Back Bay Fens

Boston Landmarks Commission

Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission

on the potential designation of

BACK BAY FENS

as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended

Approved by Marcia Myers SEP 19 1983

Executive Director Date

Accepted by Paul Chase Harrell SEP 19 1983

Chairman Date

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FENWAY / KENMORE

0 400 800 1600 FEET

N

1.0 Location of the Property

1.1 Address: The Fenway, Boston, Massachusetts, Ward 5.

Assessor's Parcel Number: 4175

1.2 Area in which the property is located:

The Back Bay Fens is bounded by roads which were planned as sections of the Fens Park: The Fenway, Audubon Road (now Park Drive) and, at the park's northern end, Boylston Street. Park Drive and Boylston Street are thoroughly residential, made up of attached five-story apartment blocks. The Fenway itself is primarily institutional, including Emmanuel College, Simmons College, The Gardner Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Forsyth Dental School and the Boston Conservatory of Music. The apartment blocks of the Fen's eastern boundary are largely student residences. The area is entirely man-made -- created out of a polluted salt marsh. All of the development pastdates the Fens and is a result of the Fens Park. The Back Bay Fens was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Olmsted Park system in 1971.

1.3 Maps Showing Location: attached.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY:

2.1 Type and Use:

The Back Bay Fens was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted as part of the Boston Park System. It was originally designed as a tidal pool to drain the salt marsh that existed prior to 1878, the year Olmsted was called in. Essentially the Fens was a sanitary solution first and a park second. Today,it contains a schoolboy stadium,a basketball court,the War Memorial,the Rose Garden and the Victory Gardens.

2.2 Physical Description:

The Back Bay Fens contains about 100 acres of land at or near sea level. It is entirely man-made land, including in its bounds a meandering stream, lawns, shaded walks, a rose garden, private garden plots and an athletic field.

The spine of the Fens is a stream, which is crossed at six points by bridges. Three of these footbridges were added nearly twenty years after the Fens was completed and were rebuilt in 1979. Although entirely contemporary in design and execution, they are not out of character with the informal landscape.

The eastern and southern sides of the Park are composed of a narrow strip of land made up of the original bridle path and footpath. The most important features of the Park, the two nondescript stone buildings near Forsythe Way, are located in this area. The two gatehouses, which control the flow of Stony Brook into the Fens Waterway, are the crux of Olmsted's original plan.

The first gatehouse was built from designs by Henry Hobson Richardson and completed in 1882. It channeled Stony Brook through two 120-inch rectangular brick culverts from whence the dirty water went directly to the Charles River through an 84-inch circular tunnel. Called the Old Stony Brook Conduit today, it roughly follows Forsythe Street.

The second gatehouse, nearest the Museum of Fine Arts, was built in 1905 when a second double-barreled conduit for Stony Brook was built. It was designed by Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge-- H.H. Richardson's successor firm-- who modeled it closely after the original 1882 gatehouse. It sits on two, twin, twelve-by-twelve foot stone and brick conduits, carefully hidden with thick shrubs and only faintly visible from the War Memorial lawn.

North of the gatehouse are original willow trees which segregate the bridle and footpaths. The slight grade change and curves of the paths are Olmsted touches. The grade change separates the two modes of travel and adds interest for the park visitor.

Agassiz Road, originally designed as a transverse road for park traffic, cuts the Fens into upper and lower ponds. The bridge, marked by five semi-circular arches, was designed by John C. Olmsted and built between 1887 and 1888. Granite abutments and piers rest on a foundation of a four-inch spruce platform on spruce piles. Faced with Roxbury puddingstone taken from old boundary walls in Franklin Park, it was completed in February of 1888. The stone parapets were built in 1891 when the road was surfaced.

Agassiz Road lines up with the Westland Avenue Entrance, which was landscaped in 1893 as one of four principal entranceways to the Fens. The other entrances are the Huntington Avenue at the Museum of Fine Arts which, because of Stony Brook conduits being built and rebuilt, was made over three times , the last change occurring in 1908; the Tremont, obliterated by the recent addition by the State College at Boston; and the Longwood entrance parallel to Emmanuel College. All were designed to have straight, broad roads and walks and lawns planted with trees.

Westland was not laid out by Olmsted, but suggested by him because of its proximity to Massachusetts Avenue. By 1900 the avenue was a grand boulevard, built up with brick townhouses and leading straight into the Fens from Boston's new cultural corner -- Horticultural and Symphony Halls.

The Johnson Memorial stands at the Westland Avenue Entrance to the Fens. Built in 1903 of marble, it makes a monumental gate to the Fens and the Olmsted Park System. Designed by Guy Lowell, the gate was provided for by Helen Johnson in memory of her husband.

Across the street from this entrance is the Boston Fire Department Control Center built in 1927. This was the first major intrusion into the Park, spoiling the view into the Fens from Westland Avenue. In addition, parking for the employees and, recently, the police mounted patrol vans, now claims more of the parkland each year.

The land mass of the Fens rises sharply north of the Control Center as the Fenway Road was built to accomodate Boylston Street as it crossed the bridge.

