements which constitute a public resort of the kind can be found in this wild and romantic tract of country. With its charming drives and walks, its hills and dales, its pleasant valleys and deep ravines, its primeval forests and cultivated fields, its running waters, its rocks clothed with rich fern and mosses, its repose and tranquility, its light and shade, its ever-varying shrubbery, its beautiful and extensive views, the locality is already possessed with all the features necessary for the object in view. There you can find nature diversified in almost every hue and form, needing but the taste of the artist and the skill of the engineer to enhance its beauty and usefulness; gentle pruning and removing what may be distasteful, improving the roads and paths and the construction of new ones, and increasing the already large growth of trees and shrubs, deciduous and evergreen, by adding to them those of other climes and countries.<sup>4</sup>

In his further description of the valley, Michler elaborated on how its natural qualities might be improved upon:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

Rock creek winds for more than four miles through the centre of the proposed grounds, receiving at convenient points the waters of the Broad and Piney branches, and several smaller tributaries. For a short distance it courses through a narrow but beautiful valley, then wildly dashes for a mile over a succession of falls and rapids, with a descent of some eight feet, the banks on both sides being bold, rocky, and picturesque; then passes again through narrow valleys or between high, bluff banks. At many points the creek is capable of being dammed, thus forming a series of lakes and ponds for useful and ornamental purposes. The many deep ravines setting in towards it can furnish romantic walks and quiet retreats for the pedestrian. The larger part of the ground is thickly wooded, and capable of great adornment. Here we find the several varieties of oak, the beech, the locust, the mulberry, the hickory, the sassafras, the persimmon, the dogwood, the pine, with a great many shrubs, vines, and creepers.... Beautiful vistas, artistically arranged, can be cut through them, exhibiting distant points of landscape, while charming promenades can invite the wanderer to seek cooling shades. Nature has been so rich in her vegetable creation that the plan of transplanting trees of large growth, which has been adopted in most of the modern parks, will be unnecessary.... Here and there some prominent point offers commanding views of the surrounding country, where observatories can be located, conservatories built for exotic plants, and geometrical flower-gardens planted. Back from the stream some level plateaus extend, which can be appropriately employed for zoological and botanical gardens, grounds for play and parade, and many other useful purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Michler urged swift action to acquire sufficient land before it became occupied by "costly suburban villas." He outlined two park alternatives. The first, embracing 2,540 acres, would include several of the Civil War defenses of Washington, "which have become historical, and from the parapets of which extensive views can be had." He estimated the acquisition cost at \$508,000. The second, "[i]n case my recommendations should be considered too extravagant," encompassed 1,800 acres at an estimated cost of \$360,000. Another \$100,000 would be needed initially for enclosing the grounds, improving and repairing existing drives and

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 3

walks, and constructing others.<sup>6</sup>

Senator Brown immediately introduced legislation to acquire a tract "along and adjacent to Rock creek embraced within the limits and designations of the survey made by Brigadier General N. Michler...for the purposes of a public park, free to all persons under such regulations as to police and government as may by proper authority be established." The bill would constitute a committee of Maj. Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, Maj. Gen. Horatio G. Wright, and Michler to negotiate with the landowners and make purchase agreements. The agreements would be subject to congressional approval. The bill provided for no appropriation (nor did it make any mention of a presidential mansion site).<sup>7</sup>

Brown brought his bill to the Senate floor on February 19. "The character of the ground around and adjacent to [Rock Creek] is exactly suited to the purposes we desire," he told his colleagues. "It has running water; it has rugged hills; it has picturesque scenery; it has abundance of varied forest timber; it has a native undergrowth blushing with beauty. It has the tangled vine and the clustering wild-flower, and the quiet mosses gray with age, and indeed a thousand imprints of native adornment that no hand of art could ever equal in its most imitative mood."<sup>8</sup>

Rising to still greater heights of rhapsody, Brown proclaimed the special value of the proposed park to congressmen and government officials:

Those who, for any length of time, have undergone the wear and tear of such life as this, who have all their energies run to brain, and all their souls fused into politics, need not be told that anything which holds out hope of either mental or passional relief is seized

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4, 7.

<sup>7</sup>S. 549, 39th Congress, Jan. 28, 1867.

<sup>8</sup>37 Congressional Globe 1578.

upon with avidity. How necessary, then, that all the ennobling influences of nature--the scenic splendor of shifting views, the life and animation of gay concourse, the uprisen majesty of the forest, the intoxicating gladness of spring flowers, the laugh of the heavens through playing branches, the shimmer of the waters, the song of birds, graceful forms, inspirations--should be so abundantly grouped around this nation's capital.... I would have you, Senators, inaugurate a public park that shall have no rival anywhere for beauty or extent or ornamentation, as it will have none for the illustrious character gathered from a whole continent in the after time to wisely rule our republic from this center of its power.

Like Michler, Brown counseled haste to acquire the land before its increase in value, "now that the uncertainty with which sectional discord and disunion so long threatened the stability of the capital has passed away." The cost would be less than \$500,000, he stated--"a mere trifle of expenditure for 'a thing of beauty' which will prove 'a joy forever.'"<sup>9</sup>

Not all were moved by Brown's appeal. "We know very well how much below the actual costs of lands that the Government proposes to buy are the estimates that are made beforehand of what they will cost....," Sen. Samuel J. Kirkwood of Iowa retorted. "I think these lands will not cost us much less than a million dollars to begin with, and God knows how many millions it will cost to improve them.... Let us wait until the country is in a more flourishing condition before we do it."<sup>10</sup>

Although the Senate passed the bill the next day by a vote of 28 to 7, Kirkwood's position prevailed. The House tabled the bill in the last hours of the 39th Congress on March 2.<sup>11</sup> B. Gratz Brown did not return to the next Congress, and the measure was not reintroduced by another champion.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 1579.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 1620, 1405.



### Renewal of Interest

Not until 1883 was sufficient interest generated to revive the Rock Creek park proposal. In that year Capt. Richard L. Hoxie, assistant to the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, advocated a park embracing all the Rock Creek region in the District north of the Washington City limits, east of Tenleytown Road (present Wisconsin Avenue), and west of Rock Creek Church Road. Hoxie's plan had a utilitarian basis: the need to increase the city's water supply. To do this, he proposed a major dam across the creek just above Georgetown; it would create a four-mile-long reservoir submerging the portion of the valley later occupied by the National Zoological Park.<sup>12</sup>

That November three prominent civic leaders, William Wilson Corcoran, Justice William Strong, and Josiah Dent, communicated their support of a Rock Creek park to the District commissioners. Their letter recalled Michler's report and the early interest it had stimulated and cited the benefits to New York from Central Park, to Philadelphia from Fairmount Park, and to Baltimore from Druid Hill. Anticipated objections were countered with the "worthless lands" argument often used by early park proponents:

A large part of the grounds needed, though admirable for a public park, is worthless for agricultural or building uses, and most of it is undesirable for residences, in its present condition; but the establishment of the park would add greatly to the value of the lands surrounding it, would make them very desirable for rural residences, and, in fact, would prove a bonus to the owners of such surroundings. It may be presumed, therefore, they would sell to the city such portions of their lands as may be included in the

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<sup>12</sup>Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, Operations from the Establishment of the Park, September 27, 1890, to June 30, 1912 (Washington, 1912), p. 4.

park for a very moderate price, or even donate them....<sup>13</sup>

The correspondents urged the commissioners to seek congressional authority for park establishment, and they and others of their class lobbied Congress directly. On June 17, 1884, Sen. Thomas F. Bayard of Delaware introduced a joint resolution "upon the recommendation and continued application of gentlemen well known to us all, large property owners, men of intelligence, of character, and cultivation in this city...." Explaining the background of the Michler survey, he said that Frederick Law Olmsted had been enlisted to help revive interest and had prepared the preamble of the resolution. It asserted that Rock Creek valley was ill-adapted to the extension of city streets, which would destroy "passages of scenery of extraordinary interest and public value."<sup>14</sup>

Bayard's resolution called for appointment of a joint committee of three senators and five House members. They would review the Michler report, make further surveys under the direction of the Secretary of War, and report back to the next session of Congress. Wholly tentative in nature, the resolution provided for no appropriation and no further action. It passed the Senate without difficulty, but as with the Brown bill 17 years before, the House did not act.<sup>15</sup>

Park advocates tried for more decisive action in the next Congress. On June 2, 1886, Sen. John J. Ingalls of Kansas, chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, introduced legislation "[t]o

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<sup>13</sup>Rock Creek National Park: Information for the Public in Relation Thereto (Washington: Judd and Detweiler, 1889), pp. 9-11.

<sup>14</sup>S.J. Res. 94, 48th Congress; <sup>15</sup> Congressional Record 5228-29.

<sup>15</sup>Congressional Record 5387, June 20, 1884.

authorize the Commissioners of the District of Columbia to condemn land on Rock Creek for the purposes of a park, to be called Rock Creek Park." The bill would lay off a park not exceeding 1,000 feet wide from Massachusetts Avenue to the District line. The cost would be ascertained by agreements with landowners and condemnation proceedings where necessary; the District commissioners would then report to Congress so that it could decide whether to appropriate the necessary funds. The Senate again approved the bill, which was then referred to the House and recommended by its District committee.<sup>16</sup> But again it was kept from a vote on the House floor.

Senator Ingalls resurrected the measure in the following Congress, and Rep. Jonathan H. Rowell of Illinois introduced a companion bill on January 9, 1888. As reported by the House District committee, Rowell's bill would direct the District commissioners to survey and plat the proposed park. The survey map would be recorded and the land condemned, but no money would be paid unless and until appropriated by Congress. If Congress did not act within two years, all proceedings would be voided.<sup>17</sup>

Rep. John J. Hemphill of South Carolina, House District committee chairman, brought the bill to the floor on August 13. He and other proponents declared the proposed condemnation procedure necessary to forestall undue increases in land prices as a result of government interest. They argued that the measure was in effect a fact-finding bill that placed no obligation on Congress should it judge the expense too great.

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<sup>16</sup>S. 2584, 49th Congress; <sup>17</sup>Congressional Record 6105, 7306, 7388; H. Rept. 3820, 49th Congress, Jan. 31, 1887.

<sup>17</sup>S. 588, 50th Congress, Dec. 13, 1887; H.R. 3328, 50th Congress; H. Rept. 2983, 50th Congress, July 20, 1888.

Minimizing the probable cost, they suggested that certain landowners would be willing to donate to the park.

Others were unpersuaded. Their reaction reflected the long-standing hostility to District expenditures of congressmen whose distant constituents benefited little from taxpayer-financed local improvements. "If I gave an opinion I should say it was clearly, very clearly, a plan to commit this Congress to a proposal to expend perhaps a million dollars, more or less..., to secure this creek bed and banks, inclose, protect, and beautify them at the expense of the Government, the primary result being to largely enhance the value of the speculative holdings of the owners of real estate thereabout..., " said Rep. Lewis E. Payson of Illinois. Opponents burdened the bill with so many weakening amendments that Hemphill requested and obtained unanimous consent to return it to his committee for revision.<sup>18</sup>

Undiscouraged, the local interests behind the park project redoubled their efforts. That Thanksgiving Day, Charles Carroll Glover, a prominent Washington banker, Capt. Thomas W. Symons, assistant to the District engineer commissioner, and other civic leaders rode through Rock Creek valley. A few days later at Glover's house, Crosby S. Noyes of the Evening Star newspaper presided over a strategy session. There followed a mass meeting at the Atlantic Building on January 11, 1889. Glover, Noyes, F. A. Richardson, George E. Lemon, B. H. Warner, and A. T. Britton were appointed a permanent executive committee to lobby for passage of park legislation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>19 Congressional Record 7494-7502.

<sup>19</sup>William V. Cox, Notes on the Establishment of a National Park in the District of Columbia and the Acquirement and Improvement of the Valley

On January 14 Hemphill introduced a new bill, which his committee reported favorably to the House 12 days later. In addition to the aesthetic argument for the park, the report cited the health hazard that would arise if development and its attendant sewage were not kept away from Rock Creek. The new bill, it noted, set a 2,500-acre limit on land acquisition and specified the same condemnation process recently adopted for obtaining the Library of Congress site across from the Capitol. The House declined to consider the bill, however, and the Senate took no action on Ingalls' bill, reported from committee there on February 15. Hemphill tried but failed to attach his park measure to another pending bill, enacted March 2, 1889, that established the National Zoological Park in Rock Creek valley under the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>20</sup>

### Success

Charles Carroll Glover found a new and powerful ally in Sen. John Sherman of Ohio, whom he called upon with a new draft bill supported by his lobbying group. On December 4, 1889, at the start of the 51st Congress, Sherman introduced the bill. Senator Ingalls resubmitted his own bill but deferred to Sherman's version, which the District committee swiftly reported and brought to the floor. The Senate amended its provisions for financing and management, passed the bill on January 28, 1890, and sent it on to the House.<sup>21</sup>

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of Rock Creek for Park Purposes, Park Improvement Papers No. 7, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Apr. 19, 1901; Rock Creek National Park, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>H.R. 12136, 50th Congress; H. Rept. 3866, 50th Congress, Jan. 26, 1889; <sup>20</sup>Congressional Record 1256, 1919; Cox, Notes on the Establishment of a National Park in the District of Columbia, p. 6; 25 Stat. 808-09.

<sup>21</sup>John D. Rhodes, "How Rock Creek Park Was Established," Atlantic

On March 18 the House District committee, now chaired by Rep. William W. Grout of Vermont, recommended House approval of the bill with further amendments. One, inspired by the forthcoming quadricentennial of Columbus's discovery of America, would designate the area "Columbus Memorial Park." Another would have the District of Columbia pay half the park's cost from its revenues. Bringing the bill to the floor a week later, Grout minimized development prospects. He foresaw initial action only to enclose the grounds and to erect over the entrance an arch, whose cornerstone would be laid on the 400th anniversary of Columbus's sailing. "Let future generations, and as opportunities arise, develop this park into a thing of beauty, when there will be a million of souls here, at the end of the next century," he declared.<sup>22</sup>

Opponents were not mollified by the cost-sharing provision and the talk of deferred development. "Mr. Chairman, this city of Washington is growing to be a very expensive necessity to the people of the United States," complained Rep. Daniel Kerr of Iowa. "We are beginning to think, out West, that if the people here want breathing-places they should provide them by taxing themselves, just as Chicago, St. Louis, and other places have done." After lengthy debate, further consideration was postponed until April 28, when Representative Payson introduced and the House adopted a lengthy amendment designed to make benefited adjoining landowners defray park costs. Even so, the bill was then defeated by a 78-88 vote. Supporters marshaled their forces and brought the measure up again

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Naturalist 12 (October 1957): 301-03; S. 4, 51st Congress; 21 Congressional Record 353, 902.

<sup>22</sup>H. Rept. 870, 51st Congress; 21 Congressional Record 2579-80.

a month later, when it passed 107 to 82.<sup>23</sup>

A conference committee was needed to reconcile the different House and Senate versions. The resulting compromise restored the Senate's "Rock Creek Park" designation but in most respects favored the House, whose provisions for assessing neighboring landowners and cost sharing were retained. Senator Ingalls called the latter "an unjust burden upon the already overtaxed resources" of District residents, but as a conferee he supported the committee's product. Both houses approved it on September 25, 1890, and President Benjamin Harrison signed the legislation into law two days later.<sup>24</sup>

The Rock Creek Park authorization came at a significant time in the development of what would later become the National Park System. In 1872 Congress had reserved the first area titled a national park, Yellowstone, "as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people"; its authorizing legislation went on to prescribe regulations to "provide for the preservation, from injury or spoliation, of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said park, and their retention in their natural condition." Not until September 25, 1890--the day Congress completed action on the Rock Creek Park bill--was another permanent national park, Sequoia, authorized. A vast natural wilderness area, Sequoia's kinship with Yellowstone was clear. But the legislation for Rock Creek Park as well as that for Sequoia adopted language from the Yellowstone act. Each was "dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the

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<sup>23</sup>21 Congressional Record 2586-89, 3939, 3952, 5303.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 5367, 10418-19, 10453, 10458; 26 Stat. 492-95.

people." The protective prescription for Rock Creek, modified slightly from that of the other two areas, called for regulations to "provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible."<sup>25</sup>

Enactment of the Rock Creek Park bill was followed four days later by authorization of two more national parks: General Grant (predecessor of Kings Canyon) and Yosemite. Thus, although not on the scale of these California wilderness preserves and lacking their "national" park labels, Rock Creek Park was part of the first post-Yellowstone influx of natural parks established by the federal government.<sup>26</sup>

The Rock Creek Park act provided for acquisition of no more than 2,000 acres extending north from Klingle Ford Bridge, the northern limit of the National Zoo. It created a commission comprising the chief of engineers of the Army, the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, and three presidential appointees to select the land and have it surveyed by the assistant to the engineer commissioner in charge of public highways, who would act as executive officer. Recording of the survey map would constitute condemnation of the included properties. A procedure was prescribed for compensation, requiring the supreme court of the District

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<sup>25</sup>17 Stat. 32; 26 Stat. 478. Mackinac Island National Park in Michigan was established in 1875 but was turned over to state administration 20 years later.

<sup>26</sup>The 51st Congress also legislated the first of the national battlefield parks: Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in Georgia and Tennessee and Antietam National Battlefield Site (now Antietam National Battlefield) in Maryland were both authorized a month before Rock Creek Park and Sequoia, General Grant, and Yosemite national parks. Stemming from different impulses and aimed at historic rather than natural preservation, the battlefields formed another component of the future National Park System.



to appoint another commission to appraise the values of lands whose owners did not accept the prices offered; this valuation when approved by the President would be final. Having ascertained the costs of the lands and related expenses, the park commission was to "assess such proportion of such cost and expenses upon the lands...specially benefited by reason of the location and improvement of said park, as nearly as may be, in proportion to the benefits resulting to such real estate."

The act appropriated \$1,200,000 for all survey, appraisal, acquisition, and related costs, half of which would be reimbursed to the Treasury from District revenues. Likewise, half of annual appropriations for park improvements and maintenance was to be charged to the District. When established, the park would be jointly controlled by the District's commissioners and the Army's chief of engineers, "whose duty it shall be, as soon as practicable, to lay out and prepare roadways and bridle paths, to be used for driving and for horseback riding, respectively, and footways for pedestrians; and...to make and publish such regulations as they deem necessary or proper for the care and management of the same."<sup>27</sup>

The long legislative battle had been won. But Rock Creek Park existed only on paper. Still more time and toil would be needed to make it a reality.

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<sup>27</sup>26 Stat. 492-95. The act is reproduced in full in the appendix.

## UNDER MILITARY RULE

### Land Acquisition

The Rock Creek Park Commission met at the War Department on October 2, 1890, only five days after approval of the act creating it. Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Casey, Army chief of engineers, was elected chairman; the other members were Lt. Col. Henry M. Robert, engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, Prof. Samuel P. Langley, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Brig. Gen. Henry V. Boynton, and R. Ross Perry. Capt. William T. Rossell, assistant to the District engineer commissioner, served as the commission's executive officer (succeeded by Capt. Gustav J. Fieberger in 1892).<sup>1</sup>

The park commissioners took to the field later that month to view their domain. They decided that the eastern boundary should follow the alignment of 16th Street above Blagden Mill Road and that the western boundary should run along Broad Branch Road and Daniel Road (present Oregon Avenue) to the District line. On November 7 they ordered the necessary survey of the proposed park and the tracts within it that would need to be acquired. The map and schedule of assessments were ready the following spring. Because the legislation required the President to approve all payments, the commissioners called upon Benjamin Harrison at the executive mansion on April 4, 1891, and obtained his concurrence

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<sup>1</sup>Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission, RG 42, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

in the land valuations.<sup>2</sup>

The map and assessments schedule were filed with the District Recorder of Deeds on April 16, at which time a circular letter was sent to landowners advising them of the action and offering to purchase at the appraised values. Very few were willing to accept the sums offered. The commission reached agreement with several owners to buy tracts at higher-than-appraised prices with President Harrison's approval after the attorney general advised that this was legal. For the remaining majority of tracts the District supreme court appointed an appraisement committee, as prescribed by the legislation. Its valuations, confirmed by the court, brought the total land costs to \$1,430,000--\$230,000 more than the available appropriation.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, recalcitrant landowners contested the condemnation of their property as unconstitutional. The court ruled against them in July 1891. Some then found previously unsuspected values in their lands. Commissioner Perry told the commission on September 26 that "the gold bearing qualities of the rock in the tracts owned by Mr. Shoemaker and Mr. Truesdell had assumed important proportions." An appraisal by an expert from the United States Mint in Philadelphia was arranged.<sup>4</sup> The commission record is silent on his findings, which presumably were unfavorable to the claimants in view of the subsequent court-approved valuation.

The valuation in excess of the appropriation required that some of the lands selected for the park be omitted. After a restudy, the commission

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. v. Glen W. Cooper et al., 20 Supreme Court, D.C. 104; Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission.

identified tracts near the District line and along 16th Street as least vital. On April 13, 1892, the President approved purchase of the remaining lands at the set prices. Payment was given the court, which on June 21 granted possession to the commission in the name of the United States. Through agreement and condemnation, the commission acquired 1,605.976 acres in all at a total cost of \$1,174,511.45 including expenses.<sup>5</sup>

There remained the business of assessing neighboring landowners based on any increase in their property values from the park. The commissioners pursued this requirement of the legislation without great enthusiasm and in the face of further opposition and litigation by affected owners. Their final determination, reported to the court in December 1898, was that the park in its unimproved state had caused no appreciable increase in property values; thus no assessments were warranted.<sup>6</sup>

### The Park's Managers

The negative report on neighboring land assessments concluded the role and active life of the Rock Creek Park Commission, which on December 13, 1894, had turned over the purchased lands to the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park. As prescribed in the legislation, the Board of Control represented the District of Columbia commissioners and the Army chief of engineers and was created to administer the park. The engineer commissioner of the District served on the board, as he did on the park commission,

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<sup>5</sup>Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission; letter, Rock Creek Park Commissioners to Commissioners of the District of Columbia and Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, Dec. 13, 1894, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup>Letter, Brig. Gen. John M. Wilson to Supreme Court of D.C., Dec. 9, 1898, Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission.

and his assistant engineer officer (the executive officer of the park commission) became secretary to the board. In this capacity the assistant was immediately responsible for managing Rock Creek Park. Capt. Gustav J. Fiebeger held this position in 1894, making him--in fact if not name--the park's first superintendent.<sup>7</sup>

The commission had employed a watchman in the park early in 1892. J. J. Kramer, Rock Creek's first "man on the ground," submitted weekly written reports to Captain Fiebeger. A typical example, from June 6, 1892: "I find everything all right in the Park this week. There has been Picnics in the Park every day the past week. No damage done yet to the trees." After the park was shifted to the Board of Control, Kramer was replaced by a mounted member of the Metropolitan Police Force, who continued the weekly reporting to Fiebeger.<sup>8</sup>

In 1896 Fiebeger transferred to a professorship at the U.S. Military Academy and was succeeded by Capt. Lansing H. Beach. Beach remained secretary of the board after rising to the post of District engineer commissioner. His close involvement with Rock Creek Park was recognized by the board in 1901 when it named the principal park roadway for him.<sup>9</sup>

A civilian assistant to Beach, Lee R. Grabill, assumed operational responsibility for the park in 1907. Grabill doubled as superintendent

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<sup>7</sup>Letter, Rock Creek Park Commissioners to Commissioners of the District of Columbia and Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, Dec. 13, 1894, Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission.

<sup>8</sup>Letters received, Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1891-1908, RG 42, National Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, Operations from the Establishment of the Park, September 27, 1890, to June 30, 1912 (Washington, 1912), p. 9. (Hereinafter cited as Board of Control Report, 1912.)

of county roads in the District of Columbia, and by 1916 he was sometimes called superintendent of Rock Creek Park.<sup>10</sup>

The park remained under the Board of Control until 1918, when Congress made it and its Piney Branch Parkway adjunct part of the park system of the District of Columbia. On September 16 of that year the park was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, which had managed the District park system since 1867. Its officer in charge, Col. Clarence S. Ridley, reported to the Army chief of engineers.<sup>11</sup> Grabill, attached to the office of the District engineer commissioner, was separated from the park, but his staff on the ground stayed. It was headed by Patrick Joyce, who had been appointed foreman in 1910, and then included three skilled laborers, a wagon boss, and nine unskilled hands.

Francis F. Gillen was the civilian superintendent of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds under Ridley, his superintendency extending to areas beyond Rock Creek Park. In addition to overseeing Joyce and his force, Gillen supervised Smith Riley, a professional forester hired by the office in 1920. Gillen would play a leading park management role into the 1940s.

In March 1921 Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill replaced Ridley as officer in charge. He held the post until February 1925, when an act of Congress abolished the Public Buildings and Grounds office under the Army chief of engineers and assigned its functions to the new Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. Sherrill became

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<sup>10</sup>Minutes of Board of Control, 1894-1917, RG 42, National Archives.

<sup>11</sup>Sundry Civil Act for Fiscal Year 1919, July 1, 1918, 40 Stat. 650. Ridley also served as superintendent of the State, War, and Navy Building.

director of the successor agency, in which capacity he now reported to the president.<sup>12</sup> He did so only for the rest of that year, retiring from the Army in December to become city manager of Cincinnati. Maj. Ulysses S. Grant III, grandson of the Civil War general and eighteenth president, took his place and held it nearly to the end of military administration of Washington's buildings and parks in 1933.

### Road and Trail Construction

The first construction work within Rock Creek Park got underway in 1897. In the absence of appropriated funds, Captain Beach secured a chain gang to improve existing and abandoned roads through the park.

Congress did not appropriate money for park improvements until 1899, when a road along the creek from Blagden Mill north to Military Road was opened and macadamized at a cost of some \$15,000. According to a later Board of Control report, heavy blasting and grading were required, but "[g]reat care was taken to do as little damage to the topography as possible outside of the limits of the road...." During this project the standing stone walls of the dilapidated Blagden Mill were obliterated, to the regret of Louis P. Shoemaker, one of the major landowners whose property had been taken and an amateur historian of the valley.<sup>13</sup>

An old road from Klinge Road north to Pierce Mill Road along the east bank of the creek was also graded in 1899. Two years later an existing road along the west bank linking Pierce Mill with the segment

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<sup>12</sup>Act of Feb. 26, 1925, 43 Stat. 983. The new office incorporated that of the superintendent of the State, War, and Navy Building.

<sup>13</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, pp. 10-11; Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," Records of the Columbia Historical Society (Washington: Columbia Historical Society, 1909), 12: 41.

running north from the Blagden Mill site was regraded, and it and the portion below Pierce Mill were macadamized. In 1900 the valley road was extended across Military Road to near the District line, but this northernmost section was not paved for some years. By a resolution of November 20, 1901, the Board of Control named the entire road along the creek Beach Drive in honor of its secretary.<sup>14</sup>

More often than not Beach Drive forded rather than bridged the creek. In 1902 the Board of Control constructed two attractive bridges, however. Boulder Bridge carried the road across Rock Creek upstream from the Blagden Mill site where the mill dam had been. Designed by W. J. Douglas and built for \$17,636, the reinforced concrete arch was faced with large fieldstones gathered from outside the park. The bridge blended admirably with its surroundings and survives as an outstanding specimen of naturalistic "parkitecture." The other crossing, known as the Pebble Dash Bridge from its exposed aggregate facings, spanned Broad Branch at its juncture with Rock Creek. It stood until the mid-1960s, when a new pair of bridges replaced it and an adjoining ford across the main stream.<sup>15</sup>

The Board of Control saw to the construction of other roads during and after its completion of Beach Drive. Ridge Road, running from Beach Drive at the confluence of Broad Branch and Rock Creek north along the highlands between the two streams to Military Road, was laid out and macadamized between 1899 and 1901. It was later redesignated Glover Road for Charles Carroll Glover, one of the park's prime movers.

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<sup>14</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, pp. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12; "Boulder and Ross Drive Bridges," National Register of Historic Places form, Sept. 25, 1979, National Park Service.



Another new road intersecting with it near its lower end also extended to Military Road along the eastern slope of the ridge. It was named for John W. Ross, president of the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners and president of the Board of Control, after his death in 1902. A timber bridge built in 1903 to carry Ross Drive over a Rock Creek tributary ravine was replaced in 1907 by a 168-foot span "significant for its early engineering distinction of being an open-spandrel concrete arch with no pretense at ornamentation other than its organic structural shape." (Ross Drive Bridge remains and was listed with Boulder Bridge in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.) Last of the roads built under Board of Control auspices was Morrow Drive, running from the juncture of Beach Drive and Military Road up the eastern slope of Rock Creek valley to 16th Street; it was named for Maj. Jay J. Morrow, a former secretary of the board and District engineer commissioner, in 1911.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the roads, the Board of Control constructed or improved about 21 miles of bridle paths and four miles of footpaths by 1912. Most of the bridle paths followed old footpaths and hauling roads.<sup>17</sup>

### Regulating Public Use

On April 29, 1895, before building any roads or taking other steps to facilitate public access, the Board of Control adopted the first regulations for use of Rock Creek Park. In doing so it was aided by copies of regulations requested from managers of large city parks in Brooklyn,

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<sup>16</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, pp. 9-10; quotation from Donald Beekman Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington (Washington: Commission of Fine Arts, 1974), p. 78.

<sup>17</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, p. 9.

Baltimore, and elsewhere.

The board forbade driving (carriages) or riding except on existing roads and bridle paths; driving or riding horses, bicycles, or tricycles more than 10 miles per hour, and coasting with the pedaled vehicles; discharging of firearms or fireworks; cutting or defacing vegetation and damaging structures; hunting, trapping, and fishing; fires; and overnight camping or "tarrying." There were to be no public assemblies by advertisement, except that group picnics could be scheduled with the board's permission. Livestock grazing and bathing were prohibited, but both were subsequently allowed under permit. Offenses were punishable by fines of from five to fifty dollars.<sup>18</sup>

In 1912 the speed limit for all vehicles was raised to 12 miles per hour, but no motor vehicle seating more than eight persons was allowed. The latter provision was waived for a private bus service arranged by the board: a bus left 18th Street and Columbia Road hourly, traversing the Zoological Park and Rock Creek Park via Beach Drive to Brightwood. The trip cost 10 cents each way, with a round trip without stopover available for 15 cents. The board reported that the service had proved "very popular."<sup>19</sup>

Bathing was supposed to occur only where "secluded from the observation of persons passing along the public roads," but this proved difficult to enforce. An indignant citizen wrote the District engineer commissioner in 1913 to ask that bathers be kept from the park. "These boys and young men commit all kinds of nuisances, such as exposing their persons to

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<sup>18</sup>Regulations and correspondence in letters received, Office of the Engineer Commissioner.

<sup>19</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, pp. 22-23, 25.

passers by, profanity, in its worst form, fighting, throwing stones....," the correspondent declared. "Ninety-five percent of this crowd is of the lowest or degenerate type, and the fact that they are permitted to bathe here without molestation, encourages the assembly of a tough element of ruffians that would never infest this park under any other conditions." Lee Grabill recommended to the Board of Control that bathing permits be ended, but the park continued to accommodate the activity in designated areas into the 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

In July 1922, with automobiles predominant among park users, the Public Buildings and Grounds office announced a rule against night parking in Rock Creek Park. There was widespread objection from the many persons and families who tried to cope with Washington's oppressive summer heat and humidity by parking and sleeping in the cooler valley. Colonel Sherrill retreated and instructed Army Capt. W. L. McMorris, superintendent of park police, "to use discretion in administering the order, which is aimed solely at persons parking at late hours of the night and early hours of the morning for immoral purposes....," according to the Evening Star newspaper. Readers were assured that the regulation had been designed only "to protect the law-abiding public from nuisance and young girls from waywardness."<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with local custom, developed picnic grounds in the park were racially segregated. A 1921 memorandum from Colonel Sherrill to

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<sup>20</sup>Unsigned copy of letter to Col. Chester Harding, June 16, 1913, Office of the Engineer Commissioner; memorandum, Grabill to Secretary, Board of Control, June 20, 1913, *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup>"Night Parking Prohibition Rule in Rock Creek Exempts Families," Evening Star, July 18, 1922, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway clippings file, Commission of Fine Arts records, RG 66, National Archives.

Francis Gillen reaffirmed this policy and prescribed signs to distinguish the picnic areas as "white" and "colored." Rep. Martin B. Madden of Illinois, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, objected to the policy and succeeded in relaxing it. After Madden's death in 1928, U. S. Grant III as director of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks moved to revive picnic segregation.<sup>22</sup> It did not remain official policy, but the races customarily kept to themselves in this and other park activities.

#### Camp Good Will, Golf, and the Miller Cabin

Among the first park facilities was Camp Good Will, a summer camp for underprivileged white children accompanied by their mothers. Begun in 1904 by the Committee on the Prevention of Consumption, a local charity, it was sited between Milk House Ford and 16th Street. It was joined by the Baby Hospital Camp, for poor infants suffering from "summer complaint."

A public golf course was begun in the same general area in 1907 but was not completed. Foreman Patrick Joyce supervised construction of a new nine-hole course on the site between October 1921 and May 1923. This forced relocation of Camp Good Will to a six-acre site west of Rock Creek, north of the Civil War Fort DeRussy, in the summer of 1923. Washington architect Arthur B. Heaton contributed building designs and landscape architect John H. Small laid out the grounds for the new camp, now operated by the Summer Outings Committee of the Associated Charities. Civic clubs were solicited for construction funds, and an administration

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<sup>22</sup>Memorandum, Sherrill to Gillen, Sept. 14, 1921, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records, RG 42, National Archives; Constance McLaughlin Green, Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 383.

building, dining hall, nursery, two pavilions, two bathhouses, three dozen tent platforms, a pool, and ball fields were built. As it had previously, the camp served 150 mothers and children for two-week periods, with the attendees staying in tents.<sup>23</sup>

The new golf course was operated by Norman B. Frost and Harold D. Miller in 1923 and 1924, but the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks judged their management unsatisfactory and declined to renew their concession contract. In 1925 the Joint Welfare Service, a War Department affiliate, operated the course and Public Buildings and Public Parks added another nine holes. A year later the concession went to the Park Amusement Company, which became the S. G. Leoffler Company in the mid-1930s and held the concession until 1982.<sup>24</sup>

In 1911 the Board of Control acquired an unwanted addition to the park. Joaquin Miller, a colorful California poet who affected rustic ways, had built a log cabin on 16th Street near the site to be developed as Meridian Hill Park. The California State Association sought to move it to Rock Creek Park. The board refused the request, but Sen. John D. Works of California intervened successfully on the association's behalf.<sup>25</sup> The cabin was placed near the east bank of Rock Creek north of Military Road and used as a shelter. After Miller's death in 1913 his family maintained ties to the cabin. In 1931 Public Buildings and Public Parks leased it

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<sup>23</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, pp. 8, 16-17; "A Brief History of Golf Courses in National Capital Parks," 4 p. paper, Concessioner file, Rock Creek Park Headquarters; letter, Clarence O. Sherrill to John Joy Edson, Oct. 20, 1922, and other correspondence in Camp Good Will file, Rock Creek Park, National Park Service records, Washington National Records Center.

<sup>24</sup>"Brief History of Golf Courses."

<sup>25</sup>Correspondence, Office of the Engineer Commissioner.

to Pherne Miller, his niece, who conducted art classes and sold candy and soft drinks there until the mid-1950s.

### Pierce Mill

Pierce Mill, Rock Creek Park's most prominent historic feature, is situated on the west bank of Rock Creek a quarter mile below its confluence with Broad Branch. Built in the 1820s by Isaac Pierce and his son Abner, the granite structure is the only one standing of several mills on Rock Creek in the 19th century. The park commission acquired the mill property in 1892. The mill continued to grind corn and grain until 1897, when its main shaft broke.

About 1905 the Board of Control permitted Mary Louise Noble to operate a tea house concession in the picturesque building, to which an enclosed frame porch was added on the upstream side. Florence I. Blake of the Dolly Madison Candy Company succeeded her a decade later, but the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds ousted Mrs. Blake in October 1919 for providing poor service and failing to pay her \$60-per-month rent promptly. Hattie L. Sewell, a black woman, obtained the concession for \$45 a month in 1920. Her presence prompted complaints from E. S. Newman, a prominent park neighbor and trustee of the Pierce-Shoemaker estate, who saw the place becoming "a rendezvous for colored people, soon developing into a nuisance." Colonel Sherrill told Newman that he had received no other complaints and that under Mrs. Sewell the tea room's service had been satisfactory and business had increased.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, p. 9; letter, Newman to Sherrill, June 23, 1921, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds; letter, Sherrill to Newman, June 28, 1921, *ibid.*; other correspondence *ibid.*

Newman persisted. Doubtless as a result of his influence, Sherrill advised Mrs. Sewell that her contract would not be renewed in October 1921 and that the tea house would be turned over to the Joint Welfare Service, which would use the proceeds for charity. This arrangement had not been cleared with the Joint Welfare Service, which declined to take the concession. Sherrill then induced the Girl Scouts Association of the District of Columbia to fill the role. It began its service in November 1921, boosted by publicity from Public Buildings and Grounds. "A delightful air of hospitality will be found always in evidence at the tea house, as the management is directly under a large committee of ladies prominent in Washington society and there will be some one of these actively in charge each day," Sherrill announced in a press release. Among the specialties offered were "Harding waffles," honoring the incumbent president. The Girl Scouts Association was allowed to use the second floor of the mill as living rooms for the attendant in charge.<sup>27</sup>

Asked to justify for the record the absence of competition in selecting the new concessioner, Sherrill provided a statement at sharp variance with his initial reply to Newman:

Competition was not deemed advisable in letting this concession because of the fact that it would be impossible to select or obtain in that way the type of proprietors desired. The party who operated the tea house prior to this concession was the high bidder in a competition. A great many complaints were received and a large number of people stopped patronizing the place. In order to overcome the prejudice which had grown up it was thought best to select the proper party who would operate the establishment to the best interest of the public and of the government.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records; memorandum to press Nov. 17, 1921, *ibid.*; letter, Sherrill to Mrs. Powell Clayton, Nov. 4, 1921, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Memorandum to Chief of Engineers, Feb. 1, 1922, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records.

For unrecorded reasons the Girl Scouts Association did not long continue to run the Pierce Mill tea house, and the Welfare and Recreational Association of Public Buildings and Grounds, Inc. (successor to the Joint Welfare Service), was persuaded to take charge. It held the concession until 1934, when the mill ceased to function as a tea house.

In 1919, the last year of Florence Blake's deteriorating operation, Colonel Ridley had instructed Horace W. Peaslee, an architect on the Public Buildings and Grounds staff, to investigate the possibility of restoring Pierce Mill in appearance if not function. Pierce submitted his report that November. He favored upgrading the structure as a restaurant featuring al fresco dining, with some old mill components replaced for atmosphere:

The restoration of the mill feature in part brings up the question as to whether or not it would be well to attempt, for the sake of historical record, to put back, without competing with the new function of the property, the essential parts of an old-time mill. Enough could be readily obtained or reconstructed to connect up the main working parts and the effect would be right, whether or not the wheels were continuously turning.... The first impression of the problem was not favorable to the attempted restoration of the mill-wheel as the last wheel used was an unpicturesque turbine, and the reconstruction of the preceding undershot wheel would leave it high and dry, fanning the air without any possible water-weathering or suggestion of a past. With detailed study, it is believed that the wheel could be restored if made a part of the proposed general restoration including necessarily a flume, race and spillway, partly following the old lines and partly conforming to and strengthening the new design.<sup>29</sup>

No action was taken on Peaslee's recommendations, nor was another proposal two years later adopted. Warren J. Brown, a local entrepreneur, then suggested to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds and the Commission of Fine Arts (which reviewed the aesthetics of government

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<sup>29</sup>Memorandum, Peaslee to Ridley, Nov. 22, 1919, Rock Creek Park General project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.



projects) a fully operational restoration of Pierce Mill; he would run it and sell the ground meal. Charles Moore, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, responded by advocating the treatment Peaslee had recommended. Colonel Sherrill wrote Brown, "It seems to me that from a business standpoint it would be a most unprofitable undertaking for you, and could not fail in my opinion to detract from the attractiveness of it."<sup>30</sup> When the mill came under new management in the 1930s, however, Brown's vision would prevail.

### Prominent Park Users

As the largest preserve in the nation's capital, Rock Creek Park would have its share of prominent visitors. Best remembered among them is Theodore Roosevelt.

"When our children were little, we were for several winters in Washington, and each Sunday afternoon the whole family spent in Rock Creek Park, which was then very real country indeed," Roosevelt recalled in his Autobiography. "I would drag one of the children's wagons; and when the very smallest pairs of feet grew tired of trudging bravely after us, or of racing on rapturous side trips after flowers and other treasures, the owners would clamber into the wagon."<sup>31</sup>

During his presidential years (1901-1909), the great advocate of the strenuous life continued to make good use of the park:

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<sup>30</sup>Letter, Brown to Moore, Dec. 16, 1921, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records; letter, Moore to Brown, Dec. 20, 1921, *ibid.*; letter, Brown to Sherrill, Dec. 17, 1921, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records; letter, Sherrill to Brown, Dec. 19, 1921, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>An Autobiography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 337.

While in the White House I always tried to get a couple of hours' exercise in the afternoons--sometimes tennis, more often riding, or else a rough cross-country walk, perhaps down Rock Creek.... Often, especially in the winters and early springs, we would arrange for a point to point walk, not turning aside for anything--for instance, swimming Rock Creek or even the Potomac if it came in our way. Of course under such circumstances we had to arrange that our return to Washington should be when it was dark, so that our appearance would scandalize no one. On several occasions we thus swam Rock Creek in the early spring when the ice was floating thick upon it.... We liked Rock Creek for these walks because we could do so much scrambling and climbing along the cliffs.... Once I invited an entire class of officers who were attending lectures at the War College to come on one of these walks; I chose a route which gave us the hardest climbing along the rocks and the deepest crossings of the creek; and my army friends enjoyed it hugely--being the right sort, to a man.<sup>32</sup>

Another high official park user during Roosevelt's administration was Adm. George Dewey of Manila Bay fame. A cool man under fire, Admiral Dewey once suffered such fright in the park that he wrote Col. John Biddle, District engineer commissioner, about it:

There came very near being a vacancy in the Admiral's grade yesterday. I was driving in Rock Creek Park, near the Military Road, having just turned at that Road and started back, when a large tree, which I had passed a minute before, fell not a hundred feet in front of me, directly across the road, breaking into three pieces. I think in ten seconds more I would have been under it!

This causes me to mention to you that in my drives through the park I have noticed a number of trees along the banks, as well as some along the Military Road, leaning badly and looking as though they were liable to fall.

Capt. Jay J. Morrow, acting for Biddle, assured the admiral that dangerous trees would be removed.<sup>33</sup>

Woodrow Wilson enjoyed drives and walks in Rock Creek Park during his presidency. In September 1915 he was courting Edith Bolling Galt, who would become his second wife. His driver would take them to a point on

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>33</sup>Letter, Dewey to Biddle, Mar. 9, 1907, Office of the Engineer Commissioner; letter, Morrow to Dewey, Mar. 11, 1907, *ibid.*

Ross Drive, let them walk alone in the woods, and pick them up at a point further along the road.<sup>34</sup>

After World War I the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds undertook to remove numerous dead trees, mostly blighted chestnut. Hundreds were sold to private cutters for telephone and telegraph poles. President Wilson was disturbed. "[C]ouldn't you give the trees in Rock Creek Park a vacation?" he wrote Colonel Ridley in April 1920. "I have been distressed by the number I have seen cut down there." Ridley answered that the only trees being cut were already dead and that the work was being done "as a necessary part of the park preservation" in accordance with a 1918 report by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm.<sup>35</sup>

Wilson was unpersuaded. "I do not profess to be a forester, but the great majority of trees that I have noticed laying prostrate in the park are certainly sound," he replied. "I know a sound tree when I see it inside the bark. Moreover, in one part of the park a whole plantation of young pines...have been cut down and it made my heart ache to see it." Ridley sent this message to Superintendent Gillen with orders to cease cutting any more trees, large or small, dead or alive, until further notice. Gillen responded that the cut pines were outside the park boundary, and Ridley so informed the president.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Edmund W. Starling, Starling of the White House (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), pp. 51-52.

<sup>35</sup>Letter, Wilson to Ridley, Apr. 22, 1920, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records; letter, Ridley to Wilson, May 7, 1920, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Wilson quoted in memorandum, Ridley to Gillen, May 10, 1920, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records; memorandum, Gillen to Ridley, May 11, 1920, *ibid.*; letter, Ridley to Wilson, May 20, 1920, *ibid.*

Wilson maintained his interest in the park after he left office in March 1921 and moved to a house on S Street. That June, upset about news of the forthcoming golf course construction, he wrote Colonel Sherrill:

Is it possible that it is true that a golf course is to be laid out in Rock Creek Park? I am loath to believe that such an unforgivable piece of vandalism is even in contemplation, and therefore beg leave to enter my earnest and emphatic protest.

That park is the most beautiful thing in the United States, and to mar its natural beauty for the sake of a sport would be to do an irretrievable thing which subsequent criticism and regret would never repair.

Sherrill replied evasively, suggesting that the tract under consideration was suited to the purpose but claiming that no definite steps had been taken other than to determine the public's wishes in the matter. The golf course construction began that October, as planned.<sup>37</sup>

A memorial in Rock Creek Park honors another prominent park user of the period: Jules Jusserand, French ambassador to the United States from 1903 to 1925. Jusserand was close to Theodore Roosevelt and often accompanied the president on his romps through the park. Congress authorized the memorial in June 1935, the Fine Arts Commission approved Joseph Freedlander's design for a granite bench a year later, the Jusserand Memorial Committee raised the necessary funds, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the completed memorial on November 7, 1936. Placement of the memorial in the park, overlooking Beach Drive and the creek a short distance south of Pierce Mill, worried Rock Creek's National Park Service managers at the time: they feared it would constitute a precedent for further memorial intrusions in the natural setting. But the Jusserand

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<sup>37</sup>Letter, Wilson to Sherrill, June 21, 1921, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records; letter, Sherrill to Wilson, June 28, 1921, *ibid.*

bench remained the sole commemorative feature in the park.<sup>38</sup>

#### External Pressures and Unnatural Presences

A natural preserve surrounded by advancing urban and suburban development would inevitably face threats to its integrity. On the whole, Rock Creek Park was ably defended by its military custodians from adverse external pressures and encroachments.

The first major threat of encroachment was an 1897 proposal by the District of Columbia Water Department to construct a reservoir in the park. Finding the proposal objectionable, the Board of Control referred it to Attorney General Joseph McKenna for an opinion that it hoped would buttress its position. McKenna did not disappoint, replying that under the Rock Creek Park legislation the board was precluded from permitting any such development foreign to the stated park purposes.<sup>39</sup>

The reservoir proponents thereupon drafted new legislation to authorize their objective. They contended that the reservoir would be an attractive addition to the park. Faced with likely enactment of the authorization, the Board of Control negotiated a happy compromise. The park boundary in the vicinity of the desired reservoir site, north of Blagden Avenue and west of 16th Street, was uneven. If the Water Department would purchase certain tracts, the board would exchange an equal or lesser amount of parkland for them so as to leave the department with an adequate reservoir site and the park with a straightened boundary.

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<sup>38</sup>Jusserand Memorial file, Central Files, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>39</sup>Letter, McKenna to Secretary of War, July 8, 1897, Office of the Engineer Commissioner.

Authorization for this bargain was incorporated in an act of Congress approved June 6, 1900, which resulted in construction of the Brightwood Reservoir and net enlargement of Rock Creek Park by seven square feet.<sup>40</sup> (The reservoir became obsolete in the 1930s, and its site is now occupied by tennis courts and ball fields.)

In January 1898 Rep. Alfred C. Harmer of Pennsylvania and Sen. Francis M. Cockrell of Missouri introduced bills that would authorize each state to erect in the park an exhibition building for "any and all articles or things connected with its natural or industrial resources or evidencing its social, scientific, or artistic progress and development." The states would be given from one to six acres apiece for their buildings.<sup>41</sup> The office of the District commissioners recommended against passage, stating that the development would conflict with the intended park purposes. The scheme did not threaten further.