The Boylston Street Bridge, at the head of the Back Bay Fens, is the result of a brilliant collaboration between Henry Hobson Richardson and the Olmsted firm. John Olmsted drew up the plans in 1878 and 1879 where both the height and span were defined. Richardson added the distinctive tourelles. A long, graceful arc originally brought people from Commonwealth Avenue into the Fens over this bridge. The effect was destroyed by the widening of Commonwealth Avenue around 1917. The center island, added to permit 2-way traffic, did not alter Olmsted's plan; originally the bridge was 2-way.

The bridge foundation and abutments were built in the fall of 1880. The arch was completed in 1883 and the bridge opened in 1884. Today, this Cape Ann style granite bridge remains the most famous structure of the Boston Park System. Totally different from any other masonry bridge of its day, the scale and materials of the Boylston Street Bridge were followed throughout the entire Park System by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge.

The rise of the roadway and the curve of the Boylston Street Bridge form a protective arc around Mother's Rest, a small children's playground at the Northern End of the Fens.

Across from the corner of Boylston Street and Fenway Road, in the park, stands the John Boyle O'Reilly Memorial. Although this statue originally stood at the corner of the two streets, a site Olmsted personally chose, its new position allows it to continue to face down Boylston Street. The sculptor, Daniel French, placed his work on a low pedestal so that the rich decorative detail could be seen from all sides.

The memorial to the Irish poet, patriot and writer is constructed of bronze. Three allegorical figures represent Ireland and her twin sons, Courage and Poetry, and stand against a granite stele carved in interlacing similar to ancient Celtic grave markers. On the back side of the memorial is a bust of the poet.

The western side of the Back Bay Fens is bordered by Park Drive. This road was completed and planted in 1888. Rebuilt to accommodate motor traffic, it is today a four lane road, one way in direction from Boylston Street to Simmons College. Traffic is segregated: park traffic nearest the park, and residential and business traffic on the outside.

Located on the western side of the parkland are private garden plots called the Victory Gardens. Benches tucked under flowering trees make this area a pleasant place to sit and relax.

Roberto Clemente Field, the War Memorial and the Rose Garden are all located in the southern portion of the Fens, below Agassiz Road. The Field has both bleachers and a field house of artificial stone. The War Memorial, built in 1949, was designed by Tito Cascieri and sculpted by John Paramino. The site is a small lawn dotted with clumps of trees laid out by Shurcliff in 1921. The famous Fens Rose Garden was also designed by Arthur Shurcliff. Built in 1930, it was expanded to its present dimensions three years later.

A lagoon and an expansive lawn create a most dignified setting for the broad plastered front of the Evans Wing of the Museum of Fine Arts. Unfortunately, the Museum has closed it Fenway entrance.

East of the Fenway Stadium field house is Fen Bridge. Designed by John Olmsted, it marks the end of the Back Bay Fens section of the Park System. It is a masonry arch bridge, fifteen feet wide, which sits on a foundation of spruce piles. Construction of the bridge began in February, 1891 and it was faced with Puddingstone from Franklin Park. Only the abutments were cemented; the rest was packed with earth and planted with vines, now long gone. The bridge was finished in January, 1892, when Audubon Road was completed to Brookline Avenue.

The waterway from Fen Bridge west to Brookline Avenue was excavated in 1891. This outlet was considerably widened after the decision was made by F.L. Olmsted in 1887 to continue the Parkway System along the Muddy River Valley. An elliptical, nine foot high by seven foot wide concrete and brick tunnel, with walls a foot thick, connects Muddy River to the Longwood Entrance canal under Brookline Avenue. This was built in 1891.

Although the Back Bay Fens ends at Avenue Louis Pasteur, the Landmark designation under consideration extends to the Boston side of the Muddy River Improvement, or the Riverway section of the Park System.

The new land mass of the Riverway was built in two years. Its most impressive feature is the slow rise of the parkway, building up to a point ninety feet above the walks of the park. The bridle path and foot path bridges at Plymouth Street were designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge and built in 1891. They are not nearly as bold or as graceful as the Boylston Street Bridge, but they retain the same red granite facing scheme. The small, handsome Riverway Shelter, built in 1894, serves as a basement tool shed and picnic area overlook.

Remnants of the original bridle path can be seen between Longwood Avenue and the Sears Parking Lot. The Bridle Path Bridge serves, today, as a flight of steps down the high banks of the parkway.

2.3 PHOTOGRAPHS: attached.

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Development of the Park System

The construction of the Fens represents a significant achievement in the development of the Boston Park System. The following paragraphs taken from the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks Annual Report for 1896 describe the evolution of the City's park system.

"The first definite move of the City Council towards establishing public parks in Boston was made in 1869, when a committee was appointed to consider what action should be taken by the city government to purchase and lay out a public park. This was due to a petition for the establishment of a public park, signed by prominent citizens and firms.

"Hearings were given, and an order was passed requesting the Mayor to petition for an act to authorize the city to take lands in Boston or vicinity for park purposes, and an act was passed in 1870. This being prior to the annexation of several of the outlying towns to Boston, the act contemplated the taking of a portion of the land required outside the city limits, and provided for a joint commission, to be appointed by the State and city authorities. The act, although receiving a majority of the votes cast at the State election, failed of approval by the required two-thirds vote."