In 1911 the United States Forest Service obtained permission to plant trees for experimental purposes north, south, and east of Camp Good Will. The Board of Control asked that the trees be set in irregular patterns to avoid the appearance of artificial cultivation. Several species of willow and a few poplars were installed the next spring. By 1920 the Forest Service had planted about 2000 trees comprising 170 species and planned to continue plantings from all parts of the world.<sup>42</sup>

The Forest Service and other parties supporting this venture hoped

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<sup>40</sup>Minutes of the Board of Control, Sept. 15, 1898; 31 Stat. 573.

<sup>41</sup>H.R. 7336 and S. 3481, 55th Congress.

<sup>42</sup>Letter, Chief Henry S. Graves, USFS, to Maj. W. V. Judson, Apr. 15, 1912, Office of the Engineer Commissioner; letter, Acting Forester A. F. Potter, USFS, to Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Jan. 20, 1920, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records.

to expand and formalize it, with congressional approval, as the National Arboretum and Botanic Garden. The Fine Arts Commission thought otherwise. A 1917 report prepared by its landscape architect member, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., declared the project incompatible with the natural qualities for which Congress had established Rock Creek Park. "It does not now, and it never will, look like a part of the natural scenery," the report said of the existing arboretum. "It is distinctly out of harmony with it." Olmsted repeated his stand in his report prepared for the park's managers a year later. As a result, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1920 disapproved further extension of the arboretum.<sup>43</sup>

The office continued its own planting of certain exotic vegetation, including Japanese honeysuckle to stabilize embankments from erosion. In May 1920 Charles Moore of the Fine Arts Commission wrote Colonel Ridley to warn of the spreading, destructive nature of the plant: "It will kill anything but the largest trees, and unless pains are taken to keep it down, for it cannot be exterminated, it will ruin Rock Creek Park." At the same time Moore called Ridley's attention to the problem of people carrying dogwood and other flowering plants from the park.<sup>44</sup>

The Board of Control was also willing to allow introduction of non-native birds to the park. According to its 1912 report:

Through the subscription of private individuals and at the

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<sup>43</sup>Commission of Fine Arts Report to the Committee on the Library, House of Representatives, Sept. 18, 1917, quoted in "Rock Creek Park: A Report by Olmsted Brothers, December 1918," Rock Creek Park Olmsted Report project file, Commission of Fine Arts records; letter, Ridley to Henry S. Graves, Jan. 28, 1920, General Correspondence file, Public Buildings and Grounds records.

<sup>44</sup>Letter, Moore to Ridley, May 22, 1920, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

suggestion of Dr. Cecil French, D.V.S., some wild ducks, wild geese, and black, white, and gray swan, were presented last fall to the park and are generally prospering. A few have disappeared and there does not seem to be much mating. Some English and golden pheasants were also presented, but were almost all killed by some unknown animal.<sup>45</sup>

The board spent \$164.51 during fiscal years 1907-1909 for feed for wildfowl. It was less hospitable to certain other exotic animals, however. In 1911 it reprimanded the Chevy Chase Club, an exclusive country club nearby in Maryland, for foxhunting with a pack of hounds through the park.<sup>46</sup>

### Park Planners and Plans

At the turn of the century the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, chaired by Sen. James McMillan of Michigan, sponsored a study of Washington's parks. The McMillan Commission, as it was known, consisted of four prominent civic artists: architects Daniel H. Burnham and Charles F. McKim, sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Their report, The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia, was edited by Charles Moore and published in 1902. With the strong advocacy of the Commission of Fine Arts, established in 1910 with Burnham, Olmsted, and Moore as initial members, the report had great influence on the later development and expansion of parklands in and around the city.

Rock Creek Park, the commission found, was among the areas needing improvement: "This territory, beautified by nature, is undeveloped, save for a few roads, the location of which was obvious; and before the

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<sup>45</sup>Board of Control Report, 1912, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16; letter, Capt. E. M. Markham to Clarence Moore, Apr. 3, 1911, Office of the Engineer Commissioner.



public can fully realize the advantages of the purchase Rock Creek Park must be improved according to a systematic plan prepared by landscape architects."<sup>47</sup>

The report cautioned against enlarging the park's major artery, Beach Drive:

Narrow as the present road is, and skillfully as it was built, there are several points where it has very appreciably injured the scenery, and to widen it by any considerable amount would be a calamity. It is true that the value of the park scenery depends absolutely on making it conveniently accessible to the people, but nothing can be gained if the means of access destroys the scenery which it is meant to exhibit, and we believe that as wide a road as the future population is likely to demand would injure the character of the valley irremediably. Possibly the solution is to be found in the ultimate construction of another and wilder drive, or drives, high enough on the valley sides to leave the wild sylvan character of the stream at the bottom of the gorge uninjured, but yet within site and sound of the water and seeming to be of the valley. Such a road would doubtless require more grading, would cost more, and would destroy more trees and more square yards of pretty undergrowth than a road at the bottom of the gorge, but the damage of the latter would be done at the vital spot. It would be the pound of flesh from nearest the heart, while the former would compare with the amputation of a leg.<sup>48</sup>

The commission recommended six additional land purchases totaling 303 acres to prevent overlooking crests from being developed and to take the park up to boundary streets separating it from adjacent property. It also advocated western extensions along the Soapstone Branch and Broad Branch tributaries, in the latter case to Fort Reno.<sup>49</sup>

Whereas the McMillan Commission only touched upon Rock Creek Park, being more concerned with the monumental city core, the Olmsted Brothers report ordered by the Board of Control in 1917 focused on its development

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<sup>47</sup>The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 10.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

and expansion. The Olmsted Report was completed in December 1918.<sup>50</sup> Its tone was set by its opening sentence: "The dominant consideration, never to be subordinated to any other purpose in dealing with Rock Creek Park, is the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty, and the making of that beauty accessible to the people without spoiling the scenery in the process."

The report spoke of the park's two kinds of scenery--the larger landscape pictures and the intimate details:

These two sorts of scenery are not peculiar to Rock Creek Park, but in this beautiful valley with its many ramifications they are found in a high degree of perfection and in almost unlimited variety. It is the extraordinary combination of this circumstance with the proximity of the valley to a great city that gives to the Park its unique value. This is the value which was first preserved by Act of Congress for the benefit of all people. It is now and always will be the only value that can justify the maintenance of this great natural park.

The approach taken by Olmsted Brothers was to divide the park into defined landscape units, based on the vegetation that should prevail in each, and recommend measures for their enhancement and maintenance. Artificial development should in all cases be unobtrusive. Structures "should be so designed and located as to fall naturally into place as part and parcel of the scenery, and should never stand out as objects complete in themselves with the surrounding landscape becoming merely a background." Roads and trails "should always and unmistakably fit into the landscape as harmonious and subordinate parts of the scenery through which they pass." The report urged higher appropriations for park maintenance and development of a trained work force directed by "a man with a thorough knowledge of plants and forestry and above all with a keen

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<sup>50</sup>"Rock Creek Park: A Report by Olmsted Brothers, December 1918."

artistic appreciation of the aims and possibilities of the work."

Accompanying the report were graphic renditions of recommended land additions, the landscape units, a system of park drives, and two proposed thoroughfares across the park (from Yuma Street on the west to Taylor Street on the east and from Utah Avenue on the west to Madison Street on the east). Land acquisition should receive priority, the report stated, especially on the west side from Pierce Mill north along Broad Branch nearly to Military Road, on each side of the narrow parkland strip then following the eastern tributary of Piney Branch, and at the northeast corner of the park.

The Olmsted Report was approved by the Fine Arts Commission, and in February 1919 Colonel Ridley announced its adoption by his office. "Nothing will be done hereafter in this park which is contrary to the letter or spirit of this report without specific approval in writing of the Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds," he ordered. At the same time he appointed a Rock Creek Park Board within the office "to assist the Officer in Charge in carrying out this development in a logical, continuous, and artistic manner." He detailed to the board two landscape architects on his staff: James D. Langdon (who had aided the McMillan Commission) and Irving W. Payne. They were to study the Olmsted Report, recommend on its implementation, and inspect and report on the work done. In the process they were to "consult freely with the landscape member of the Commission of Fine Arts taking every opportunity to present to him on the ground important details of work proposed."<sup>51</sup>

The landscape member of the Fine Arts Commission was James L. Green-

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<sup>51</sup>Office memorandum, Ridley, Feb. 1, 1919, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

leaf of New York, who had succeeded Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., in 1918. At the commission's request, Greenleaf wrote Ridley at length with his comments and elaboration on the Olmsted Report.<sup>52</sup> He began by remarking on the perennial tension between preservation and use:

The Report declares the "dominant motives" of the Park to be to preserve its natural character of wooded valley and upland and open meadow, and to make it accessible to the public with the least injury to this natural beauty. The two motives are inevitably opposed in any naturalistic park and increasingly so in proportion as a large city grows about it. Yet they must be balanced and adjusted, and this basic problem of adjusting artistic values and utility will arise continually in a thousand different places.... Features of utility are necessary that the Park may be of use, but always there must be dominant a clear appreciation of its natural charm and a determination that it shall not be sacrificed. A recognition of this is vital to the preservation of values in Rock Creek Park.

"The rectifying of boundaries is an important matter and the Report rightly urges immediate attention to this before real estate values make the problem more difficult," Greenleaf continued. "The scenery is not panoramic, but instead the views are now chiefly those of woodland valley, bordered by hills wooded to the skyline. How unfortunate if this foliage skyline be replaced by obtrusive rows of buildings, gaping down into the Park...."

Of artificial structures in the park Greenleaf wrote:

All are inroads upon the natural scenery, more or less necessary it is true and therefore more or less justifiable, but to be handled with great caution and restraint. The advice given is to hold all structures down to simple forms, easily assimilated by the rustic scenery. This is to be commended if the idea be not carried too far. Designs made so rustic as to be a straining for that effect are unsatisfactory. A needed building, for instance, should not be obtrusive in its style of architecture but on the other hand, it should not be wildly rustic in a vain attempt to blend with woodland scenery.... Over all stands this general policy: limit artificial structures and keep them simple.

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<sup>52</sup>letter, Greenleaf to Ridley, Feb. 6, 1919, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

Greenleaf reluctantly accepted picnic grounds in Rock Creek Park but urged a strong stand against auto camping:

The Report recognizes the inevitable demand upon the Park Management for utilities when it suggests picnic groves at suitable places. If carefully policed such are not serious blemishes in the woodland and valley scenery, but frankly, they are danger spots in the higher development of the Park and should be firmly controlled....

Right now...comes the request from the Board of Trade for motor parking grounds in the Park where visitors by motor to the city can camp inexpensively while they are exploring the political centre of the United States. The park is for the public and open spaces in it are cheap. What more plausible?

Need we state the serious objection to this proposal? Even in great parks like the Yellowstone such parking and camping places are necessary evils, that grate upon one's sensibilities. In the narrow, charming river valley of Rock Creek Park they would be an unmitigated, vulgar intrusion upon its sylvan beauty.... If parking places for this laudable purpose are to be provided let the city take unused land that is not vital to scenic efforts, and so develop it. The valley of Rock Creek must be held inviolate.

Greenleaf's discourse to Ridley on the Olmsted Report reflected his concern that the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was unequal to the task of implementing it. "Col. Ridley has difficulties of organization and daily administration," he confided to commission chairman Charles Moore. "My fear is that the valuable ideas the Olmsted Report gives shall never bear fruit under the deadening influence of daily routine."<sup>53</sup>

Moore was also inclined to criticism of the park's management under Ridley's office. In a letter to Olmsted in December 1921 he wrote, "It seems to me the park has been rather neglected in various ways, and the Commission wants to give the park particular attention during the next year."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Letter, Greenleaf to Moore, Feb. 6, 1919, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>54</sup>Letter, Moore to Olmsted, Dec. 24, 1921, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

The following March Greenleaf expressed the commission's sense in a letter to Ridley's successor, Colonel Sherrill. "There can be no doubt that serious damage is occurring and this damage can be checked solely by intelligent and thorough handling," he wrote, calling for prompt suppression of weed growth. "There is a hill-side at a western entrance to Rock Creek Park which, with its cedars rising against the sky was reminiscent of an Italian hill-side. When I saw it three years ago, these cedars were shrieking under the throttling grasp of wild honey-suckle and tree weeds. Now as one passes he hears only a smothered moan. I call that hill-side 'The Tragedy of the Cedars.'" He urged Sherrill to study the Olmsted Report on this and other matters: "Its words as to a permanent trained force, and control by a man of imagination and artistic feeling and training withal, are as apples of gold in a silver dish."<sup>55</sup>

Sherrill did not take kindly to Greenleaf's implications of mismanagement and neglect. "The line of procedure indicated in your letter has been consistently followed for many years, and the report of Mr. Olmsted, with which I am entirely familiar, has been of the greatest service in administering the park...", he retorted. "There is no lack of a trained force, or of control of a man of imagination and artistic feeling in handling the matters connected with Rock Creek Park. The only difficulty is, and has been, that appropriations adequate to accomplish all the necessary work cannot be secured for the purpose." Nevertheless, he wrote, an expert forester recommended by the Forest Service had been employed by his office in the park for the past year and had accomplished much recommended by Olmsted. Sixty percent of the dead chestnuts had been removed and

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<sup>55</sup>Letter, Greenleaf to Sherrill, Mar. 3, 1922, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

their areas replanted with more than 25,000 seedling trees, 50 acres north of Milk House Ford had been cleared of weed growth, and three acres around Fort DeRussy had been cleared of shrub pine to free the cedars. "In view of the above," Sherrill concluded, "I am sure you will agree that the administration of Rock Creek Park is not devoid of intelligence as intimated in your letter."<sup>56</sup>

Greenleaf hastened to assure Sherrill that he had meant no personal criticism and appreciated the work done. But criticism of Rock Creek Park's management continued. It would be repeated by professional representatives of the bureau succeeding the park's military government, the National Park Service, a dozen years later.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Letter, Sherrill to Greenleaf, Mar. 10, 1922, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>57</sup>Letter, Greenleaf to Sherrill, Mar. 11, 1922, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records; see pages 73-75.

## PARKWAY AND OTHER ADDITIONS

### Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

Rock Creek Park was and is limited to the creek valley north of the National Zoological Park. When Congress authorized its establishment in 1890, little or no thought was given park treatment of the degraded valley from the Zoo south to the Potomac River. Later, under a separate commission, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was established and developed there. The parkway--the term encompassing the strip of park land, not just the road extending along it--continues southeast along the Potomac from the creek to West Potomac Park at the Lincoln Memorial. Here we shall be concerned primarily with the portion above the creek mouth: although never officially part of Rock Creek Park, it has long been administratively linked with the larger park and is properly considered an extension of it.

The histories of urban streams frequently conclude with their tunneling and conversion to underground sewers, hidden from public view beneath city streets. Such was the fate of Washington's Tiber Creek, initially transformed in its lower reaches as part of the Washington City Canal, then buried beneath B Street Northwest (today's Constitution Avenue) after the Civil War. By the late 1880s the lower portion of Rock Creek seemed destined for similar treatment. It carried odiferous sewage from adjoining industrial development. Its valley had become an unsightly dumping ground and was perceived as a barrier to convenient access between Georgetown and Washington. "Arching" the creek and



filling in the valley over it would cover the sewage and refuse, eliminate the need for bridges, and create valuable new land for building.

A Senate resolution of July 22, 1892, asked the District engineer commissioner, Capt. William T. Rossell, to prepare plans and estimates for converting Rock Creek below Massachusetts Avenue into a closed sewer and to compute the net gain from the increased value of the filled land over the cost of the valley land that would need to be condemned. Reporting back on January 10, 1893, Rossell sought to discourage the project. Efforts were then underway to divert all sewage into the Potomac below Washington; planned use of Rock Creek for other than storm water drainage "would be wrong in principle and enormously expensive," he wrote. "From a sanitary standpoint I can see no necessity for covering the creek at all if the sewage is kept out of it."<sup>1</sup>

Rossell appended a report by Capt. Gustav J. Fiebege, his assistant, estimating that more than six million cubic yards of fill would be needed to level the valley. Another appended report by another assistant, Capt. James L. Lusk, raised the specter of flood waters backing up and inundating portions of the city if the inlet to the covered lower creek became clogged by debris. Proponents of filling the valley were not persuaded by these adverse reports, but they made no major progress during the decade in advancing their objective.

The lower valley next became an object of federal action in 1900, when Congress authorized and appropriated \$4,000 for the Army chief of engineers to examine and report on "a suitable connection between the Potomac and the Zoological parks" and to employ "a landscape architect of

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<sup>1</sup>Senate Misc. Doc. 21, 52d Congress.

conspicuous ability in his profession" for the purpose. Brig. Gen. John M. Wilson, the chief of engineers, referred the task to Col. Theodore A. Bingham, officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, who engaged Samuel Parsons, Jr., a New York landscape architect.<sup>2</sup>

The larger mission included a plan for the Mall area, on which Parsons lavished most of his attention. He provided for a road extending west from the Washington Monument and turning north on the alignment of 23rd Street, with the space between 22nd and 24th streets made an open parkway. This straight course did not hit Rock Creek until near O Street, whereupon it followed the winding valley up to the Zoo. The valley below N Street, running west of the straight north-south segment, was thus excluded from park treatment. Secretary of War Elihu Root endorsed the Parsons plan in reporting it to the Speaker of the House. Colonel Bingham confessed that the plan had been hastily prepared, however, with "some minor points which it is not intended should be carried out exactly as they appear on the drawings" because "the draftsmen were not personally familiar with the ground they were deliniating."<sup>3</sup>

The Parsons plan received no homage from the distinguished McMillan Commission, whose work followed close upon it. The commission's 1902 report called Rock Creek valley below the Zoo "unsightly to the verge of ugliness." The situation was not helped by the lack of resolution about filling it versus leaving it open. "The need for a definite plan of treatment is shown in a striking manner by the fact that on the line of Connecticut avenue a bridge is in course of construction [the present

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<sup>2</sup>Sundry Civil Act of June 6, 1900, Pub. 163, 56th Congress, 31 Stat. 622; House Doc. 135, 56th Congress, Dec. 6, 1900.

<sup>3</sup>House Doc. 135.

Taft Bridge]; while on the line of Massachusetts avenue a culvert is building, the obvious intention being to fill the entire valley southward to the mouth of the creek."<sup>4</sup>

Although the fill carrying Massachusetts Avenue would "interfere with the perfect execution of the open-valley plan," the commission strongly recommended this alternative "on grounds of economy, convenience, and beauty." Travelers along drives and paths depressed below the surrounding grade would be spared views of the "shabby, sordid, and disagreeable" tenements and factories adjoining between Pennsylvania Avenue and Q Street. "It is therefore a very fortunate opportunity that permits the seclusion of the parkway in a valley the immediate sides of which can be controlled and can be made to limit the view to a self-contained landscape, which may be beautiful even though restricted." By retaining the valley, moreover, east-west crossings would continue by bridge rather than at grade and would be less disruptive to a park experience.<sup>5</sup>

The Washington Board of Trade favored the McMillan Commission approach. The Georgetown Citizens' Association did not, preferring that at least a portion of the valley be filled to improve access between Georgetown and Washington. Sen. Nathan B. Scott of West Virginia and Rep. William S. Cowherd of Missouri introduced bills responsive to the Georgetown interests in January 1904. They called for putting Rock Creek in a culvert from Lyons Mill (adjacent to Sheridan Circle) down to 25th and O streets, which would eliminate the easterly bend of the creek between those points, and building an avenue atop the fill. The Georgetown

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<sup>4</sup>The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-86.

Citizens' Association solicited the support of the District commissioners for the legislation, and the commissioners declared that if Congress voted such an extraordinary expenditure they would favor it.<sup>6</sup> A year later Sen. Shelby M. Cullom of Illinois introduced another bill incorporating a pet scheme of Richard J. Beall, a former District official; it would arch the creek from L Street up to Connecticut Avenue, where a dam would create a large bathing pool. The District commissioners opposed this plan, and Congress took no action on any of the bills.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with continuing and conflicting pressures to do something about the lower valley, Congress provided another \$4,000 in the fiscal 1908 District appropriations act for another study. The District engineer commissioner, Maj. Jay J. Morrow, and his assistant, Capt. E. M. Markham, were charged with preparing plans and estimates for the treatment of the valley below Massachusetts Avenue, "both by open-valley method and by conduit."<sup>8</sup>

The resulting report, submitted in May 1908, assumed at the outset that some form of parkway was called for: "A park effect of one kind or another is unquestionably the essence of any possible treatment of Rock Creek between Massachusetts avenue and L street....," Markham wrote. The two engineer officers examined four alternatives: a conduit with fill carrying a 160-foot-wide boulevard from Massachusetts to L; the same with a 400-foot-wide boulevard; a conduit with fill carrying a 160-foot-wide

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<sup>6</sup>S. 3883 and H.R. 11047, 58th Congress; Georgetown Citizens' Association resolution and related correspondence in records, Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, RG 42, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup>S. 7169, 58th Congress; letter, Henry Grant to Sen. H. J. Callinger, Feb. 21, 1905, Office of the Engineer Commissioner.

<sup>8</sup>Senate Doc. 458, 60th Congress, May 21, 1908.

boulevard from L to O streets, the valley to be open above O Street; and a fully open valley "with the proper arrangement of high-level and low-level roads and paths throughout the entire distance." Below L Street all alternatives would have an elevated boulevard connection with Potomac Park, and all would acquire and leave natural the valley above Massachusetts Avenue.<sup>9</sup>

Morrow and Markham favored the fully open valley, with a main drive along the creek and bordering roadways above on each side so the backs of buildings would not present themselves to view from within the park. They estimated the cost of this treatment between Massachusetts Avenue and L Street at \$4,750,000--significantly less than the other choices. As part of the work they recommended preservation of the defunct Lyons Mill as a "historic structure"; a planned road bridge crossing the creek nearby would have a brick superstructure to match it.<sup>10</sup>

The engineers sought to dispel the notion of rapid economic gain from a filled valley. Because the fill would take many years to subside and stabilize, "it is probable that a cheap character of building would ensue along this boulevard, rather than it would become the fine residential avenue that its cost and character should warrant." They continued:

The closed-conduit method of improvement, which would doubtless involve in it mere fill from eight to ten years, could therefore hardly meet the expectations of its supporters for a period of at least twenty to thirty years, if ever.

It is the apparant expectation of those interested in the closed treatment that the business interests of Georgetown would be vastly bettered thereby, and that a good class of residential construction would spread westward from Washington across the present site of the valley and, invading Georgetown, would finally eliminate the squalid settlements along the west side of Rock Creek below P street. This

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 2, 24.

is very seriously doubted.<sup>11</sup>

Morrow and Markham urged prompt action on behalf of the open plan in view of the ongoing dumping in the valley. W. J. Douglas, the District bridge engineer, joined in their position and advocated assessing 20 percent of the total cost of the improvement against the abutting properties for the benefits accruing to them.<sup>12</sup>

There was no immediate action on the Morrow-Markham report, but establishment of the Commission of Fine Arts two years later gave new official voice to its recommendation and the similar previous one of the McMillan Commission. Sen. George Peabody Wetmore of Rhode Island, chairman of the Senate Committee on the Library, became personally interested in the lower valley. In February 1911 he introduced legislation for a park there that would contain the U.S. Botanic Garden, relocated from the west side of the Capitol. That March Wetmore conferred at length with Chairman Daniel H. Burnham of the Fine Arts Commission, and commission member Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., prepared for Wetmore a report on the area. Olmsted favored the parkway but opposed relocation of the Botanic Garden there, warning that "such use of the valley would offer a constant temptation to introduce greenhouses, working yards, experimental garden plots, and other conspicuously artificial features which would radically impair the character of the whole valley landscape as seen from the surrounding high level drives and viaducts."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>13</sup>S. 10851, 61st Congress; letter, Burnham to Col. Spencer Cosby, CFA secretary, Mar. 16, 1911, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records, RG 66, National Archives; Olmsted, "Report for Senator Wetmore on the Rock Creek Matter," Mar. 17, 1911, *ibid.*

Wetmore reintroduced his bill, still containing the Botanic Garden provision and a \$2,300,000 appropriation authorization, in the next Congress in May 1911. The Senate passed it in August. The House took no action, whereupon the Senate, in the final week before adjournment in February 1913, inserted the bill's language in an omnibus public buildings bill referred to it by the House.<sup>14</sup>

When the amended omnibus bill returned to the House after Senate passage, the House refused to concur in the Rock Creek provision. "That old crooked black snake proposition that has been before the House so often and always fails on its own merits was sneaked in here," charged Rep. Thetus W. Sims of Tennessee. When a conference committee was appointed to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions, the House conferees specified the Senate's Rock Creek amendment as one they would not accept. But Sen. George Sutherland of Utah, chairman of the Public Buildings and Grounds committee, regarded it as the most urgent of the items in contention because of rising land values. Sen. Elihu Root of New York stood fast with him, calling it "little less than criminal for us to go on without doing something like we have provided in this bill in regard to the treatment of lower Rock Creek, cesspool and pesthole as it is."<sup>15</sup>

On the penultimate day of the Congress, in the third conference on the bill, the conferees finally agreed on a modified version of the Rock Creek provision. Relocation of the Botanic Garden and a million dollars were cut out, but its substance stayed. Section 22 of the Public Buildings

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<sup>14</sup>S. 2366, 62nd Congress; 47 Congressional Record 3498; H.R. 28766, 62nd Congress; 49 Congressional Record 4050, Feb. 26, 1913.

<sup>15</sup>49 Congressional Record 4247, 4376-77, 4700.

Act of March 4, 1913, in the form finally passed and approved by President William Howard Taft on his last morning in office, began as follows:

That for the purpose of preventing the pollution and obstruction of Rock Creek and of connecting Potomac Park with the Zoological Park and Rock Creek Park, a commission, to be composed of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of Agriculture, is hereby authorized and directed to acquire, by purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, such land and premises as are not now the property of the United States in the District of Columbia shown on the map on file in the office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, dated May seventeenth, nineteen hundred and eleven, and lying on both sides of Rock Creek, including such portion of the creek bed as may be in private ownership, between the Zoological Park and Potomac Park; and the sum of \$1,300,000 is hereby authorized to be expended toward the requirement of such land. That all lands now belonging to the United States or to the District of Columbia lying within the exterior boundaries of the land to be acquired...are hereby appropriated to and made a part of the parkway herein authorized to be acquired. One-half of the cost of the said lands shall be reimbursed to the Treasury of the United States out of the revenues of the District of Columbia....<sup>16</sup>

To carry out the actual work of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, the officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds was made its executive and disbursing officer. As will be recalled from the discussion of Rock Creek Park's management, the duties of this position fell in 1925 to the director of the new Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. Once Rock Creek Park came under Public Buildings and Grounds in 1918, therefore, the park and parkway were administered by the same succession of engineer officers and staff.

In his capacity as executive and disbursing officer of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, Col. William W. Harts (Col. Clarence S. Ridley's predecessor as officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds) soon found that the boundary map referenced in the authorizing legislation was inadequate: its scale was too small and it had been drawn without

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 4693-94, 4816; Pub. 432, 62nd Congress, 37 Stat. 885. See appendix for provision in full.



regard to existing lot lines. If the commission were forced to acquire all land within its taking lines, the expense would far exceed the authorized appropriation. The commission chairman, Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo, thereupon wrote the speaker of the House to request corrective legislation. The result was a \$5,000 appropriation approved March 3, 1915, for the commission to survey the exact boundaries of the lands now desired and submit the resulting map to Congress.<sup>17</sup>

Landscape architect James D. Langdon and others on Colonel Harts' staff set to work. Their survey and comprehensive accompanying report were reviewed by Frederick Law Olmsted and approved by the Fine Arts Commission before the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission transmitted them to Congress in February 1916. Because the battle to secure appropriations for land acquisition and development still lay ahead, the report devoted some attention to further justifying the project. Filling the 2-1/2-mile gap between the existing parkland to the north and south would permit a continuous drive of 14-1/2 miles, it declared, continuing:

It is true one may ride in the saddle or walk about half the way along a winding stream through an attractive valley, but the remainder of the valley in this intervening area is inaccessible even to pedestrians, its natural features having long since disappeared under great dumps of ashes and city refuse whose steep slopes descend precipitously to the stream's edge. To unaccompanied women and children the trip through the more accessible section of this valley is not altogether without drawbacks, for as these areas are largely private property effective policing is difficult.... [Between L and P streets] the natural features [have] been almost entirely eliminated by the dumping of refuse on the creek banks.... Where dumping has ceased the slopes are overgrown with tangles of bush and tree until they present a sordid and undesirable appearance. This condition has long militated against the occupancy of this region by any but the lowest type of population.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>House Doc. 999, 63d Congress, May 23, 1914; Sundry Civil Act of Mar. 3, 1915, Pub. 263, 63d Congress.

<sup>18</sup>Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission: 1916,

The report detailed the newly proposed takings of property with respect to lot lines. The parkway commission sought to acquire 4,113,818 square feet assessed at \$1,422,693 (as opposed to 5,989,581 square feet on the 1911 map assessed at \$2,796,209). The greatest difficulties were foreseen in connection with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company and the Washington Gas Light Company, which held most of the valley below the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge.<sup>19</sup>

The eastern terminus of the C & O Canal entered Rock Creek on alignment with L Street and used the lower creek, raised by a dam at its mouth and diverted by a mole of stone and earth fill, as a barge basin and transshipment area. The canal company claimed perpetual rights to this portion of the creek and the adjoining land it had filled by virtue of its 1828 congressional charter. In discussions with the parkway commission, the company tentatively agreed to relinquish its rights and territory east of the proposed west boundary of the parkway if the government would quitclaim lands to the west used by the company and reroute the canal from the creek. Accordingly, the commission's plan showed the canal angling to the river just west of its existing first lift lock and running parallel to the creek through a new lift lock down to a new tide lock at the river. In conjunction with this reconfiguration, the creek itself would be shifted eastward below the former canal entry point.<sup>20</sup>

The gas company, with its tanks and other apparatus, was the dominant presence on the east side of the lower creek and along the adjoining

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House Doc. 1114, 64th Congress, pp. 10-17.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 11, 45-46.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-14.

Potomac riverfront. The commission proposed an exchange by which the company would cede its waterfront holdings for land farther inland, including an unneeded street right of way. Negotiations proceeded smoothly, and the exchange was concluded in September 1917.<sup>21</sup>

Congress accepted the parkway commission's survey and report and voted an initial \$50,000 for land acquisition in fiscal year 1917. The commission began purchasing tracts in September 1916. By early 1923 it had acquired 82 percent of the authorized parkway. Finding that it could not obtain the balance by negotiation at reasonable cost, it asked the attorney general to condemn the remaining parcels south of M Street.<sup>22</sup>

The commission had reached a more serious impasse in its negotiations with the C & O Canal Company. By the Jurisdictional Act of April 27, 1912, the attorney general had been directed to file suit against the canal company and other parties claiming interest in lands and waters in, under, and adjacent to the Potomac and Anacostia rivers and Rock Creek to establish and clarify the government's title thereto. The suit against the canal company was shelved while the exchange negotiations held promise; but the company proved more demanding than expected. Negotiations were suspended during the war, then resumed, then suspended again upon the company's insistence that it receive fee simple title to the territory it would gain. At the commission's request, the Justice Department reactivated the suit in late 1923--the government claiming it owned the land wanted for the parkway because it had been made on the bed of a

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16; George E. Clark, "Estimates on the Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," July 1, 1929, report in Historic Resources Services Division, National Capital Region, National Park Service.

<sup>22</sup>Pub. 132, 64th Congress, July 1, 1916, 39 Stat. 282; Clark, "Estimates on the Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," p. 17.

navigable stream, the company claiming ownership because Congress had granted it the use of Rock Creek for its canal.<sup>23</sup>

The government's hand was much strengthened by an otherwise calamitous natural occurrence: the Potomac flood of May 12-14, 1924. Canal navigation had been suspended by damage from many previous floods, but barge traffic and revenues had now dwindled to the point where it no longer paid to rebuild. The company initially insisted that navigation would resume, but as time passed without the necessary repairs, the Justice Department was able to argue for reversion of the company's rights to Rock Creek and the made land along it. In 1930 Lt. Col. U. S. Grant III, then the parkway commission's executive officer, formally requested the District assessor to transfer the made land from the company to the United States on his books. The still-pending title suit was finally settled, in the government's favor, in May 1933.<sup>24</sup>

The Justice Department moved slowly on the commission's 1923 request for condemnation of other parkway lands. The more time passed, the higher property values rose, rendering obsolete the commission's estimates in its 1916 report to Congress. The \$1,300,000 authorized in the 1913 act was fully appropriated by 1925, and approximately 12 acres--including expensive tracts at Pennsylvania Avenue and M Street--remained to be bought. At the beginning of 1926 the commission was forced to draft and send to

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<sup>23</sup>Pub. 138, 62d Congress, 37 Stat. 93; USA v. C & O Canal Company et al., Equity No. 31580, Supreme Court, District of Columbia; memorandum, George E. Clark to Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill, July 27, 1923, General Records of the Executive and Disbursing Officer, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, RG 42, National Archives; letter, Acting Attorney General W. D. Riter to Sherrill, Aug. 30, 1923, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Letter, Grant to William P. Richards, May 26, 1930, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission records; other correspondence *ibid.*

Congress a bill to authorize another \$600,000 to complete acquisition. The bill had all funds coming from the Treasury, which gave congressmen from distant districts another opportunity to vociferously protest the taxing of their people for local improvements. The Senate sought to compromise with 50-50 cost sharing as in the original parkway authorization, but Rep. Thomas L. Blanton of Texas led House opponents in insisting on full funding from District revenues. On that basis the authorization was approved in May and the appropriation made two months later.<sup>25</sup>

Inevitably, the commission staff and influential outside parties occasionally found it desirable to amend the parkway boundaries set in 1916. Brig. Gen. S. T. Ansell, acting judge advocate general, and Sen. Reed Smoot of Utah lived near the Calvert Street crossing and wanted excluded tracts west of Ashmead Place and 20th Street purchased to protect their views. Smoot inserted a provision in a fiscal 1921 appropriations act directing addition of the land to the parkway. A smaller addition was ordered by a District appropriations act in 1923.<sup>26</sup>

In 1927 outside pressure was successfully exerted to have the commission sell back a portion of the parkway east of the creek at P Street for the Church of the Pilgrims. Rep. Fiorello H. LaGuardia of New York thought the sale might be detrimental to the park. "I think that is true," Rep. Edwin L. Davis of Tennessee replied, "but Colonel Grant says that it would be a proper thing to do." In fact, Grant had his own

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<sup>25</sup>Clark, "Estimates on the Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," p. 17; H.R. 4785, 69th Congress; 67 Congressional Record 1862, 8442-43; Pub. 179, 69th Congress, May 5, 1926, 44 Stat. 396.

<sup>26</sup>Letter, Col. Clarence S. Ridley to Ansell, Jan. 11, 1918, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records; Sundry Civil Act of June 5, 1920, Pub. 246, 66th Congress, 41 Stat. 890; Pub. 457, 67th Congress, Feb. 28, 1923, 42 Stat. 1366.

reservations, but he had evidently been made to overcome them in preparing and supporting the legislation ordering the sale. Passed and enacted swiftly without further questions, it allowed the church to recover the land for the price the government had paid in 1924 and gave it a permanent access across parkway property.<sup>27</sup>

Two years later the commission obtained blanket authority to make minor adjustments in the boundaries of the parkway "by excluding therefrom and selling certain small areas, and including other limited areas, the net cost not to exceed the total sum already authorized for the entire project." Colonel Grant made the commission's case for this legislation in transmitting it to Congress:

While the bill does slightly increase the discretion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, it will be advantageous both from the standpoint of economy and the standpoint of best park development. It will permit the commission to get better prices for the few parcels of land still to be bought, because now the owners stand out for a high price in some cases, feeling that the Government is committed to the purchase of the land and that they can prove a high price in court, while if the commission had the discretion given by this bill, it would be possible to tell the owners that their lands would not be purchased unless they would part with them at a more reasonable price.

The bill was enacted without opposition on March 2, 1929.<sup>28</sup> In the next two years under its authority, the commission acquired 33,642 square feet at Connecticut and Calvert streets and sold 41,932 square feet between P and Q streets.

There was continued frustration with the slow pace of the Justice Department in prosecuting the outstanding land condemnation cases and

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<sup>27</sup>Letter, Grant to Rep. Finis J. Garrett, Jan. 11, 1927, in House Rept. 1748, 69th Congress; 68 Congressional Record 1812; Pub. 533, 69th Congress, Jan. 20, 1927, 44 Stat. 1007.

<sup>28</sup>Letter, Grant to Rep. Richard N. Elliott, Jan. 16, 1929, in House Rept. 2210, 70th Congress; Pub. 968, 70th Congress, 45 Stat. 1523.

quiet title suits against other claimants. "[I]t is becoming harder and harder for me to explain to the Committees of Congress each year why this office does not gain possession of the property included in these projects, authorized by law 16 and 15 years ago, some of which acquisitions are absolutely essential to do the construction work proposed by the project," Grant complained to Attorney General William D. Mitchell on May 9, 1929. Justice was roused to action on the remaining seven percent of unacquired land, and by February 1931 the last 13 parcels to be condemned came to public ownership.<sup>29</sup>

The principal developed feature of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, synonymous with it in the public mind, would be the road through it. Segments of the road were under construction in the mid-1920s, but the title disputes and unacquired land prevented it from being made continuous.

The culvert and earth fill carrying Massachusetts Avenue across the valley constituted another obstacle to ideal parkway development. An attractive bridge there would be a great aesthetic improvement and open up the valley; it would also be costly. Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill, the parkway commission's executive officer from 1921 to 1925, had a plan to promote the bridge. The commission would build a low road through the culvert that would be flooded over during high water periods. "The public will thus begin in a short while to realize the necessity of a handsome arch bridge and will accordingly support an appropriation for it," he wrote Charles Moore of the Fine Arts Commission in October 1925.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Letter, Grant to Mitchell, and letter, George E. Clark to Henry H. Glassie, Feb. 16, 1931, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission records.

<sup>30</sup>Letter, Sherrill to Moore, October 23, 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway General project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

Sherrill's strategy ultimately succeeded: the road through the culvert became the predicted bottleneck, and the District government built the present Massachusetts Avenue bridge to replace the culvert and fill in 1940-41.

With parkway development funds limited, it was necessary to resort to other temporary expedients on occasion. Where the road crossed the creek upstream from the Massachusetts Avenue culvert, the commission installed a bridge employing steel girders salvaged from the old Aqueduct Bridge across the Potomac, dismantled in 1926.<sup>31</sup> The lattice girders rose above the road surface between the two lanes as well as on each side and were not in keeping with other parkway construction. The bridge stood from 1927 to 1938-39, when it was replaced with the present stone-faced span.

In October 1931 the government reached an agreement with the C & O Canal Company that permitted construction of a planned creek crossing where the canal entered the creek.<sup>32</sup> Over the next two years the commission built the so-called L Street bridge there, not crossed by L Street but on its east-west alignment. (It was replaced in 1981-83 by the present bridge at that point.) Simultaneously under construction was the Water-side Drive overpass, carrying southbound traffic from Massachusetts Avenue across the northbound lane of the parkway road to its southbound lane. A tower containing a comfort station and a park police lodge was incorporated in the structure, which was completed in June 1932.

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<sup>31</sup>"Work Progressing on Link Connecting Washington Parks," Washington Post, Apr. 3, 1927, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup>"Reach Agreement for Parkway Span Over Rock Creek," Evening Star, Oct. 14, 1931, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Clippings project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.



The last leg of the parkway road, between K and P streets, was opened to traffic in October 1935. The bridge crossing the creek just above P Street was not completed until June 1936; in the meantime, through parkway traffic crossed the creek there via the city's P Street overpass, using the parkway ramps at each end to leave and reenter the park road. With the completion of this segment, a park drive could be enjoyed from Potomac Park to the District line and beyond to East-West Highway in Montgomery County, Maryland.

One major aesthetic flaw remained to mar this extended park experience. At the critical confluence of Rock Creek and the Potomac River, the west bank of the creek was in commercial occupancy. Frederick Law Olmsted had written Charles Moore in 1925 about the problem this posed:

This land, held by the Canal Company and occupied in part by plants for handling gravel and sand, lies directly across the view to the Potomac and the Virginia shore just at the point where anyone driving southward in the parkway would otherwise have that view burst upon him on crossing K Street. I understand that the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission found it impossible to deal with the Canal Company for this land on any reasonable basis....

The canal having been abandoned for navigation, there would be no point in carrying out the old plan in so far as it calls for separating the canal from the creek, but it would be worth a great deal to acquire the land about as far as a line drawn from 29th and K Streets to the south end of 30th Street at the River, in order to provide an unobstructed park foreground to the river view at the point where all the southbound users of the parkway will first become aware of that view and eager to enjoy it. Whether north bound or south bound, users of the parkway will make the transition in this locality from the open broad river bank scenery to the self-contained sylvan scenery of the creek valley or vice versa, and considering the strength and persistency of first impressions this is probably the worst place on the whole line to permit ugly commercial structures and uses to intrude conspicuously on the scenery of the parkway.<sup>33</sup>

The problem would persist until the mid-1980s, when a solution responding in good part to Olmsted's concern appeared imminent.

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<sup>33</sup>Letter, Olmsted to Moore, Sept. 26, 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway General project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

Other Additions

The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was not the first extension of Rock Creek Park. Nearly a decade before the parkway's authorization, moves were afoot to add the first of several tributary stream valleys to the park. The Piney Branch Parkway, extending along the eastern tributary of that name to the vicinity of 16th Street, was proposed in legislation prepared by the District commissioners and transmitted to Congress in November 1905. The resulting act, approved February 27, 1907, directed the commissioners to institute condemnation of land along the valley "not more than an average of four hundred feet in width" connecting 16th Street and Rock Creek Park.<sup>34</sup>

The land was acquired by October 1908, and the Rock Creek Park Board of Control designated it Biddle Parkway for Col. John Biddle, a former board secretary and District engineer commissioner.<sup>35</sup> The name did not adhere in common use, but the parkway grew in length and width under later legal authority. In the 1920s it was extended beyond 16th Street, and the road permitting traffic from adjoining Arkansas Avenue beneath the 16th Street bridge down the valley to Beach Drive was constructed. Land acquired on the north slope of the valley included the prehistoric Piney Branch Quarry, now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Klinge Valley, running west from Rock Creek along the north side of the National Zoological Park, was another early object of acquisition interest. Congressional legislation was pending in 1912 to add a parkway

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<sup>34</sup>Letter, Henry B. F. Macfarland to Rep. J. W. Babcock, Nov. 21, 1905, in House Rept. 5483, 59th Congress; Pub. 135, 59th Congress, 34 Stat. 1000.

<sup>35</sup>Minutes of the Board of Control, Oct. 30, 1908, RG 42, National Archives.

strip along the existing Klingle Road from Rock Creek Park up to Woodley Road. In the early 1920s the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was still pursuing this objective and was seeking a further extension to connect the proposed Klingle Valley Parkway with the Normanstone Parkway, running northwest above Massachusetts Avenue from the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The connection would enable a parkway detour around the west side of the zoo, wanted because the road along Rock Creek through the zoo was closed at night and whenever water rose too high at the two fords within the zoo grounds.<sup>36</sup> The Klingle Valley and Normanstone parkways ultimately came into being, their land acquisition continuing into the 1950s, but the connection between them never materialized.

In addition to serving for access routes into Rock Creek Park, these and other tributary park extensions were wanted to help preserve the Rock Creek watershed. Acquisition of the desired lands was a foremost purpose of the National Capital Park Commission, established by an act of Congress approved June 6, 1924, "to preserve the flow of water in Rock Creek, to prevent pollution of Rock Creek and the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, to preserve forests and natural scenery in and about Washington, and to provide for the comprehensive systematic, and continuous development of the park, parkway, and playground system of the National Capital."<sup>37</sup>

The commission was composed of the chief of engineers of the U.S. Army, the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, the director

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<sup>36</sup>Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, Operations from the Establishment of the Park, September 27, 1890, to June 30, 1912 (Washington, 1912), p. 8; Senate Rept. 480, 67th Congress, Feb. 3, 1922; Klingle Valley administrative file, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records, RG 328, National Archives.

<sup>37</sup>Pub. 202, 68th Congress, 43 Stat. 463.

of the National Park Service, the chief of the U.S. Forest Service, the officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, and the chairmen of the House and Senate committees on the District of Columbia. The officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds (succeeded in 1925 by the director of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital) served as executive officer of the commission, in which capacity he oversaw its land acquisition program. Subsequent stream valley and other additions to Rock Creek Park in the District, including Melvin C. Hazen Park, Soapstone Valley Park, and Pinehurst Parkway, were purchased by the commission over the next three decades. A 1926 amendment to the act retitled the body the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and gave it the additional purpose of developing "a comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated plan for the National Capital and its environs in the States of Maryland and Virginia."<sup>38</sup>

This regional approach to parks and planning was motivated in part by awareness that Rock Creek and its parkland in the District would suffer increasing degradation if the creek and its watershed upstream in Maryland were not protected. In a 1913 paper on attractions around Washington, Lord Bryce, the British ambassador to the United States, had proposed park status for the upper valley on scenic and recreational grounds:

I should like to go even further [than the existing park]--although perhaps I am indulging in aspirations and not sufficiently thinking of appropriations--and consecrate the whole of Rock Creek valley for 10 or 12 miles above Washington to the public. It is a very beautiful valley.... Some day or other such a piece of scenery will be of infinite value to the people of Washington, who want to refresh their souls with the charms of Nature.... There are leafy glades where a man can go and lie down on a bed of leaves and listen

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<sup>38</sup>Pub. 158, 69th Congress, Apr. 30, 1926, 44 Stat. 374.

for hours to the birds singing and forget there is such a place as Washington and such a thing as politics within eight miles of him.<sup>39</sup>

In September 1925 Colonel Sherrill, as executive secretary of the National Capital Park Commission, wrote Gov. Albert C. Ritchie of Maryland to enlist his state's cooperation in park planning and acquisition for watershed protection as well as recreation. The governor agreed to appoint a committee to work with the commission. His appointees met the following May and named Maj. E. Brooke Lee, a prominent Montgomery County landowner and politician, as their chairman. In 1927 the Maryland legislature gave the committee legal status as the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.<sup>40</sup> Along with other land planning and development responsibilities, the Maryland commission would both acquire and administer most parkland in Montgomery and Prince Georges counties, the jurisdictions bordering the District of Columbia.

To inspire the District's neighbors to substantive action, the carrot of federal aid was deemed necessary. Rep. Louis C. Cramton of Michigan, chairman of the House subcommittee dealing with park appropriations, introduced legislation in 1929 that would have the United States grant one third and advance two thirds of the cost of extensions of Rock Creek and Anacostia River parkland into Maryland. On the House floor that December, Cramton announced that the Maryland-National Capital Park and

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<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Charles W. Eliot II, "Park System for the National Capital, Washington Region," February 1927, Cooperation with Maryland (General) file 545-95-25, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records.

<sup>40</sup>Letter, Sherrill to Ritchie, Sept. 11, 1925, Cooperation with Maryland (General) file 545-95-25, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records; letter, Ritchie to Sherrill, Sept. 14, 1925, *ibid.*; other documents *ibid.*

Planning Commission had made detailed plans for the Rock Creek Park extension in consultation with the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and was prepared to repay the federal advance. The House passed the bill, and it was referred to the Senate's Committee on the District of Columbia chaired by Sen. Arthur Capper of Kansas.<sup>41</sup>

Colonel Grant, now executive officer of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, worked closely with Cramton and Capper to resolve minor differences. As approved by the Senate and subsequently agreed to by the House, the bill specified a ceiling of \$1,500,000 for the federal contribution and \$3,000,000 more for the advance, to be repaid without interest in eight years. No appropriation would be made available until the two park and planning commissions had negotiated a satisfactory agreement on sewage disposal and storm water flow in the watersheds with the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, the bi-county sewer and water authority. The Capper-Cramton Act, as it was known, received President Herbert Hoover's signature on May 29, 1930.<sup>42</sup>

Conrad L. Wirth, a young landscape architect on the staff of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, worked with the Maryland commission and completed a report on the extended Rock Creek Park boundaries that September. The following August the commissions entered into the required sewage and storm water agreement, and the Maryland commission accelerated its extensive land acquisition program. It was already at work continuing Beach Drive 1.2 miles north to East-West Highway. The

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<sup>41</sup>H.R. 26, 71st Congress, Apr. 15, 1929; House Rept. 55, 71st Congress, Dec. 18, 1929; 72 Congressional Record 1084-86, 2724.

<sup>42</sup>Senate Rept. 458, 71st Congress, Apr. 17, 1930; 72 Congressional Record 8850, 9371; Pub. 284, 71st Congress, 46 Stat. 484.

Maryland portion of Rock Creek Park would ultimately reach upstream 22 miles from the District line and encompass 4,193 acres, as compared to 1,754 acres in the District portion.<sup>43</sup> Its separate administration would not be perceptible to most users entering and continuing along Beach Drive or a hiking or horse trail, and it would closely complement the federal park.

Two significant tracts in Georgetown might be considered additions to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, except that one predates it as parkland. Montrose Park, occupying some 16 acres at 30th and R streets, owes its existence to a 1911 District appropriations act provision directing its purchase and inclusion in the District park system.<sup>44</sup> The force behind the legislation was Sarah Louise Rittenhouse, a Georgetown citizen determined to save the land from commercial development. The park became contiguous to the parkway when the land for the latter was acquired in the valley below. Adjoining Montrose Park on the northwest is Dumbarton Oaks Park, which Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss deeded to the government in 1940 when they gave the main portion of their Georgetown estate to Harvard. It comprises 27 acres of wooded land with a stream valley descending to Rock Creek. Both parks afford convenient access to parkway trails from upper Georgetown.

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<sup>43</sup>Counting Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the tributary parklands not officially part of Rock Creek Park, there are between 2,100 and 2,200 acres of federal parkland in the District portion of Rock Creek valley.

<sup>44</sup>Pub. 441, 61st Congress, Mar. 2, 1911, 36 Stat. 1005.

## UNDER THE PARK SERVICE

### The Changing of the Guard

A new era for Rock Creek Park and related parklands began on August 10, 1933. An executive order effective that date, signed two months before by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, abolished the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission and assigned their functions to the Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations in the Department of the Interior. The Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations was a new name for the National Park Service and one that proved temporary: the designation employed since the bureau's creation in 1916 was restored in an Interior appropriations act approved March 2, 1934.<sup>1</sup>

The administrative shift was part of a larger reorganization of the executive branch ordered by President Roosevelt during his first months in office (his action having been authorized in legislation signed by Herbert Hoover on his last full day as president). As it affected the National Park Service, the major aim of the reorganization was consolidation of the national monuments and battlefield parks administered by three government departments under one. Horace M. Albright, the enterprising young director of the Service, was chiefly interested in obtaining the parks and monuments of the Agriculture and War departments; but he

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<sup>1</sup>Executive Order 6166, Mar. 3, 1933, 5 USC §124-32; Pub. 109, 73d Congress, 48 Stat. 389.



did not object when Lewis W. Douglas, Roosevelt's budget director, drafted the executive order to include the Washington parks. A skilled political operator, Albright knew that possession of these parks would further enhance the Service's visibility among members of Congress and other national leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Under the National Park Service, Rock Creek Park and its adjuncts became components of National Capital Parks. The term denoted the administrative branch of the Service formed to manage the Washington area acquisitions as well as the parks themselves collectively. National Capital Parks inherited most of the civilian employees of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, including Francis F. Gillen and Frank T. Gartside. Gartside acted as NCP superintendent for the first two months of the new administration, whereupon C. Marshall Finnan, formerly superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park, received the permanent appointment.

Finnan stayed through July 1939. Gartside, Edmund B. Rogers, and Gillen successively acted in the position during the interval to January 1941, when Irving C. Root took the job. Root, who had been chief engineer with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, was superintendent until July 1950. He was followed by a line of career Park Service managers: Edward J. Kelly through April 1958, Harry T. Thompson to February 1961, T. Sutton Jett to January 1968, I. G. (Nash) Castro to September 1969, Russell E. Dickenson from December 1969 to October 1973, and Manus J. (Jack) Fish, Jr., from then until this

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<sup>2</sup>Albright, Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1971), pp. 21-24.

writing. From 1962 to 1969 and from 1976 to date, National Capital Region replaced National Capital Parks as the umbrella organizational term, and the head of the office was titled regional director.

Like most components of National Capital Parks, Rock Creek Park was not treated as a discrete unit of the National Park System for many years after it came under National Park Service administration. As a sub-unit of NCP it did not have its own superintendent and staff. Maintenance workers, park police officers, and others were detailed regularly to duty there, however, and the person assigned to supervise park maintenance was sometimes termed superintendent, as under the predecessor organizations.

Joseph J. Quinn, another legacy of Public Buildings and Public Parks, was chief of NCP's Rock Creek Park Division in the early 1940s and was called superintendent of the park in the mid-1950s. Keith R. Polhemus filled his role in 1958 as Chief, Rock Creek Park Section. In 1965 three new administrative divisions were established within the National Capital Region, and Rock Creek Park came under National Capital Parks-North, headed successively by Superintendents Joseph Brown, Julius A. Martinek, and Joseph Antosca. The three divisions were reduced to two in July 1972, Rock Creek being assigned to National Capital Parks-West under Superintendent William R. Failor, then Luther C. Burnett.

In 1975 the National Park Service listed Rock Creek Park as a separate unit of the National Park System, giving it the same nominal status as Yellowstone and Yosemite.<sup>3</sup> It did not yet have the same degree of administrative autonomy: when National Capital Parks-West was abolished that year, the park reverted to a division in the National Capital Parks

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<sup>3</sup>Index of the National Park System and Affiliated Areas as of January 1, 1975 (Washington: National Park Service, 1975), p. 109.

headquarters managed by James J. Redmond. An administrative reorganization in October 1976 brought to the Rock Creek Division Pinehurst Parkway, Soapstone Valley Park, Melvin C. Hazen Park, Klinge Valley Parkway, Normanstone Parkway, Dumbarton Oaks Park, Montrose Park, Beach Parkway, and Blair Portal--tributary and other bordering reservations recently under George Washington Memorial Parkway and National Capital Parks--East jurisdiction. With its effective boundaries thus enlarged, Rock Creek Park lost its division status and became a distinct organizational entity in August 1977, and Redmond became a full-fledged park superintendent. Upon his untimely death in August 1983 he was succeeded in that capacity by Georgia A. Ellard.

#### The Urban Challenge

Until the 1933 reorganization the National Park Service managed mostly western wilderness. City parks--even large natural city parks--were alien to its agenda. Although Horace Albright and his successors appreciated the visibility and political value their bureau derived from administering the National Capital Parks, many if not most of their staff did not regard this urban inheritance as "real Park Service." A dichotomy between the National Park Service and the National Capital Parks persists to the present in the minds of many Service traditionalists.

Rock Creek Park was more like the Service's traditional areas than were other elements of National Capital Parks. This resemblance did not shield it from internal criticism, however. In June 1934 Malcolm Kirkpatrick, a landscape architect in the Service's Branch of Plans and Design, prepared a 16-page report titled "What Is Wrong With Rock Creek Park." He termed his critique a supplement to the Olmsted Report of 1918.

Kirkpatrick complained of the park's deteriorated woodlands from unchecked weed and seedling growth and a failure to remove dead timber (revealing a management orientation not shared by all). He noted the erratic flow of the creek from its use as a storm sewer, causing undercutting of banks and deposition of sand and silt. "The automobile can be designated as one of the greatest detriments to the enjoyment of Rock Creek Park today; that is, Rock Creek Park as it is equipped to handle the burden of traffic upon it," he wrote; to alleviate the situation he suggested augmenting the creek fords with bridges.<sup>4</sup>

Kirkpatrick was offended by the aesthetics of previous park development. The rustic signs were "'rustic' in the worst sense of that word which implies apparently that to conform to natural surroundings, objects of wood must ape the growing tree. This is an absurd notion that yields absurd results." Toilet buildings and shelters were "drab and uninteresting." Existing road bridges represented "a fairly thorough cross-section of bad architectural and structural design."

"Thus to the National Park Service has come a heritage wealthy only in its possibilities...", he concluded. "Once a program is formulated, a rigid system of control must be inaugurated so that every step taken shall be in the direction of the established objective and within the bounds of good taste and common sense. No more of this haphazard freedom for subordinate field foremen."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. E. P. Meinecke, a natural scientist on the Service staff, recorded his views on Rock Creek Park at the same time:

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<sup>4</sup>Report in Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records, RG 66, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The strongest impression I get is that of disappointment. I have every reason to expect, in a large city, the capital of the Nation, a Park representing that which is best in American landscape art, designed to serve a large and growing number of its inhabitants as a place of recreation and refuge from the turmoil and heat of the city. I find instead a curious mixture of more or less futile attempts at landscaping and of wild or rather unkempt growth, haphazardly developed, of amateurish attempts at embellishment side by side with crudest neglect.<sup>6</sup>

Meinecke found too much cleaning of the forest floor in heavily used areas, tending to soil erosion. Like Kirkpatrick, he commented on the scouring and undercutting of the creek banks from unregulated stream flow. "There is at present, little pleasure to be gained from visiting the creek itself," he wrote. "The water is dirty and the smell of decaying filth is anything but agreeable." He attributed much of this problem to an inadequate storm sewer gate in Piney Branch, which in heavy rain let raw sewage into the stream.<sup>7</sup>

The primary feature of Rock Creek Park--the creek itself--had been sullied for some time by its urban and suburban surroundings. In 1922 designated children's bathing places were identified as subject to very high fecal contamination, traced to sewage from Bethesda and Kensington, Maryland. The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission could not correct the problem until the District of Columbia completed its interceptor sewer, to which the suburban sewerage would connect. The Army Medical Corps operated chlorination plants above the bathing areas, but their efficacy in the running stream could not be assured. Bathing had to be suspended.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Memorandum, Meinecke to Tom Vint, June 20, 1934, Rock Creek Park Correspondence project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>"Rock Creek Park Bathers in Peril From Bad Water," Evening Star,

As related in the last chapter, the volume of stream flow had also become a matter of increasing concern in the 1920s. In his capacity as executive secretary of the National Capital Park Commission, U. S. Grant III asked the U.S. Geological Survey in 1926 to monitor the flow in the Rock Creek basin. Funds were not immediately available to establish gauging stations, but A. H. Horton of the Survey arranged for the monitoring beginning in 1929. "The flowing water in Rock Creek is one of the chief attractions of the park," he wrote Grant. "[I]f the developments in the basin of the creek are affecting the amount of water in the creek I believe it would be desirable to obtain data which will indicate how serious the situation is and whether the effect on the flow of the creek is increasing year by year." Two years later the National Capital Park and Planning Commission considered a proposal to raise the Potomac River dam above Great Falls so that the impounded water could be gravity-fed to the Rock Creek valley through a conduit to augment the creek flow during dry periods. Grant determined that the scheme would be very costly, and it was not pursued.<sup>9</sup>

Government facilities were among the sources of creek pollution in the early 1930s. The Walter Reed Army Hospital on upper 16th Street discharged sewage into Rock Creek, and the National Bureau of Standards on Connecticut Avenue disposed of large quantities of chemicals in the

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June 13, 1922; "Rock Creek Park Bathing Is Halted," Evening Star, July 6, 1922; both in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Clippings project file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>9</sup>Letter, Grant to Director, USGS, May 23, 1926, Rock Creek and Tributaries file 545-98-60, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records, RG 328, National Archives; letter, Horton to Grant, Mar. 16, 1929, *ibid.*; Minutes, 57th Meeting of National Capital Park and Planning Commission, July 31-Aug. 1, 1931, copy *ibid.*

tributary running past its property. In 1934 the National Park Service received a \$25,000 allotment from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works to study and plan for the elimination of pollution in Rock Creek and its tributaries. The resulting report declared the major problem to be the combined sanitary and storm sewers serving some 160,000 people in the District portion of the watershed: the intercepting sewers became overcharged during rains and spilled their contents into the creek. Separate systems would be needed--and they would be costly.<sup>10</sup>

The situation had not greatly improved by 1954, when an article titled "Our Capital's Rock Creek Mess" appeared in American Forests. "It is hard to believe that the foul-smelling, mud-laden, debris-choked watercourse which winds its sickly way from Montgomery County, Maryland, through the nation's capital can be the same stream which Major Michler described...some 90 years ago," wrote its author, Bernard Frank of the U.S. Forest Service. Frank deplored the overdevelopment of the watershed with inadequate storm water and sewage controls and called for strict measures to prevent erosion during land development.<sup>11</sup>

In 1967 an Interior Department publication, The Creek and the City: Urban Pressures on a Natural Stream; Rock Creek Park and Metropolitan Washington, was able to report some progress. The U.S. Geological Survey and the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration had conducted

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<sup>10</sup>Memorandum, Frank T. Gartside to Chief, Park Division, Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, Aug. 5, 1932, Rock Creek and Tributaries file 545-98-60, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records; letter, Arno B. Cammerer to Chairman, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Jan. 11, 1935, *ibid.*; LeRoy K. Sherman and Wesley W. Horner, Report on Measures for Elimination of Pollution of Rock Creek and Its Tributaries in Washington (Washington: National Park Service, 1935).

<sup>11</sup>August 1954, pp. 20-21, 44-45.

detailed studies to monitor water quality in the creek. Two dams had recently been built upstream in Montgomery County under the Soil Conservation Service; Lakes Needwood and Frank (for the deceased Bernard Frank) behind them would collect silt and curb flood damage downstream during their expected 50-year lifespans. Montgomery County had adopted new grading and sediment controls for land development. Some defective sewers in Washington had been repaired, and the National Zoo had initiated a major program to halt the discharge of animal wastes into the creek. The report advocated stronger enforcement of existing anti-siltage and pollution measures and greater efforts to continuously remove trash and other debris from the stream.

In the mid-1980s there is still some pollution from combined sewers in times of prolonged rainfall, but most is from non-point sources--general street runoff. With the heavy development in the watershed accelerating runoff, the creek flow is more erratic than ever. Neither problem is readily solvable.<sup>12</sup>

The urban environs of Rock Creek Park presented other challenges unfamiliar to Park Service managers in their accustomed habitat. Most park users were local, and many used the park in ways that visitors to most other national parklands did not. Some of these uses were judged incompatible with the higher values for which the park had been set aside.

In 1936 Russell T. Edwards of the American Nature Association complained that the park had been converted to "an outdoor garage for the automobile washing industry." Evidently a traditionalist in matters of

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<sup>12</sup>Interview with Robert Ford, Nov. 19, 1984.



dress, Edwards was scandalized by the dishabille of the participants. "With a background of still reflecting waters with ducks and geese paddling idly about," he wrote, "you will find women in Mother Hubbards or nightgowns, I wouldn't know which, washing automobiles aided by, I presume, their husbands, stripped to the shirt and less." Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes agreed that the activity was unseemly and announced plans to forbid car washing--a prohibition not consistently enforced.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, there were more serious offenses to occupy the attention of the U.S. Park Police, established under the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1919 and inherited by the Park Service with National Capital Parks in 1933. "Residents describe the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway section between Taft Bridge and Calvert Street Bridge, particularly the south slope behind the Edgewater Riding Academy, as a 'jungle'--a habitat of unsavory characters, perverts, and delinquents," Assistant Regional Director Nash Castro advised the force in 1962. He ordered heightened surveillance of the area.<sup>14</sup> Surveillance would never be sufficient to thwart all evil-doing in the park, however.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Park Service made a more concerted effort to bring "parks to the people"--particularly urban parks to inner-city populations. The National Capital Region sponsored "Summer in the

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<sup>13</sup>Edwards letter to the editor, Washington Post, July 25, 1936; "Ickes to Forbid Washing Autos In Park Creek," Washington Post, Aug. 6, 1936; both in clipping scrapbook, National Capital Parks, National Park Service records, RG 79, National Archives.

<sup>14</sup>Memorandum, Castro to The Force, Mar. 16, 1962, Administration, Maintenance, and Protection file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, National Capital Region, National Park Service records, Washington National Records Center (WNRC), Suitland, Md.

Parks" and "Parks for All Seasons" programs aimed at black youth and others who had been little drawn to the traditional park values and activities. Amplified popular music concerts were prominent features of the new programs. Some were held in Rock Creek Park, but when park neighbors complained of the noise and "undesirable elements" attracted, most such programs there (outside the Carter Barron Amphitheater) were discontinued.

In 1972 a Washingtonian magazine article summarized the stresses and contradictions stemming from Rock Creek Park's urban situation:

It is thought to be the largest urban park in the country, perhaps in the world, yet it is very hard to get into. It is a wilderness preserve largely untrammelled by man, but the polluted stream that flows through it is dangerous to touch. It has the potential to bring people together in enjoyment and relaxation, but it is a physical barrier four miles long and one mile wide separating the haves [west of the park] from the have-nots [east of the park] in an already divided city. It is without peer as a living example of our heritage from prehistoric ages to colonial times to the present, yet the majority of those who use it are commuters who never leave their cars.<sup>15</sup>

### The Park and the Automobile

The greatest urban impact on Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was and is automobile traffic. Although virtually all national parklands felt the heavy influence of the automobile, few were so dominated by it.

Automobiles could not be accused of intruding in the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which was intended from its inception to accommodate them. "The road in the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway section is designed for high speed traffic as far north as Cathedral Avenue," reported

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<sup>15</sup>Jim Seymore, "What Is Big, Green, Pretty, Polluted, Underused, and Exploited?" October 1972, p. 86.

Thomas C. Jeffers, a National Capital Park and Planning Commission landscape architect, in 1934. "Its real purpose is to provide a pleasant and speedy way of travel between Potomac Park and Rock Creek Park." Jeffers contrasted it with Beach Drive and the link through the zoo, which he declared must remain low speed and unstraightened.<sup>16</sup>

Upon completion of the parkway road in June 1936, Chairman Frederic A. Delano of the Park and Planning Commission suggested alternating one-way traffic south and north for morning and evening commuters respectively. This pattern was inaugurated in May 1937 and became a permanent feature of the parkway, reinforcing its status as a commuter route.<sup>17</sup> Among the regular parkway commuters during the first decade was Secretary Ickes, who in the early 1940s requested weekly park police reports on violators of the one-way traffic regulation and personally recorded the license numbers of offenders he spotted.

The completion and heavy use of the parkway road created new pressures on the valley road to the north. The link from the upper end of the parkway through the zoo to Rock Creek Park proper, built in the 1920s, was a major impediment to through traffic. It wound sharply along an S-curve of the creek and traversed two fords, which caused closure of the road during high water.

In 1933, even before the parkway road was finished, highway improvement advocates in the city were favoring construction of a road tunnel

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<sup>16</sup>"Future Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge To and Including Piney Branch Parkway," Feb. 16, 1934, Rock Creek Park and Parkway planning file 535, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records.

<sup>17</sup>Letter, Delano to Arno B. Cammerer, June 6, 1936, Roads file 630, NCR-NPS records, National Archives; "One Way Traffic Due for Parkway," Evening Star, May 12, 1937, clipping in Roads and Traffic file, Resources Management office, Rock Creek Park headquarters.

beneath a portion of the zoo to straighten the link. The Smithsonian Institution, which administered the zoo and the road segment through it, opposed the tunnel. So did the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which thought it would violate the park character of the road. But the highway interests, generally supported by the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners, persisted and broadened their vision. In 1938 Commissioner Melvin C. Hazen proposed extension of a double traffic artery through the zoo and north through the Rock Creek valley to East-West Highway in Maryland--a scheme opposed by the Evening Star newspaper as "about the worst thing that could happen to Rock Creek Park."<sup>18</sup>

Prompted by the District commissioners, Congress in the fiscal 1940 District appropriations act ordered planning for "additional highway and parkway facilities in the vicinity of, into and through Rock Creek Park, Rock Creek and Potomac connecting Parkway and National Zoological Park." But the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the National Park Service, essential parties to the planning, succeeded in stalling action until 1942, when World War II shifted federal priorities and the through highway scheme was shelved.<sup>19</sup>

The zoo road became a live issue again in 1954, with the National Park Service and National Capital Planning Commission (as it was retitled

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<sup>18</sup>Minutes, 80th Meeting, National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Sept. 15-16, 1933, Zoo Bypass file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records, WNRC; letter, Alexander Wetmore to Arno B. Cammerer, Oct. 4, 1933, *ibid.*; "Spare the Park" (editorial), Evening Star, June 28, 1938.

<sup>19</sup>Pub. 176, 76th Congress, July 15, 1939, 53 Stat. 1036; letter, Arthur E. Demaray to Col. C. W. Kutz, Sept. 15, 1942, Rock Creek Park and Parkway planning file 535, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records; Minutes, 176th Meeting, National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *ibid.*

in 1952) now eager to improve that segment. The Service advocated twin two-lane tunnels through the hill around which the downstream bend of the creek flowed through the zoo, with a bridge over the creek below the south portals. The Smithsonian was still reluctant and deflected Service requests for permission to start surveying and test boring for the tunnels. "This matter has been very carefully discussed in our offices, and I am afraid that it is the unanimous opinion here that it would be disadvantageous for the National Zoological Park to have the road you describe cut through its property..." Secretary Leonard Carmichael wrote Director Conrad L. Wirth in February 1957. "It is our considered opinion that an arterial type road cutting through this property would seriously interfere with the basic recreational and scientific functions of the Zoological Park."<sup>20</sup>

In a peremptory reply to Carmichael, Wirth spelled out the legislative intent of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as connecting Potomac Park and Rock Creek Park and virtually demanded a transfer of zoo land to the Service for the purpose. Unintimidated, Carmichael replied that much more time would be needed for the Smithsonian's lawyers and board of regents to consider the matter. The Service then took a more conciliatory approach, wooing Dr. Theodore H. Reed, the zoo director, with master planning assistance. In a 1959 letter to Carmichael, Wirth was deferential, promising to hold the new zoo road to two lanes and offering to allow the Smithsonian to choose its alignment. Carmichael finally authorized the survey and borings, and in March 1960 he announced the Smithsonian's approval of plans prepared by the Service and Bureau of Public Roads. The

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<sup>20</sup>Letter, Feb. 25, 1957, Zoo Bypass file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records.

two-lane road would tunnel through "Administration Hill" and follow the east side of Rock Creek to Klingle Road; the zoo land north of the tunnel and east of the road would be transferred to the Service; and the Service would build a parking lot for the zoo near the Harvard Street entrance and a bridge to carry Harvard Street traffic across the parkway.<sup>21</sup>

After further design work, a contract for \$1,536,584 was let to A. S. Wilkerstrom, Inc., of Skaneateles, New York, in June 1962. The tunnel and new road segment, eliminating the two fords, opened to traffic in the fall of 1966.

The improvement, so long advocated by the Park Service, proved a mixed blessing. The parkway below carried more northbound rush-hour traffic wanting to use the single northbound lane of the new road through the tunnel than it could accommodate, leading to long backups on the parkway. Pressures mounted to extend one-way northbound traffic to Klingle Street--but that would only relocate the bottleneck and clog both lanes of the tunnel, blocking it to emergency vehicles and creating possible hazards from exhaust fumes.

By the 1970s the Service realized the futility of parkway improvements to lessen traffic congestion: more lanes and fewer impediments only served to attract more traffic, with increasingly evident degradation of park values. In a 1977 planning document on Rock Creek Park the Service reviewed its past actions with regret: "[T]he conversion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to exclusive use by one-way traffic during

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<sup>21</sup>Letter, Wirth to Carmichael, May 1, 1957, Zoo Bypass file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records; letter, Carmichael to Wirth, May 3, 1957, *ibid.*; letter, Wirth to Carmichael, Mar. 13, 1959, *ibid.*; letter, Carmichael to Wirth, Aug. 7, 1959, *ibid.*; letter, Carmichael to Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, Mar. 15, 1969, *ibid.*

morning and evening rush periods and the provision of first priority maintenance of an excellent road net directly encourage excessive commuter traffic.... Construction of a tunnel on roadway near the National Zoo represents inappropriate development since it directly encourages adverse increased commuter use of park roads."<sup>22</sup> Such are the insights of hindsight!

The Service's position on the proposed four-lane arterial highway to Maryland has better stood the test of time. As advanced by Commissioner Hazen in 1938, the highway would pass through the zoo and the lower part of Rock Creek Park, extend north along the east side of Broad Branch Road to Military Road, then use Oregon Avenue widened on the park side to connect with a widened Beach Drive in Maryland. In delaying action on the proposal, the Service cited the 1918 Olmsted Report to buttress its view that no major roadway should occupy the narrow winding floor or steep wooded hillsides of the valley above the zoo (although certain crossings would be appropriate).<sup>23</sup>

The war sidelined but did not bury the highway plan, which reappeared in the Recommended Highway Improvement Program presented by the Regional Highway Planning Committee in 1952. The arterial along and through Rock Creek Park was now to be a link connecting U.S. Route 240 (present Interstate 270) in Maryland with downtown Washington. Proponents of the plan, including the District commissioners, argued that only a small part of the park--the most densely wooded and least used part--would be

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<sup>22</sup>"Statement for Management, Rock Creek Park," pp. 8, 10 (copy at Rock Creek Park headquarters).

<sup>23</sup>Letter, Acting Director Arthur E. Demaray to Col. C. W. Kutz, Sept. 15, 1942, Rock Creek Park and Parkway planning file 535, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records.

affected. They were joined in Maryland by the State Roads Commission and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which was prepared to allow use of Maryland's Rock Creek Park for the highway and for a segment of what would become the Capital Beltway.<sup>24</sup>

The National Park Service resumed its opposition. It was aided by a group of Chevy Chase, Maryland, residents led by Gerald P. Nye, a former senator from North Dakota, who would be disturbed by a leg of the highway displacing or passing near their homes. In June 1953 Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay wrote Nye, "[T]he Department of the Interior will vigorously oppose any use of the Rock Creek Valley for arterial highway purposes or any other use contrary to the intent of Congress in the establishment of this important park area."<sup>25</sup> Park Service Director Conrad Wirth represented Interior on the National Capital Planning Commission, which would have to approve highway construction in the Maryland parkland acquired with federal funds under the Capper-Cramton Act. The commission opposed the highway down Rock Creek Park in the District, but it overrode Wirth's objections and allowed the Capital Beltway to pass through a portion of the park in Maryland.

In January 1955 the Service drafted legislation, introduced by Chairman James E. Murray of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs committee, that would require the National Capital Planning Commission to rescind its permission for the beltway leg, restrict its approval of subsequent roads in the Maryland park, and proscribe additional roads in the District

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<sup>24</sup>Sam Zagoria, "Key Planners Call Parley to Decide Fate of Proposed Rock Creek Parkway Leg," Washington Post, Oct. 28, 1953, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup>Letter, McKay to Nye, June 17, 1953, Route 240 file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.



park without specific congressional approval. The bill won support from retired congressman Louis C. Cramton, Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant III (now president of the American Planning and Civic Association), and an array of civic and conservation organizations. It was opposed by the Bureau of the Budget, which thought it unnecessary in view of existing protections; by Maryland politicians and officials, to whom it represented unwarranted federal interference in state affairs; and by the Washington Post, which editorialized, "[N]o assurance can be given that the enormous increase in traffic from Montgomery County into the District can be handled without an expressway along the edge of Rock Creek Park some time in the future."<sup>26</sup>

The highway issue was thoroughly ventilated in a Senate hearing on the bill, which was not brought to a vote in either house then or following its reintroduction in the next Congress. Planning for the beltway leg in Maryland proceeded amid state assurances that it would be a low-speed "parkway" from which commercial traffic would be forever barred--assurances that were forgotten when the beltway was completed in the mid-1960s and became part of the interstate highway system. But opposition to bringing U.S. 240 into the District via Rock Creek Park spread and solidified. When District and Maryland highway interests revived the scheme in 1957, the Washington Post admitted past error and declared, "This would be intolerable, and Washingtonians who love their park had better rise up and block any such encroachment." (At the same time, it

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<sup>26</sup>Memorandum, Associate Superintendent Harry T. Thompson, NCP, to Conrad L. Wirth, Jan. 13, 1955, Route 240 file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; S.J. Res. 36, 84th Congress; Congressional Record, Feb. 1, 1955, p. 874; U.S. Congress, Senate, Rock Creek Park, Hearings before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, 84th Congress, 1st Session, on S.J. Res. 36, Feb. 25-26, 1955; letter, Assistant Director Harold Pearson, Budget Bureau, to Murray, Apr. 21, 1955, Route 240 file; "Congress and Rock Creek" (editorial), Washington Post, Feb. 4, 1955.

avored an alternate route through Glover-Archbold Park as "the least disadvantageous course," because "unquestionably a connection with U.S. 240 must be provided.") Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton solicited statements from District Commissioner Robert E. McLaughlin, Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks, and Gov. Theodore H. McKeldin of Maryland that they shared his strong objection to a Rock Creek highway; only McKeldin declined to join in.<sup>27</sup>

Some skirmishing continued (highway dragons being notoriously difficult to slay). A 1958 Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission staff report on alternative extensions of U.S. 240 explicitly ruled out Rock Creek Park based on Interior-Park Service and conservationist opposition. A year later, however, the Maryland commission and the Montgomery County Planning Board resolved to restudy a route using the park. Once again Director Wirth made clear the Service position, with evident success--for a time.<sup>28</sup>

The next and last serious challenge came in 1966. The Lands Committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the National Capital Regional Planning Council, an affiliate of the National Capital Planning Commission, proposed a new feasibility study of a highway route along the western edge of Rock Creek Park south to Tilden Street, where it would cross to the east side and join the Rock Creek and Potomac

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<sup>27</sup>S.J. 123, 85th Congress; "Highway Keep Out" (editorial), Washington Post, July 12, 1957; Seaton letters July 18, 1957, McLaughlin to Seaton, July 23, 1957, Weeks to Seaton, July 25, 1957, Route 240 file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>28</sup>"Staff Report on Feasibility Studies for the Extension and Location of U.S. 240 to Connect with the District of Columbia," January 1958, Route 240 file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; letter, Wirth to Jesse F. Nicholson (MNCPPC), May 22, 1959, *ibid.*

Parkway below the zoo. The Evening Star endorsed the plan, characterizing opposition to the earlier proposals as emotional and predicting that this route would "emerge as the most reasonable, logical solution" to the need for a northwestern freeway connection.<sup>29</sup>

By this time, however, longstanding assumptions about the need for such a connection--somewhere--were being challenged by other visions. From them sprang the planning and construction of Metro, metropolitan Washington's rapid rail transit system, in the next two decades. The massive governmental commitment to Metro rendered most freeway proposals obsolete, that for Rock Creek Park among them. The park would likely have been spared without the subway, so entrenched were its defenders; but if the highway plan were finally dead, Metro entombed it.

### Bicycling

The 1960s saw a resurgence in the popularity of the bicycle as a mode of transportation and recreation for adults as well as children. Rock Creek Park made its first special effort to accommodate cyclists early in that decade, when Ross Drive was occasionally reserved for their use. In 1966 the section of Beach Drive from Joyce Road to Broad Branch Road was first limited to bicycle and pedestrian traffic on Sunday mornings. By that fall about three and a half miles of trail north of the Nature Center had been bluestone-surfaced for bicycle use. In the following years the Beach Drive automobile closure was extended to Morrow Drive, and the bicycle trail was extended.

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<sup>29</sup>Jack Eisen, "Rock Creek Freeway Proposal Is Revived," Washington Post, Apr. 15, 1966; "Back to the Park" (editorial), Evening Star, Apr. 19, 1966; both clippings in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway clipping file, Martin Luther King Library, Washington, D.C.

These initial efforts were not altogether successful. The trail was overly steep in places, and the surface was not stable enough for thin tires. Bicycle use on the closed roads did not appear sufficient to justify their closure, and motorists complained. They also objected to sharing roads simultaneously with cyclists, who tended to hold up traffic.<sup>30</sup>

Cyclists made rapid gains in number and influence, however. In September 1971 they prevailed upon the Park Service to set aside one lane of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway north of Virginia Avenue for a week to promote commuting by bicycle in lieu of automobiles. The experiment was well publicized and enjoyed a good response from cyclists, but its positive aspects were overshadowed by massive traffic tieups with severe inconvenience to the great majority of parkway users unable or unwilling to shift to bicycles. The political impossibility of continuing the lane closure--the goal of the bicycle lobby--was quickly apparent. The Service compromised by paving over the existing bridle trail between Connecticut and Virginia avenues for bicycle use; the crash project was completed by the following week.

During the 1970s good paved bicycle trails were completed north along Beach Drive to Broad Branch Road and from Joyce Road north to near the Maryland line. The missing link was the stretch from Broad Branch to Joyce roads. Beach Drive between those points continued to be closed to auto traffic during weekend hours, when commuters did not rely heavily on it; but when motorists and cyclists coexisted on the narrow, winding road, the association was unpleasant for both.

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<sup>30</sup>Draft memorandum, J. A. Martinek, July 16, 1970, Recreation file, Rock Creek Park headquarters.

In its Statement for Management on Rock Creek Park prepared in 1977, the Service listed as an objective "To improve the quality of the visitor's experience by reducing excessive automobile commuter traffic on roads within Rock Creek Park, and encourage the shift of such traffic to mass transit, bicycle, and other more appropriate forms of transportation." In line with this objective, the Service in 1980 studied nine alternatives for completing the bicycle system. At one end of the spectrum, 5-1/2 miles of new bicycle trail paralleling Beach Drive would be built, entailing no effect on auto traffic. At the other end, major segments of Beach Drive would be permanently converted to bicycle use only, eliminating it as a through route for automobiles.<sup>31</sup> Michael A. Replogle, an engineer with transportation experience, advanced a tenth alternative in March 1981 on behalf of the People's Alliance for Rock Creek Park (PARC), an outside group. His plan would permanently close Beach Drive to through auto traffic both above and below Joyce Road as soon as the Metro subway system was opened to the Van Ness station on Connecticut Avenue.

In March 1983 the Service advanced a three-phase solution largely endorsed by PARC. Portions of Beach Drive above Joyce Road would be closed to cars on weekends and holidays during the warm months. One lane of Beach Drive south to Broad Branch Road would be reserved for cyclists and joggers during weekday rush hours, allowing cars the other lane in the prevailing rush hour direction. After 1985, when the Red Line of Metro was to be completed beyond Van Ness and reconstruction work on 16th Street was to be finished, a gate would be placed near Boulder Bridge permanently barring that section of Beach Drive to automobiles.

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<sup>31</sup>Environmental Assessment, Bicycle Trail Study, Rock Creek Park, November 1980, Resources Management office, Rock Creek Park headquarters.

Three months later, however, the Service disappointed the bicycle forces and others interested in curtailing auto traffic by a change of position. It confirmed the weekend closings on upper Beach Drive between Picnic Area 10 and Wise Road and between West Beach Drive and the Maryland line--measures previously tried with good results. But it would not interfere with weekday traffic below Joyce Road. Instead, it would build a 2.5-mile bicycle trail paralleling that segment of Beach Drive down to Broad Branch Road.<sup>32</sup>

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association called the decision a "shocking turnaround" and "a totally inadequate response to the problem of high-volume, high speed auto commuter traffic in this magnificent national park." The National Parks and Conservation Association was equally critical. "Caving in to pressure from automobile commuters and some city officials, Manus Fish, NPS director of the National Capital Region, announced that a three-year planning effort would be disregarded, and he offered a new bike path instead," it reported in its National Parks magazine. "Because construction of a paved path through the narrow valley would disrupt the site and--most important--would do nothing to alleviate traffic problems, NPCA is opposed to the plan."<sup>33</sup>

The opposition to the new bicycle path, together with its cost, dimmed the likelihood of its early construction. At this writing the closings on upper Beach Drive are in effect on weekends during daylight

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<sup>32</sup>News release, "For Rock Creek Park: Park Service Announces Plan on Bike/Recreational Study," Aug. 5, 1983, Resources Management office, Rock Creek Park headquarters.

<sup>33</sup>"Park Service Abandons Beach Drive Plans," Ride On! (newsletter), Sept. 1, 1983; "NPS Scraps Traffic Plan for Rock Creek Park," National Parks, November/December 1983, p. 33.

savings time, and the drive between Joyce and Broad Branch roads is barred to automobiles on weekends year round. Further measures to curb auto traffic in favor of bicycles do not appear imminent.<sup>34</sup>

### Equestrian Use

Horseback riding has been enjoyed in Rock Creek Park from its beginning. The cost of maintaining or renting horses has limited riding to the more affluent public, for the most part, and many equestrian users of the park have been persons of prominence in local and national affairs. Douglas McKay, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's first secretary of the Interior, and William P. Clark, President Ronald Reagan's second Interior secretary, were regular Rock Creek riders.

Until the 1950s recreational riders were served only by stables outside the park, including Pegasus Stables in Silver Spring, Maryland, and Edgewater Riding Academy near 26th and D streets. In 1956 Helen Fenwick Kollock, manager of Pegasus Stables, and Mary K. Nelms met with Secretary McKay and Superintendent Edward J. Kelly of National Capital Parks to propose a stable in the park. The women would erect it near the existing Park Police stable, built the year before north of Military Road and east of Oregon Avenue, and present it to the government in return for a long-term operating lease. Horses for hire and boarding for individual owners' horses would be offered.<sup>35</sup>

McKay approved the proposal, but complications soon developed. The Edgewater Riding Academy property was condemned that year for the eastern

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<sup>34</sup>Ford interview.

<sup>35</sup>Memorandum, Kelly to Conrad L. Wirth, Jan. 24, 1956, Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC.

approach to Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, and its operator, Francis J. Hannan, sought to relocate in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The prospect of two competing private ventures caused the Park Service to decide that it should build the park stable. In March 1957 it announced its intention to do so in fiscal 1958 as a project of MISSION 66, a 10-year development program that would improve facilities throughout the National Park System by the fiftieth anniversary of the Service in 1966.<sup>36</sup>

Hannan and his patrons formed the Lower Rock Creek Riding Association to lobby for a stable in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. At the same time, opposition developed to the site tentatively selected near Oregon Avenue: a stable there would displace garden plots tended by members of the Good Will Garden Club of Chevy Chase. In June Director Wirth, Chief Landscape Architect Robert W. Andrews, and Sen. Francis H. Case of South Dakota inspected the Oregon Avenue site and a site by the William Howard Taft (Connecticut Avenue) Bridge advocated by the Lower Rock Creek Riding Association. They concluded that a stable was needed at each place.<sup>37</sup>

Notified that their gardening permits would not be renewed in 1958, the Good Will Garden Club members escalated their protest. A delegation including Rep. DeWitt S. Hyde of Maryland, Rep. Peter F. Mack, Jr., of Illinois, and Postmaster Roy M. North of the District of Columbia descended on Superintendent Kelly to complain, and letters followed from Sen. Carl E. Mundt of South Dakota, Sen. Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon, and Rep. Gracie B. Pfof of Idaho. Neighborhood

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<sup>36</sup>Letter, Hannan to Kelly, Sept. 7, 1956, Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Harry T. Thompson to William M. Haussmann, Nov. 1, 1956, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Memorandum, Andrews to Files, June 19, 1957, Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.



residents voiced fears of odors, flies, disease, and especially "undesirable elements" forthcoming from a stable. "We believe our sixteen year old daughter will not be safe alone in our home, with the stable help required to care for forty horses, and the people who 'hang around' a stable, nearby," wrote one. The local Hawthorn Citizens Association passed a resolution in opposition, declaring that the stable would be a "definite threat to the long-established property in the area and a hazard to the welfare of the citizens."<sup>38</sup>

Nor did the Park Police welcome the prospect of a public stable adjoining their facility. Sergeants T. C. Tingle and A. D. Baye warned that it would increase the possibility of disease to their horses, leave them with less corral space, and endanger both their horses and the public by bringing them into close contact. Relaying these views to Superintendent Kelly, Acting Chief Raymond L. Selby concurred and sided with the neighborhood opposition: "The contemplated location is very near to a rather exclusive residential area. Rental stables notoriously attract a 'trashy' class of help and hangers-on, such as will be a continual source of friction with the neighboring residents."<sup>39</sup>

Yielding to the powerful forces arrayed against the Oregon Avenue site, the Service leadership announced in December a shift of location to a site south of Military Road and east of Glover Drive, where the park

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<sup>38</sup> Report of meeting and letters in Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; letter, Agnes C. Gaumnitz to Kelly, Oct. 12, 1957, *ibid.*; "Rock Creek Park Stable Plan Draws Hawthorn Protest," Evening Star, Nov. 14, 1957, clipping in Rock Creek Park general file, Commission of Fine Arts records.

<sup>39</sup>Memorandum, Tingle and Baye to Chief, U.S. Park Police, Oct. 9, 1957, Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Selby to Kelly, Oct. 14, 1957, *ibid.*

maintenance area then stood. In March 1958 the Service awarded a \$104,000 contract to Sun Construction Company of Silver Spring, which completed the stable for opening that December. Mary Nelms obtained the concession for its management under the name Rock Creek Stables, Inc. William L. Warfield of Falls Church, Virginia, received an \$87,500 contract for construction of the second stable, by the Taft Bridge. It opened in April 1959 under Francis Hannan's management as the Edgewater Riding Academy. Built on the same plan, the two stables each accommodated 40 horses.<sup>40</sup>

Rock Creek Stables experienced financial difficulties by 1960, and Mrs. Nelms sold her interest the following year. In 1970 its operator was forced to declare bankruptcy as a result of an accident claim. The Edgewater Riding Academy was dislocated in 1970 when the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority occupied its building for Metro subway construction (the Red Line would pass beneath Rock Creek at that point). To replace it, WMATA built a new stable near Rock Creek Stables in 1972 from an award-winning design by the noted Washington architectural firm of Hartman-Cox. Both concessions were then acquired by Rock Creek Park Horse Center, Inc., operated by James H. Warrick, Jr.<sup>41</sup>

In 1974 Robert Douglas began a program of therapeutic riding for handicapped children at the new stable, known as the Red Barn, with Park Service and other federal grants. The National Center for Therapeutic Riding was formed as a nonprofit charity in 1980 and attracted much favorable notice, aided by a visit from Nancy Reagan after she became

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<sup>40</sup>"Rock Creek Park to Get Two Stables," Washington Post, Dec. 24, 1957, clipping in Rock Creek Park general file, Commission of Fine Arts records; Stables file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>41</sup>Rock Creek Park general file, Regional Director's Office, National Capital Region, National Park Service.

first lady. Its quarters proved less successful: the Red Barn suffered from leaking skylights and a deteriorating roof structure to the point of threatened collapse in 1980. The Service condemned the building that July and razed it the following February. The therapeutic riding program moved to the older stable nearby.

Another de-stabilizing event occurred in 1980 when fire destroyed part of the small frame Park Police structure near Oregon Avenue; the stable was replaced two years later. Previously, police horses had acquired additional quarters when WMATA vacated the former Edgewater Riding Academy in 1979 upon completion of Metro construction in the vicinity. The paving of the equestrian trail along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway for bicycles rendered the area unsuitable for recreational riding, so the police takeover met little or no public resistance.

#### The Pierce-Klingle House and the Nature Center

The most imposing structure in Rock Creek Park is one not generally visible and familiar to the public. Its obscurity stems from its secluded location off a city street not connected to the main park drives and from the private residential and administrative uses to which it has largely been devoted.

The Pierce-Klingle House, or Klingle Mansion, is situated on Williamsburg Lane above the west bank of Rock Creek less than half a mile below Pierce Mill. Joshua Pierce, a son of the mill builder, built the house in 1823 and enlarged it by an addition on the west side 20 years later. The Pennsylvania Dutch-style structure is of blue and gray granite and encloses 10 rooms within its three stories. A two-story stone and wood frame barn stands to the east, and a utility house and potting shed

flank the rear.

An avid horticulturalist, Pierce named the property Linnaean Hill for Karl Van Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, and cultivated a wide variety of plants there. Upon his death in 1869 the property passed to his wife's nephew, Joshua Pierce Klingles; the Klingles occupied it until the early 1890s, when it was acquired for Rock Creek Park. Its future then became problematic. In 1908 Louis P. Shoemaker, a grand-nephew of Joshua Pierce, urged its conversion to "a reception hall for the protection, advantage, and pleasure of the public," with exhibits on the natural and human history of the park.<sup>42</sup> His suggestion was not adopted, and the house was kept in residential occupancy by park staff. Patrick Joyce, maintenance foreman under the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, lived there before 1926, when Joseph J. Quinn took both the job and the house. Quinn was paying \$15 a month in rent and employing the property as a maintenance center when he and the park were transferred to the National Park Service in 1933.

The Service's new superintendent of National Capital Parks, C. Marshall Finnan, thought the house better suited to become the superintendent's residence. Quinn was unhappy about the prospect of eviction and sought high-placed assistance in holding on to his quarters. "At the White House today I was handed a memorandum with reference to the house in Rock Creek Park that has been occupied by J. J. Quinn," Secretary Ickes wrote Park Service Director Arno B. Cammerer on March 15, 1934. "This memorandum sets out that Mr. Quinn has been ordered to move so that the house could be turned over to Mr. Finnan. I would like to discuss this matter

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<sup>42</sup>Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," Records of the Columbia Historical Society (Washington: Columbia Historical Society, 1909), 12: 46-47.

with you."<sup>43</sup>

At Cammerer's request, Finnan prepared a statement on the historical associations and architectural interest of the house and urged that it be restored in a manner befitting its significance. "If the house continues to serve as a residence," he wrote, "it should most certainly be occupied by some one fully appreciative of the historical and architectural values, and who would be willing to furnish it, as nearly as practicable to do so, in the period and style from 1830 to 1840." Finnan had himself in mind, and Cammerer secured the secretary's approval by assuring him that the higher rent forthcoming from the superintendent would cover the restoration costs.<sup>44</sup>

Ickes remained personally interested in the house, writing again in May to ask how it could ultimately be used if restored. Finnan responded that it could become a historic house museum, exhibiting varieties of cut flowers in keeping with Joshua Pierce's horticultural interests; alternately, it could be rented to the highest bidder "until the entire investment of restoration is paid for and then it could be taken over by the Park Service for such uses as it feels will best suit the interests of the public and the administration of the park." He estimated that residential rent would bring in between \$125 and \$150 per month, "so that the project would be self-liquidating."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Memorandum in Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC.

<sup>44</sup>Memorandum, Finnan to Cammerer, Mar. 20, 1934, Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; Cammerer note on memorandum, Ickes to Cammerer, Mar. 15, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>Memorandum, Ickes to Cammerer, May 23, 1934, Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Finnan to Cammerer, May 25, 1934, *ibid.*

The Service proceeded to renovate the house for Finnan's use, and he took up residence there in October 1936. Notwithstanding the original estimate, he approved monthly rent for himself of \$85, justifying the below-market figure with language routinely used for employee quarters in the Service's remote parks: "This property is located in an isolated community where transportation facilities, schools, stores and conveniences are not readily accessible."<sup>46</sup> Finnan remained there until August 1, 1939, when he left for the superintendency of Zion National Park in southwestern Utah--a place more nearly fitting his rent justification.

Secretary Ickes ordered that the house not be assigned to Finnan's successor or anyone else connected with National Capital Parks. At his direction, it was advertised for lease at a minimum bid of \$200 per month. When no such bids were received, a lease at \$2,200 per year (\$183 per month) was negotiated with Michael W. Straus, chief of the Interior Department's Division of Information, in February 1940.<sup>47</sup>

This arrangement came under attack in January 1947 when George D. Riley, staff director of the Senate Civil Service committee, charged that Straus, then commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, was improperly benefiting from it. He grilled Park Service Director Newton B. Drury, Associate Director Arthur E. Demaray, and National Capital Parks Superintendent Irving C. Root about the lease at a committee hearing, but no wrongdoing was found. Straus continued in occupancy until early 1952,

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<sup>46</sup>"Finnan Lives in D.C. Park," Washington Times, Oct. 20, 1936, clipping scrapbook, National Capital Parks; Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>47</sup>Memorandum, Acting NPS Director John R. White to Acting NCP Superintendent Frank T. Gartside, Aug. 15, 1939, Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; letter, Straus to Gartside, Nov. 28, 1939, *ibid.*; lease documents *ibid.*

when he moved to a new house outside the park.<sup>48</sup>

Jane Dahlman Ickes, widow of the just-deceased former Interior secretary, asked Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman if she could rent the house. The Park Service decided that it needed the property for administrative purposes and so advised Chapman, who politely declined Mrs. Ickes' request. The Service envisioned using the house for ranger-naturalist offices, a unit of the engineering survey staff, and a checking-in station for the mounted police in Rock Creek park.<sup>49</sup> In practice, only the police used the house and barn during the remainder of 1952. Service auditors occupied part of the house in early 1953, but it was vacant at the end of the summer.

In February 1954 Under Secretary Ralph A. Tudor told Associate Superintendent Harry T. Thompson of National Capital Parks that Chief Justice Earl Warren was interested in renting the house. "I gave Mr. Tudor the historical background on the mansion house relating how it had been a constant public relations problem; that it was used this past summer as interim office space for field officers; that the heating plant would need replacement if it were to be occupied; that it presented a servant and maintenance problem and so on," Thompson recorded of their conversation.<sup>50</sup> Tudor was sympathetic and discouraged Warren's application.

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<sup>48</sup>Unpublished hearing transcript, Jan. 28, 1947, in Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>49</sup>Memorandum, Conrad L. Wirth to Chapman, Mar. 21, 1952, Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; letter, Chapman to Jane D. Ickes, Mar. 25, 1952, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>Memorandum, Thompson to files, Feb. 5, 1954, Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

The following year Matilda Young, director of the Children's Museum of Washington, sought to obtain the building for her museum. W. Drew Chick, Jr., chief park naturalist for National Capital Parks, and C. Kenny Dale, his assistant, had begun planning for a nature center in the house, and Director Wirth turned down the museum's request.<sup>51</sup> The Rock Creek Park Nature Center opened in October 1956.

Catering largely to school children, the nature center soon encountered opposition from neighboring residents. John D. Rhodes, a Senate reporter, took the lead, organizing a petition and visiting Associate Superintendent Thompson in April 1957 to complain of traffic and trespassing by the visitors. The Service had planned to build a hard-surfaced parking lot for the center that summer, but the opposition led Thompson to promise that the activity would be relocated after the current school year.<sup>52</sup>

Word of the decision aroused contrary sentiment. John G. Gruber, vice-principal of Suitland Junior High School, charged that neighborhood objections to the center were based on the importation of black children there. The National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society voiced support for its retention. Interviewed by a newspaper reporter, Thompson claimed that the relocation plans stemmed from the physical inadequacy of the house and the difficult access to it; but he admitted that Rhodes had "crystallized" the decision. The counter-opposition caused the

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<sup>51</sup>Letter, Wirth to Young, May 23, 1955, Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>52</sup>Memorandum, Edward J. Kelly to Conrad L. Wirth, Apr. 4, 1957, Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; petition Apr. 8, 1957, *ibid.*; memorandum, Thompson to Chief, Architectural Branch, June 3, 1957, *ibid.*; Grace Bassett, "\$50,000 Waste Charged in Closing New Rock Creek Nature Center," Evening Star, Aug. 15, 1957, clipping *ibid.*



Service to pledge in August that it would not discontinue the nature center in Klingle House until a new facility was ready.<sup>53</sup>

Planning for the new nature center had begun that June with the decision to place it east of upper Glover Road, on the site of a caretaker's residence. The five-room frame residence had been built with a Public Works Administration allotment in 1936 and was occupied by Joseph J. Quinn upon his eviction from Klingle House. With Quinn's impending retirement the house was no longer deemed necessary, and William M. Haussmann, chief architect for National Capital Parks, designed the nature center building to incorporate usable portions of it.<sup>54</sup>

The construction contract was awarded to Cee Bee Contractors of Coral Hills, Maryland, in June 1959. The building cost \$258,500, its exhibits \$41,500, the projector for its planetarium \$6,000, and the access road and parking area \$27,500--a total of \$333,500. Delays in material deliveries postponed the scheduled December completion. With Director Wirth presiding, the new nature center was dedicated on June 4, 1960.<sup>55</sup>

During 1959, the final year of the Klingle House nature center, the Service considered other tenants for the building upon its forthcoming

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<sup>53</sup>Gruber letter to the editor, Washington Post, Aug. 20, 1957, clipping in Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; letter, Fred M. Packard to Conrad L. Wirth, Aug. 12, 1957, *ibid.*; Bassett, "\$50,000 Waste Charged"; letter, Edward J. Kelly to Fred M. Packard, Aug. 26, 1957, Klingle House file.

<sup>54</sup>Memorandum, Harry T. Thompson to Chief, Architectural Branch (Haussmann), June 3, 1957.

<sup>55</sup>Nature Center file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC. The center was designed and built without consultation with the Commission of Fine Arts, much to the commission's displeasure. (Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium central file, Commission of Fine Arts records.)

vacancy, among them the American Institute of Park Executives, the National Conference on State Parks, the American Planning and Civic Association, and the Junior League of Washington. When the Junior League appeared most satisfactory, the Service negotiated an agreement with that organization. It moved in on April 6, 1960.<sup>56</sup>

In 1963 the Children's Museum of Washington again tried to obtain the house. When Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall turned down the request, citing the problems experienced there with the nature center, the well-connected museum sponsors sought to work their will through the White House and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, the president's brother. Failing in this, they bided their time until March 1965, two months before the Junior League's lease would expire. When Matilda Young then pressed Secretary Udall for the property, the Service initially decided to locate the offices of National Capital Parks-North there so that it would not have to choose between the two private groups. It then dropped this plan, renewed the Junior League's lease, and offered its Conduit Road School building on MacArthur Boulevard to the museum, which reluctantly accepted the arrangement.<sup>57</sup>

In 1972 the Service regained occupancy of Klinge House, the Junior League having moved to new quarters on M Street in Georgetown. In the succeeding decade it used the house for the "Green Scene," a horticultural outreach program; other science and natural resource program activities;

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<sup>56</sup>Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>57</sup>Letter, Udall to Lloyd Hinton, March 22, 1963, Rock Creek Park file, History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.; letter, Young to Udall, Mar. 19, 1965, *ibid.*; letter, Robert C. Horne to Mrs. John W. Davidge, May 11, 1965, *ibid.*; letter, T. Sutton Jett to Mrs. John W. Davidge, June 24, 1965, *ibid.*; letter, Lloyd Hinton to Udall, Aug. 25, 1965, *ibid.*; letter, Stanley A. Cain to Hinton, Sept. 9, 1965, *ibid.*

and various administrative purposes. The house was expensive to maintain and not ideally suited for these functions, however, causing the Service to look once again for an appropriate tenant. It found one in the American Institute for Conservation, which on October 15, 1982, was given a five-year special use permit to use Klingle House as its headquarters. The rent of \$800 per month would be devoted to restoration of the structure.<sup>58</sup> For the immediate future, at least, the house appeared in good hands.

#### Pierce Mill and the Art Barn

When Superintendent Finnan advocated renovation of Klingle House in March 1934, he mentioned Pierce Mill as another park structure deserving attention. The cost of restoring it as an operating mill would be "almost negative," he wrote. Secretary Ickes was intrigued by the idea. "[Finnan's] memorandum persuades me that we ought to consider restoring not only the Mansion with a view toward preserving it as a monument, but the old mill as well," he wrote Director Cammerer. "How much would this cost?"<sup>59</sup>

Thomas T. Waterman and Malcolm Kirkpatrick, an architect and landscape architect in the Service's Branch of Plans and Design, prepared plans and estimates, and Cammerer responded in May that the mill restoration would cost \$19,250. The Service had already applied for the money as a public works allotment, he told Ickes, and could start work promptly if the project were approved. Perhaps expedited by Ickes' other role as

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<sup>58</sup>Annual Report, Rock Creek Park, 1982, Rock Creek Park headquarters.

<sup>59</sup>Memorandum, Finnan to Cammerer, Mar. 20, 1934, Klingle House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Ickes to Cammerer, Mar. 22, 1934, *ibid*.

public works administrator, approval was soon forthcoming. In November the frame porch on the upstream side of the mill that had been used by the teahouse concession was removed to clear the way for reconstruction of the water wheel and mill race. The Fitz Water Wheel Company of Hanover, Pennsylvania, prepared working drawings under a \$500 contract and restored the milling machinery for \$7,465. It was powered by an undershot wheel, less efficient than an overshot wheel but not requiring the high elevation of water supply needed for the latter. The project was completed in March 1936 at a total cost of \$26,614.<sup>60</sup>

Mill operation began on October 27, 1936, under the supervision of Robert A. Little, a veteran miller employed by the Welfare and Recreational Association of Public Buildings and Grounds. The meal went to the cafeterias run by the association in government buildings and was sold to the public at the mill. To preclude charges of unfair competition with private enterprise, the association was careful to advertise its sales prices as "higher than in the stores."<sup>61</sup>

The mill ran sporadically and was never a high-volume business. Machinery breakdowns, fluctuations in the water supply, and the unavailability of trained millwrights caused operation to cease in 1958. Interest revived in the next decade, and in 1967 Blaine E. Cliver, a Service architect, recommended measures to resume operation. The water wheel and

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<sup>60</sup>Memorandum, Cammerer to Ickes, May 21, 1934, Klinge House file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records; "Old Pierce Mill Loses Its Porch To Gain a Wheel," Washington Post, Nov. 9, 1934, clipping in Pierce Mill clipping file, Martin Luther King Library; Pierce Mill file 630, National Capital Parks, National Park Service records, National Archives.

<sup>61</sup>"Old Pierce Mill Again Will Grind; U.S. to Get Grain," Evening Star, Oct. 1, 1936; "Wheels Turn Again at Pierce Mill," Evening Star, Oct. 28, 1936; both in clipping scrapbook, National Capital Parks, National Park Service records, National Archives.

shaft had decayed beyond repair, and Cliver found the undershot design of dubious authenticity. On his advice the machinery was redone with an overshot wheel.<sup>62</sup> Because of the difficulty of getting Rock Creek water at a level high enough to power it, municipal water was piped to a short exposed race above the wheel.

The mill ran again in July 1970. Miller Robert Batte tended it, aided and succeeded by Brian Gregorie. A tropical storm in September 1975 damaged the machinery and forced another suspension of operations. Repairs were made, but operation continued on a sporadic rather than steady basis. For most visitors on most occasions, the picturesque appearance of the mill and the interpretive exhibits and leaflets explaining its operation had to suffice. At this writing the park was reactivating the mill for regular service, so its future may be livelier.

Two other historic structures nearby enhance the setting of Pierce Mill. The earliest of Isaac Pierce's buildings remaining is a blue granite springhouse, built in 1801 and now straddled by the divided lanes of Tilden Street. Directly west of the mill is one of several barns built by Pierce. Predating the mill, it has a frame front and sides of blue granite, which like that for the springhouse was quarried along Broad Branch.

In May 1971 the barn was reincarnated as the Art Barn, displaying art exhibits under an agreement with the Associates of Artists Equity. This arrangement received special legal sanction in 1984, when Congress authorized the secretary of the Interior to negotiate a five-year contract with the Art Barn Association (successor to the Associates of Artists

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<sup>62</sup>Cliver, "Historic Structures Report, Pierce Mill--Water Wheel," History Division, National Park Service.

Equity).<sup>63</sup> Using the barn in this manner, however distant from its historical function, would help insure its preservation.

Camp Good Will, the CCC, and the Army

Camp Good Will (pages 26-27) continued in operation under the National Park Service. In the fall of 1931 Frank T. Gartside had proposed its relocation to Fort Hunt, Virginia, where more open space was available. The move did not occur, and it remained in Rock Creek Park north of Fort DeRussy. In 1933 its operator, the Family Service Association, reduced it from an overnight facility to a day camp as an economy measure. Nearly a thousand Boy Scouts from Washington and Maryland convened at Camp Good Will in June 1936. The charity camp then spent its last summer there before moving to the Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area (now Prince William Forest Park) in Prince William County, Virginia. The remaining buildings received some use by Scout groups in 1937 before their demolition in February 1938.<sup>64</sup>

A Civilian Conservation Corps contingent then occupied the site, designated Camp NP-14, Rock Creek Park. Before and during its use of the area, the CCC performed a range of improvements in the park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Its enrollees cleared the creek channel and stabilized its banks with riprap, planted trees and shrubs, built more than two miles of bridle path with log hurdles for jumping, and constructed an addition to the Park Police lodge, which had been built with a \$13,500 public works allotment on Beach Drive below Joyce Road

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<sup>63</sup>P.L. 98-504, Oct. 19, 1984, 98 Stat. 2336.

<sup>64</sup>Camp Good Will file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC.

in 1936.<sup>65</sup>

During World War II the U.S. Army took over the site, naming it Camp King. It constructed roads and barracks, which it removed upon its departure in 1944. The army was also active elsewhere in the park. The 93rd Detachment of the 212th Anti-aircraft Search Light Battery moved onto the old reservoir site at 16th and Kennedy streets with two trucks and four trailers a week after the Pearl Harbor attack. The War Department subsequently sought and obtained a permit to keep the unit there for the duration of the war, but the detachment left in November 1944, nine months before the cessation of hostilities.<sup>66</sup>

#### Interpretation, Recreation, and Entertainment

One of the justifications for consolidating federal parklands under the National Park Service in 1933 was the Service's reputation for communicating, through educational or interpretive programs and media, the values of its parks to the public. The offices previously responsible for Rock Creek Park had done little of an interpretive nature, and the Service sought to make its mark there in this regard.

Donald Edward McHenry, the first Service naturalist assigned to National Capital Parks, began a series of Friday night campfire programs at Pierce Mill on June 5, 1936. McHenry, Dr. Harold C. Bryant, the Service's assistant director for research and education; Dr. Paul Bartsch,

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<sup>65</sup>Robert M. Coates, "Inventory of Work Accomplished by CCC Camps Under the Jurisdiction of National Capital Parks, October 19, 1933, to January 1, 1942," Reforestation file 885-01, NCP-NPS records, National Archives.

<sup>66</sup>Memorandum, Capt. M. H. Raspberry, Park Police, to Francis F. Gillen, Dec. 15, 1941, Structures file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC; letter, Henry L. Stimson to Harold L. Ickes, Apr. 16, 1942, *ibid.*

curator of mollusks at the Smithsonian Institution; and Superintendent C. Marshall Finnan spoke that month to a total attendance of about a thousand.<sup>67</sup>

The campfire programs at Pierce Mill--shifted to the Interior Department auditorium in inclement weather--continued to feature an array of Service and Smithsonian officials. Among the speakers in 1939 were Minor R. Tillotson, the Service's regional director from Santa Fe, on the Grand Canyon; Acting Associate Director John S. White on "Years of Adventure in Our National Parks"; Assistant Secretary Alexander Wetmore of the Smithsonian with "Birds on the Wing"; and Carl P. Russell, head of the Service's branch of research and information, on "Behind and In Front of the Scenes in Our National Parks."<sup>68</sup>

In 1940 the outdoor programs were relocated to a wooded recreation grove near 16th and Kennedy streets. There a special campfire program on August 29, 1941, celebrated the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the National Park Service. Former director Horace M. Albright presided over the ceremonial lighting of a large birthday cake. Among the candle lighters were William Henry Jackson, whose photographs had won support for the early western parks; J. Horace McFarland, who had promoted the Park Service bill as president of the American Civic Association; Assistant Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman; and Service officials Hillory A. Tolson, Conrad L. Wirth, and Ronald F. Lee.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1936, NCP-NPS records, National Archives.

<sup>68</sup>Superintendent's monthly reports, June-August 1939, NCP-NPS records, National Archives.

<sup>69</sup>Park Naturalist's Report file 207-04, NCP-NPS records, National Archives.



In 1938 Donald McHenry developed a nature trail in Rock Creek Park. The quarter-mile loop trail, east of Beach Drive north of the Bingham Road intersection, displayed some 200 labels identifying plants and other natural features.<sup>70</sup> Then and during the war McHenry and his naturalist staff, including George A. Petrides and W. Drew Chick, Jr., led bird-watching expeditions and nature walks along other park trails. They obtained much volunteer support in these programs from the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia.

The 1954 American Forests article by Bernard Frank, "Our Capital's Rock Creek Mess" (see page 77), stimulated the Washington chapter of the Soil Conservation Society of America to generate wider public interest in the Rock Creek watershed. The contemporary threat of the arterial highway through the park was a further spur to action. The first Rock Creek Park Day, on May 15, 1955, was an effort to focus attention on the park and increase awareness of its values.

Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant III chaired the commission for Rock Creek Park Day, and its steering committee included Irston R. Barnes, president of the Potomac Valley Conservation and Recreation Council; Fred M. Packard, executive secretary of the National Parks Association; James Craig, editor of American Forests; and Drew Chick, then chief naturalist of National Capital Parks. A horse show, dog show, and bird and nature walks were among the special events offered, and speakers proclaimed the need for watershed protection. The day was sufficiently successful to be repeated on October 7, 1956, when Mamie Eisenhower served as honorary chairman and the nature center in Klinge House was first opened. With some exceptions

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<sup>70</sup>Monthly Report of the Naturalist Division, July 1938, NCP-NPS records, National Archives.

(notably in the early 1970s), Rock Creek Park Day continued as an annual event. It is usually observed on the last Saturday in September.<sup>71</sup>

As in the earlier years, proposals were occasionally advanced for recreational development in the park that would intrude upon its natural qualities. In 1936 the National Capital Park and Planning Commission advocated a recreation center at Military Road and 27th Street. The commission's recreation plan justified the development on the grounds that it would be isolated from the rest of Rock Creek Park by Fort Drive, a parkway proposed to link the Civil War defenses of Washington. Superintendent Finnan and landscape architect Malcolm Kirkpatrick strongly opposed such use of any part of the park, citing the 1918 Olmsted Report.<sup>72</sup> The center was not built. Athletic fields and related facilities were constructed on the east side of the park at 16th and Kennedy streets in 1937-1938, but they supplanted the obsolete Brightwood Reservoir and thus did not constitute a new intrusion.

One of the greatest park incursions resulted from the 150th anniversary celebration of Washington as the nation's capital, in 1950. The previous May, Congress authorized the National Capital Sesquicentennial Commission to erect a structure or structures for the celebration, and in November Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman approved a site in Rock Creek Park near 16th Street and Colorado Avenue for a large amphitheater. National Capital Parks architect William Haussmann and engineer

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<sup>71</sup>Memorandum, W. Drew Chick, Jr., to Superintendent, NCP, Mar. 24, 1955, Rock Creek Park Day file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC; subsequent documents *ibid*.

<sup>72</sup>Letter, John Nolen, Jr., to Henry V. Hubbard, Mar. 31, 1936, Rock Creek Park file, Nolen office files, National Capital Park and Planning Commission records.

Robert C. Horne designed the facility, for which Secretary Chapman broke ground on December 17. The completed amphitheater with its extensive parking lot and approach roads cost \$563,676 and seated more than four thousand.<sup>73</sup>

The theater opened on August 4, 1950, with "Faith of Our Fathers," a dramatic production by Paul Green commissioned for the sesquicentennial. President Harry S Truman and his family witnessed the event. The drama continued for the rest of the summer and resumed for the 1951 season, but it did not enjoy the success of "The Lost Colony," Green's long-running outdoor production on Roanoke Island, North Carolina. Because the theater was operated by the sesquicentennial commission, the Park Service had to obtain its approval to arrange military band concerts there on Sunday evenings, when "Faith of Our Fathers" was not playing.

Carter T. Barron, executive vice chairman of the commission, died on November 17, 1950, and the amphitheater was named for him a week later. Carter Barron--the name alone having become synonymous with the facility--devolved to National Capital Parks custody on July 1, 1952, when the commission disbanded. Super Attractions, run by Irvin and Israel Feld, booked the theater that August to stage Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, but the impresarios were unable to arrange a full season of entertainment planned for 1953.

The Sixteenth Street Highlands Citizens' Association, composed of neighboring landowners, protested the commercial use of Carter Barron. But Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay, finding such use in "the

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<sup>73</sup>P.L. 81-78, May 31, 1949, 63 Stat. 141; "Faith of Our Fathers" souvenir program, 1950, Carter Barron file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC.

broad interest of the National Capital community," announced in April that Washington Festival, Inc., headed by Constance Bennett, would produce a 12-week program that summer. The productions, including "Show Boat," "Annie Get Your Gun," "The Merry Widow," and "Brigadoon," earned lukewarm reviews and insufficient revenue to cover costs. Washington Festival folded at the end of the season, and Super Attractions returned in 1954. For the rest of the decade and into the next it booked ballet, opera, popular musicals, and the National Symphony Orchestra at Carter Barron.<sup>74</sup>

According to Jacqueline Trescott of the Washington Star-News, "This Ed Sullivan mix of attractions worked through the mid-60s when music began to dominate the schedule and the cost of elaborate productions was finally too burdensome." Ballet ceased in 1969. "Our audience was gone....," Mrs. Israel Feld later recalled. "The whole Washington scene was changing. After the riots [of April 1968], people were afraid. And our new patrons didn't want operettas and Broadway plays." By 1972 the new patrons, mostly black teenagers, had caused Carter Barron to become "the summertime palace of second-string soul," in Trescott's words.<sup>75</sup>

During the 1970s Carter Barron's traditional audience was further dispersed to the new Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Maryland, Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington--the last two also under Park Service custody. Reflecting the viewpoint of

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<sup>74</sup>Letter, Theodore Rothman to District Commissioners, Feb. 17, 1953, Permits and Licenses file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records, WNRC; press release, "McKay Announces Decision on Barron Amphitheater," Apr. 1, 1953, *ibid.*; Carter Barron file, Rock Creek Park, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>75</sup>Trescott, "Top-40 Soul After 20 Years," Washington Star-News, Aug. 19, 1973, p. H1.

its departed patronage, a Washington Post drama critic in 1984 called Carter Barron "now more celebrated as a parking lot."<sup>76</sup>

### The Mouth of the Creek

With all that was done to preserve and enhance the natural quality of its valley, Rock Creek remained a blighted spectacle at its mouth--a point of great potential attractiveness, as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., had observed in 1925 (page 63). The National Park Service acquired possession of the mole at the creek's juncture with the Potomac, but the land just west of the mole and along the west bank of the creek below K Street remained in industrial use.

In 1956 the Service initiated planning for a water sports facility on the mole as part of its MISSION 66 development program. Architect William Haussmann visited boathouses at the U.S. Naval Academy, Philadelphia, Princeton, and Syracuse in preparing the design. His plan included restoration of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal dam at the creek mouth and its tidelock across the tip of the mole. The total cost was estimated at \$521,500.<sup>77</sup>

The fact that interceptor sewers discharged into the Potomac nearby caused some concern within the Service. Associate Superintendent Harry T. Thompson pressed strongly for the development, contending that pollution was less there than downriver and that the District of Columbia was planning corrective measures. He prevailed, and the Service publicly

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<sup>76</sup>Richard L. Coe, "Irvin Feld's Eye for Talent," Washington Post, Sept. 10, 1984, p. B3.

<sup>77</sup>Memorandum, Haussmann to files, July 24, 1956, Thompson Boat Center file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records, WNRC; memorandum, Edward J. Kelly to Conrad L. Wirth, Nov. 28, 1956, *ibid*.

announced its plans for a scaled-down facility, minus the dam and tide-lock restoration, in January 1958.<sup>78</sup>

David V. Auld, the District's director of sanitary engineering, again raised the pollution issue, and John Nolen, Jr., retired staff director of the National Capital Planning Commission, recalled Olmsted's desire to keep the view at the creek mouth open. Nolen favored moving the boat center upriver to the mouth of Foundry Branch, above Georgetown. Haussmann agreed that the Foundry Branch site was "certainly preferable from the esthetic point of view," but vehicular access to it was difficult. Controversy continued into the following year, with District public health authorities and the Washington Post opposing the mole location on health grounds.<sup>79</sup>

In March 1959 Harry Thompson, then superintendent, made a final plea for the mole site. Director Wirth informed Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton of the Service's plans to proceed at that location, and in July Seaton finally concurred. On September 22 a \$92,289 contract for a parking lot and approach road and bridge over Rock Creek was awarded to Allied Contractors, Inc., followed two months later by a \$196,272 award to James L. Partello, Inc., for the boathouse.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Memorandum, John B. Thomas to Robert C. Horne, Feb. 11, 1957, Thompson Boat Center file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Thompson to Horne, Mar. 19, 1957, *ibid.*; press release, *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>Letter, Auld to Edward J. Kelly, Apr. 9, 1958, Thompson Boat Center file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Haussmann to Kelly, June 18, 1958, *ibid.*; "Stay Upstream" (editorial), Washington Post, Feb. 27, 1959, clipping *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>Memorandum, Thompson to Wirth, Mar. 4, 1959, Thompson Boat Center file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records; memorandum, Wirth to Seaton, Mar. 13, 1959, *ibid.*; contract documents *ibid.*

The National Capital Water Sports Center, as the completed facility was initially known, was dedicated September 24, 1960. Harry Thompson gave the welcoming address at the ceremony. Five months later Thompson died, and on March 22, 1961, Wirth recommended to Secretary Stewart Udall that the center be named the Harry T. Thompson Boat Center. Udall quickly approved the honor for the man who had labored so actively on its behalf.<sup>81</sup>

The boat center, renting canoes and other small craft under concession contract and housing racing shells for area schools and colleges, brought public recreational use to the mouth of Rock Creek.<sup>82</sup> In doing so, it rendered even less appealing the railroad tracks and grimy industrial infrastructure along the creek and riverfront next door. By the early 1980s the redevelopment of lower Georgetown (below M Street) was well underway, and the owners of the privately held waterfront land between the creek and 31st Street were planning an elaborate complex of residential condominiums, offices, and a hotel.

The block directly adjoining the creek and the mole was encumbered by a 20-foot building height covenant, the result of a 1941 transaction between the government and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, its owner at the time. The present owner and developer, seeking to build a luxury hotel and an office building on the block, wanted relief from the height restriction. In exchange, it was willing to grant benefits of equal

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<sup>81</sup>Memorandum, Wirth to Udall, Mar. 22, 1961, signed as approved by Udall Mar. 28, 1961, Thompson Boat Center file, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NCR-NPS records.

<sup>82</sup>Although occupying Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway land, the boat center and its parking lot are administered by the superintendent of Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park rather than the superintendent of Rock Creek Park.

economic value to the National Park Service, which held the covenant for the government. Under the agreement reached by the parties in 1984, the two buildings would rise to between 50 and 60 feet but would be set well back from the creek and riverfront. The developer would grant perpetual public access along the river and creek and pay for stabilization and landscaping of both creek banks and restoration of the canal tidelock.

The agreement came under fire from some local citizens who opposed all private development along the Georgetown waterfront. Supporters of the agreement countered that development was inevitable, in the absence of major appropriations to buy the private land; that the kind of development planned next to the creek was the best that could be expected there and certainly better than the status quo; and that the exchange granting increased public access and parkland improvements was "very much in the public interest," in the words of Regional Director Jack Fish.<sup>83</sup>

The opponents sued to block the agreement, and on May 30, 1985, U.S. District Court Judge Barrington D. Parker ruled that the Park Service had illegally alienated National Park System property by easing the terms of the covenant protecting the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. If allowed to stand, the decision would stall the planned enhancement of Rock Creek's mouth. At this writing the developer and the Service had filed an appeal. Although the outcome could not be predicted with certainty, there were high hopes that Olmsted's vision of an attractive confluence might yet be realized by the centennial of Rock Creek Park in 1990.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Fish note to the author, Aug. 16, 1984.

<sup>84</sup>Kenneth Bredemeier, "U.S. Judge Blocks Georgetown Hotel," Washington Post, May 31, 1985, p. C1; telephone conversation with Albert J. Benjamin, May 31, 1985.



## SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

In 1990 Rock Creek Park will observe its hundredth birthday. Only a handful of national parklands have existed longer as such. The occasion will be something to celebrate.

The century of this urban natural park--almost a contradiction in terms--has been one of challenges. As its birth was achieved only after much effort, so was its extension by the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and other additions. The natural qualities for which it was set aside have been perennially threatened by pressures for incompatible development and uses--some of which have prevailed. The park will not satisfy those who seek solitude in wilderness.

But it is not supposed to. Rock Creek Park was envisioned to preserve some attractive natural scenery for public enjoyment in the midst of a growing city, whose outer reaches were largely rural in 1890 but whose total urbanization was even then a certainty. It would be set aside from the city, yet it would be of the city. Washington residents and visitors would come on foot, on horseback, by carriage, and soon by automobile to enjoy an hour's or an afternoon's contrast from the neighboring streets and buildings. Increasingly, they would just pass through on their way to other destinations--yet even such brief windshield contacts with natural surroundings would enrich.

The law of supply and demand operates for natural preserves as much as for other commodities. Thus, as the urban and suburban encirclement of the park has become complete, its value has increased. Its presence

in the midst of the nation's capital, so much taken for granted, is in fact a marvel. Driving through such a valley in remote country would be a pleasant experience but hardly an extraordinary one. Coming south from Maryland along Beach Drive, knowing that one is bisecting the capital yet seeing only the creek, rocks, and forested valley slopes until one is virtually at the city center--that is indeed an extraordinary experience for those who pause to ponder it. From this perspective, the park's value lies in its context even more than in its content.

A small jewel on a contrasting cloth can appeal as much as a large jewel in a setting of other gemstones. Rock Creek Park is not Yosemite, its fellow 1990 centenarian. But to those who appreciate the wonder of its existence, it gleams no less brightly.

## APPENDIX



THE ROCK CREEK PARK AUTHORIZATION

FIFTY-FIRST CONGRESS. SESS. I. CH. 1001. 1890.

September 27, 1890.

CHAP. 1001.—An act authorizing the establishing of a public park in the District of Columbia.

<p>District of Columbia.</p> <p>Rock Creek Park established.</p> <p>Location.</p> <p>Description.</p> <p>Dedication.</p> <p>Proviso.</p> <p>Maximum size and cost.</p> <p>Commission to be appointed.</p> <p>Duties.</p> <p>Executive officer.</p>  <p>Map to be filed.</p> <p>Condemnation.</p> <p>Title.</p> <p>Compensation.</p> <p>Proviso.</p> <p>Acceptance by owners.</p> <p>Failure to agree.</p> <p>Judicial procedure.</p> <p>Application for assessment.</p> <p>Petition and map.</p> <p>Notification.</p> <p>Appraisal commission.</p> <p>Ascertainment of value.</p> <p>Payment.</p> <p>Title.</p>	<p><i>Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That a tract of land lying on both sides of Rock Creek, beginning at Klinge Ford Bridge, and running northwardly, following the course of said creek, of a width not less at any point than six hundred feet, nor more than twelve hundred feet, including the bed of the creek, of which not less than two hundred feet shall be on either side of said creek, south of Broad Branch road and Blagden Mill road and of such greater width north of said roads as the commissioners designated in this act may select, shall be secured, as hereinafter set out, and be perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States, to be known by the name of Rock Creek Park: Provided, however, That the whole tract so to be selected and condemned under the provisions of this act shall not exceed two thousand acres nor the total cost thereof exceed the amount of money herein appropriated.</i></p> <p>SEC. 2. That the Chief of Engineers of the United States Army, the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, and three citizens to be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, be, and they are hereby, created a commission to select the land for said park, of the quantity and within the limits aforesaid, and to have the same surveyed by the assistant to the said Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia in charge of public highways, which said assistant shall also act as executive officer to the said commission.</p> <p>SEC. 3. That the said commission shall cause to be made an accurate map of said Rock Creek Park, showing the location, quantity, and character of each parcel of private property to be taken for such purpose, with the names of the respective owners inscribed thereon, which map shall be filed and recorded in the public records of the District of Columbia, and from and after the date of filing said map the several tracts and parcels of land embraced in said Rock Creek Park shall be held as condemned for public uses, and the title thereof vested in the United States, subject to the payment of just compensation, to be determined by said commission, and approved by the President of the United States: <i>Provided, That such compensation be accepted by the owner or owners of the several parcels of land.</i></p> <p>That if the said commission shall be unable by agreement with the respective owners to purchase all of the land so selected and condemned within thirty days after such condemnation, at the price approved by the President of the United States, it shall, at the expiration of such period of thirty days, make application to the supreme court of the District of Columbia, by petition, at a general or special term, for an assessment of the value of such land as it has been unable to purchase.</p> <p>Said petition shall contain a particular description of the property selected and condemned, with the name of the owner or owners thereof, if known, and their residences, as far as the same may be ascertained, together with a copy of the recorded map of the park; and the said court is hereby authorized and required, upon such application, without delay, to notify the owners and occupants of the land, if known, by personal service, and if unknown, by service by publication, and to ascertain and assess the value of the land so selected and condemned, by appointing three competent and disinterested commissioners to appraise the value or values thereof, and to return the appraisement to the court; and when the value or values of such land are thus ascertained, and the President of the United States shall decide the same to be reasonable, said value or values shall be paid to the owner or owners, and the United States shall be deemed to have a valid title to said land; and if in any case</p>
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the owner or owners of any portion of said land shall refuse or neglect, after the appraisement of the cash value of said lands and improvements, to demand or receive the same from said court, upon depositing the appraised value in said court to the credit of such owner or owners, respectively, the fee-simple shall in like manner be vested in the United States.

SEC. 4. That said court may direct the time and manner in which possession of the property condemned shall be taken or delivered, and may, if necessary, enforce any order or issue any process for giving possession.

Possession.  
Process.

SEC. 5. That no delay in making an assessment of compensation, or in taking possession, shall be occasioned by any doubt which may arise as to the ownership of the property, or any part thereof, or as to the interests of the respective owners. In such cases the court shall require a deposit of the money allowed as compensation for the whole property or the part in dispute. In all cases as soon as the said commission shall have paid the compensation assessed, or secured its payment by a deposit of money under the order of the court, possession of the property may be taken. All proceedings hereunder shall be in the name of the United States of America and managed by the commission.

No delay in assessment, etc.  
Disputed claims.  
Possession.  
Proceedings.

SEC. 6. That the commission having ascertained the cost of the land, including expenses, shall assess such proportion of such cost and expenses upon the lands, lots, and blocks situated in the District of Columbia specially benefited by reason of the location and improvement of said park, as nearly as may be, in proportion to the benefits resulting to such real estate.

Proportionate assessment of cost, etc., on benefited lands.

If said commission shall find that the real estate in said District directly benefited by reason of the location of the park is not benefited to the full extent of the estimated cost and expenses, then they shall assess each tract or parcel of land specially benefited to the extent of such benefits as they shall deem the said real estate specially benefited. The commission shall give at least ten days' notice, in one daily newspaper published in the city of Washington, of the time and place of their meeting for the purpose of making such assessment and may adjourn from time to time till the same be completed. In making the assessment the real estate benefited shall be assessed by the description as appears of record in the District on the day of the first meeting; but no error in description shall vitiate the assessment: *Provided*, That the premises are described with substantial accuracy. The commission shall estimate the value of the different parcels of real estate benefited as aforesaid and the amount assessed against each tract or parcel, and enter all in an assessment book. All persons interested may appear and be heard. When the assessment shall be completed it shall be signed by the commission, or a majority (which majority shall have power always to act), and be filed in the office of the clerk of the supreme court of the District of Columbia. The commission shall apply to the court for a confirmation of said assessment, giving at least ten days' notice of the time thereof by publication in one daily newspaper published in the city of Washington, which notice shall state in general terms the subject and the object of the application.

Notice by publication.  
Adjournments of commission.  
Record description.  
Errors.  
*Proviso*.  
Substantial accuracy.  
Entries in assessment book.  
Hearings.  
Commission to file assessment.

The said court shall have power, after said notice shall have been duly given, to hear and determine all matters connected with said assessment; and may revise, correct, amend, and confirm said assessment, in whole or in part, or order a new assessment, in whole or in part, with or without further notice or on such notice as it shall prescribe; but no order for a new assessment in part, or any partial adverse action, shall hinder or delay confirmation of the residue, or collection of the assessment thereon. Confirmation of any part of the assessment shall make the same a lien on the real estate assessed.

Application for confirmation.  
Notice.  
Powers of court in determining, etc.  
Confirmation.  
Lien.

<p>Payment of assessment by installments, etc.</p>	<p>The assessment, when confirmed, shall be divided into four equal installments, and may be paid by any party interested in full or in one, two, three, and four years, on or before which times all shall be payable, with six per centum annual interest on all deferred payments. All payments shall be made to the Treasurer of the United States, who shall keep the account as a separate fund. The orders of the court shall be conclusive evidence of the regularity of all previous proceedings necessary to the validity thereof, and of all matters recited in said orders. The clerk of said court shall keep a record of all proceedings in regard to said assessment and confirmation.</p>
<p>Interest.</p>	<p>The commission shall furnish the said clerk with a duplicate of its assessment book, and in both shall be entered any change made or ordered by the court as to any real estate. Such book filed with the clerk when completed and certified shall be prima facie evidence of all facts recited therein. In case assessments are not paid as aforesaid the book of assessments certified by the clerk of the court shall be delivered to the officer charged by law with the duty of collecting delinquent taxes in the District of Columbia, who shall proceed to collect the same as delinquent real estate taxes are collected. No sale for any installment of assessment shall discharge the real estate from any subsequent installment; and proceedings for subsequent installments shall be as if no default had been made in prior ones.</p>
<p>Separate Treasury fund.</p>	<p>All money so collected may be paid by the Treasurer on the order of the commission to any persons entitled thereto as compensation for land or services. Such order on the Treasurer shall be signed by a majority of the commission and shall specify fully the purpose for which it is drawn. If the proceeds of assessment exceed the cost of the park the excess shall be used in its improvement, under the direction of the officers named in section eight, if such excess shall not exceed the amount of ten thousand dollars. If it shall exceed that amount that part above ten thousand dollars shall be refunded ratably. Public officers performing any duty hereunder shall be allowed such fees and compensation as they would be entitled to in like cases of collecting taxes. The civilian members of the commission shall be allowed ten dollars per day each for each day of actual service. Deeds made to purchasers at sales for delinquent assessments hereunder shall be prima facie evidence of the right of the purchaser, and any one claiming under him, that the real estate was subject to assessment and directly benefited, and that the assessment was regularly made; that the assessment was not paid; that due advertisement had been made; that the grantee in the deed was the purchaser or assignee of the purchaser, and that the sale was conducted legally.</p>
<p>Validity of proceedings.</p>	<p>Any judgment for the sale of any real estate for unpaid assessments shall be conclusive evidence of its regularity and validity in all collateral proceedings except when the assessment was actually paid, and the judgment shall estop all persons from raising any objection thereto, or to any sale or deed based thereon, which existed at the date of its rendition, and could have been presented as a defense to the application for such judgment.</p>
<p>Court record.</p>	<p>To pay the expenses of inquiry, survey, assessment, cost of lands taken, and all other necessary expenses incidental thereto, the sum of one million two hundred thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated: <i>Provided</i>, That one-half of said sum of one million two hundred thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be expended, shall be re-imbursed to the Treasury of the United States out of the revenues of the District of Columbia, in four equal annual installments, with interest at the rate of three per centum per annum upon the deferred payments: <i>And provided further</i>, That one-half of the sum which shall be annually appropriated and expended for the maintenance and improvement of said</p>
<p>Duplicate assessment book to be filed.</p>	<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>
<p>Evidence of recited facts.</p>	<p>Interest.</p>
<p>Delinquent assessments.</p>	<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>
<p>Collection.</p>	<p>Half from District revenues.</p>
<p>Payment of compensation by Treasurer.</p>	<p>Half from District revenues.</p>
<p>Commission orders.</p>	<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>
<p>Proceeds in excess of cost.</p>	<p>Interest.</p>
<p>Compensation of public officers.</p>	<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>
<p>Compensation of civilian commissioners.</p>	<p>Half from District revenues.</p>
<p>Delinquent assessment sale deeds.</p>	<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>
<p>Evidence of.</p>	<p>Interest.</p>
<p>Judgment of sale.</p>	<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>
<p>Estoppel, etc.</p>	<p>Half from District revenues.</p>
<p>Appropriation. For total cost, etc.</p>	<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>
<p>Provision.</p>	<p>Interest.</p>
<p>Half from the District revenues.</p>	<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>
<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>	<p>Half from District revenues.</p>
<p>Interest.</p>	<p>Reimbursed in installments.</p>
<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>	<p>Interest.</p>
<p>Half from District revenues.</p>	<p>Maintenance, etc.</p>

lands as a public park shall be charged against and paid out of the revenues of the District of Columbia, in the manner now provided by law in respect to other appropriations for the District of Columbia, and the other half shall be appropriated out of the Treasury of the United States.

SEC. 7. That the public park authorized and established by this act shall be under the joint control of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia and the Chief of Engineers of the United States Army, whose duty it shall be, as soon as practicable, to lay out and prepare roadways and bridle paths, to be used for driving and for horseback riding, respectively, and footways for pedestrians; and whose duty it shall also be to make and publish such regulations as they deem necessary or proper for the care and management of the same. Such regulations shall provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible.

Approved, September 27, 1890.

Control, etc., of  
park.

Regulations, etc.

#### THE ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY AUTHORIZATION

(From the Public Buildings Act of March 4, 1913)

SEC. 22. That for the purpose of preventing the pollution and obstruction of Rock Creek and of connecting Potomac Park with the Zoological Park and Rock Creek Park, a commission, to be composed of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of Agriculture, is hereby authorized and directed to acquire, by purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, such land and premises as are not now the property of the United States in the District of Columbia shown on the map on file in the office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, dated May seventeenth, nineteen hundred and eleven, and lying on both sides of Rock Creek, including such portion of the creek bed as may be in private ownership, between the Zoological Park and Potomac Park; and the sum of \$1,300,000 is hereby authorized to be expended toward the requirement of such land. That all lands now belonging to the United States or to the District of Columbia lying within the exterior boundaries of the land to be acquired by this act as shown and designated on said map are hereby appropriated to and made a part of the parkway herein authorized to be acquired. One-half of the cost of the said lands shall be reimbursed to the Treasury of the United States out of the revenues of the District of Columbia in eight equal annual installments, with interest at the rate of three per centum per annum upon the deferred payments. That should the commission decide to institute condemnation proceedings in order to secure any or all of the land herein authorized to be acquired, such proceedings shall be in accordance with the provisions of the act of Congress approved August thirtieth, eighteen hundred and ninety, providing a site for the enlargement of the Government Printing Office (United States Statutes at Large, volume twenty-six, chapter eight hundred and thirty-seven).

Washington, D. C.  
Commission to ac-  
quire land adjoining  
Rock Creek to connect  
Zoological and Poto-  
mac Parks.

Amount authorized.

Public lands added.

One half of cost from  
District revenues, in  
installments.

Condemnation pro-  
ceedings.

Vol. 26, p. 412.



PRINCIPAL PARK PERSONNEL, 1965-1985

Superintendents

Joseph Brown	1965-1966
Julius Martinek	1967-1970
Joseph Antosca	1971
George McHaffey (Park Manager)	1972
James Fugate (Park Manager)	1973-1974
James Redmond	1975-1983
Georgia A. Ellard	1983-

Assistant Superintendents

Keith Polhemus	1967-1971
(No position 1972-1980)	
Georgia A. Ellard	1981-1983
Joseph M. Lawler	1984-

Administrative Officers

Keith Polhemus	1965-1966
Kenneth Kegler	1967-1968
William Saylor	1969-1971
(No position 1972-1977)	
Loren Littlefield	1978-

Chiefs of Interpretation

Charles Adams	1965-1968
Wescoat Wolfe	1969-1971
(No position 1972-1974)	
Julia Holmaas	1975-1978
Albert James	1979-

Chief of Resource Management

Robert Ford	1976-
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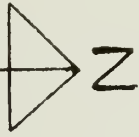
Chiefs of Maintenance

J. Conway Smith	1965-1969
Wayne Corbit	1970-1971
James Fugate	1971
David Newman	1973-

Supervisory Park Ranger, Rock Creek Nature Center

Robert Whisler	1965-1972
Robert Ford	1973-1975
Ronald Crawford	1976-1977
Larry Steeler	1978
E. Macdougall Palmer	1979
Lurrie Pope	1980-





Georgetown

Rock Creek Park  
Maryland

Carter Barron  
Amphitheatre

Silver Spring

Theodore  
Boat Center

East-West Highway  
Spencer Road  
Colston Road

N. Cdr

Georgia Ave

Francis Scott Key Bridge

Memorial Park

Washington Circle

Foggy Bottom

Farragut Square

Phoenician Square

Franklin Park

White House

Capitol

404

400

396

392

388

384

380

376

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ILLUSTRATIONS





Pierce Mill with Teahouse Porch

circa 1930



Rustic Signs at Beach Drive and Military Road

1931





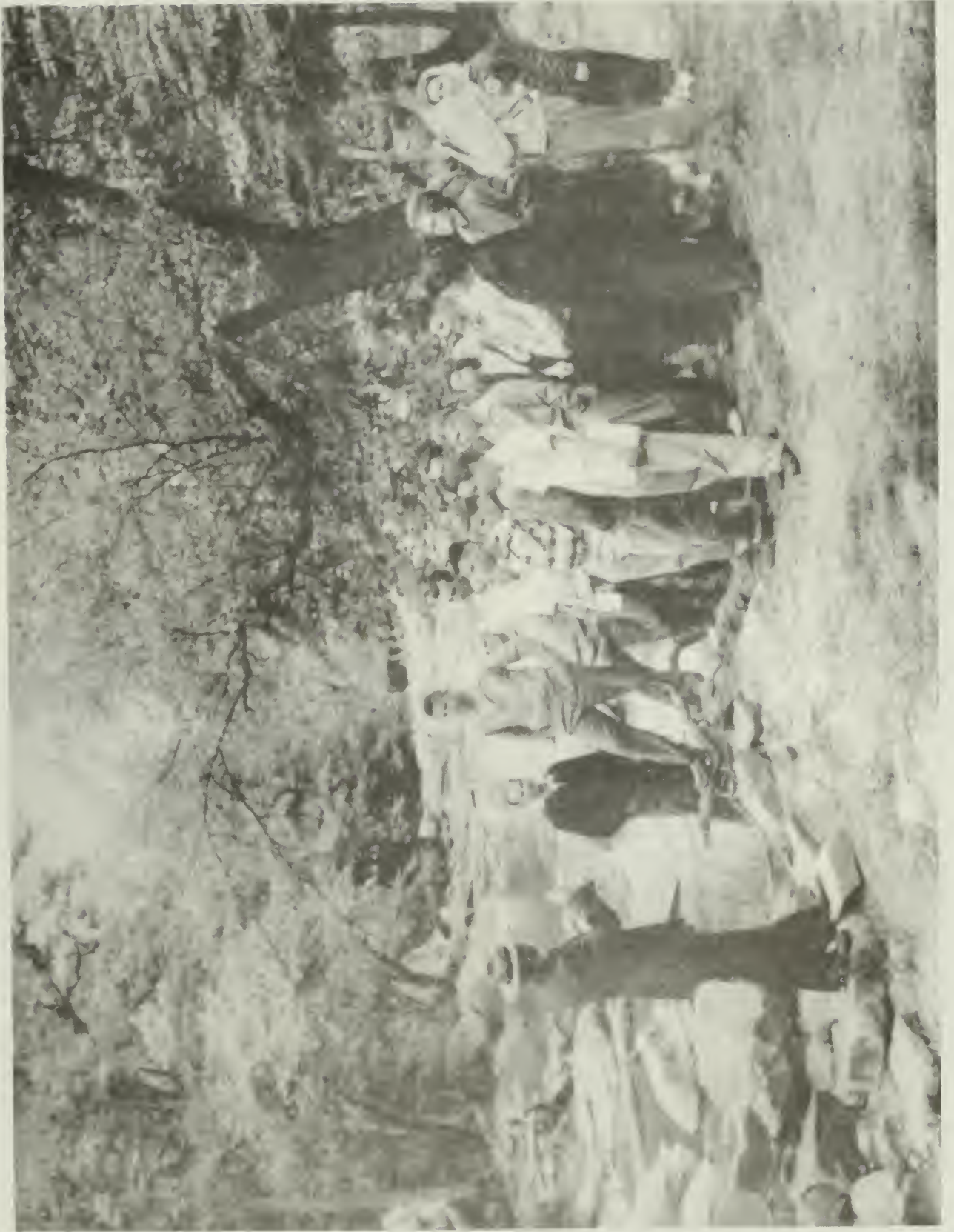
Winter Scene

1937



Guided Walk

1957



A Park Ford

circa 1960