"Mayor Cobb, in 1874, after annexation of the outlying towns, recommended that action be taken to secure suitable public parks within the city limits, and the subject was referred to a special commission, consisting of the Mayor, two aldermen, three councilmen, and three citizens at large, who submitted a valuable and interesting report advocating the establishment of public parks, and recommending the passage of an act for that purpose. This recommendation was acted upon, and in the following year the present Park Act was passed and accepted by a majority vote at a special election, which occurred June 9, 1875."

"The Mayor thereupon appointed T. Jefferson Coolidge, Charles H. Dalton, and William Gray, Jr., as Park Commissioners, who reported in 1876 a scheme for public parks, which has been carried out in its main features, the whole forming a comprehensive plan for improving and beautifying the city and securing the benefit that parks afford. The Plan was received with great favor; resolutions were adopted at a public meeting in Faneuil Hall in support thereof, which called for immediate and favorable action thereupon by the city government."

"In 1877, the first action towards carrying out these recommendations was taken by the appropriation of about half a million dollars for the purchase of one-hundred acres of land and flats in the Full Basin, so called, at the Back Bay. The establishment of a park in this location was considered largely a matter of sanitary necessity."

"During the first period of ten years from the organization of the Board, relatively little was done in the way of construction. It was felt by the Commissioners that the securing of the lands was the prime necessity, and although some work was done, chiefely in filling and building roads and bridges on the Back Bay Fens, the work of construction had barely begun."

"In 1885, the site of six parks had been secured, and the cost for both land and construction had reached four million dollars."

The establishment at this time (mid-1880) of a low tax and debt limit made the further carrying out of the park scheme a difficult matter. The Board accordingly inaugurated the policy of continuing the work by long-term loans outside of the debt limit, which has resulted in developing the park system in a progressive and comprehensive manner. From 1885 to 1896 te number of park sites, including parkways and playgrounds increased from six to nineteen."

With the major construction of the Fens completed in 1893, the Boston Park System was established.

3.2 Landscape Architectural Significance:

The Boston Park System and the Back Bay Fens reflect the skill of Frederick Law Olmsted. He was born in April 26, 1822 in Hartford, Connecticut. His father was a prosperous merchant who often took his family on long trips around the northeast. It was on these trips and in walks around the neighboring countryside that Olmsted developed a deep respect for the land.

At that time, America was largely agrarian, and in 1847 Olmsted took up farming after a spotty education. He believed that the establishment of model farms of scientific agriculture and management were in the national interest. He submerged himself in his work, studying the latest scientific methods and consulting the writings of the leading agricultural and horticultural experts of the day, including Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852). Downing was the most prominent landscape architect at that time, and his Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (1814) was recognized as the leading work on the subject. This self-made man loved scenery, and his firmly-held conviction that human behavior was affected by the environment was a great influence on Olmsted, who made a pilgrimage to his hero's estate on the Hudson River in 1851.

A number of events led Frederick Law Olmsted to change his profession from scientific farmer to landscape architect. First of all, his move to Staten Island in 1848 put him in touch with the social and literary elite of New York. He was exposed to such new theories as Utopian Socialism, which was being advanced by Parke Goodwin. Another very influential experience was Olmsted's walking tour through the British Isles and Europe with his brother John in 1850. He was particularly impressed by a park of 120 acres in Birkenhead, which had been designed by Sir Joseph Paxton in 1844. He found it interesting that citizens of every class congregated in the park to pass their leisure hours in its restful surroundings.

surroundings. Olmsted was also exposed to environmental planning and design throughout Europe. Two years after returning from Europe, Olmsted was sent on a tour of the South by the New York Times to prepare a series of articles on southern agriculture and economy as affected by slavery. A Journey in the Back Country resulted from this assigment. These experiences reinforced Olmsted's belief that a man's environment influenced his behavior.

After an abortive effort as a part owner and editor of Putnam's Monthly Magazine, Olmsted sought the post of Superintendent of Central Park in September, 1857. One of Downing's most important achievements was leading the fight for a public park in New York; his efforts from the mid-1840's onward were responsible for the Park Act in New York of 1851 which brought forth the first country park in the New World, Central Park.

When Olmsted first saw Central Park, it was 770 acres of swamp and rock without any master plan. Downing's associate Calvert Vaux invited Olmsted to collaborate with him on a design. They worked on this plan for six months, and it was selected over 32 other proposals in April, 1858. In May, Frederick Law Olmsted was made Architect in Chief of Central Park. And so the career of America's prominent landscape architect was launched. The success of Central Park was immediate and Olmsted's reputation spread far and wide. The politics of New York City often made Olmsted's job very difficult, but he was able to see his plan implemented with few alterations.

Olmsted's served as the Secretary of the Sanitary Commission, forerunner of the Red Cross, during the Civil War. When the war ended, Olmsted was awarded a number of commissions. Among other projects, he designed Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California (1864); Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1866), a large subdivision in Chicago called Riverside (1869), Mount Royal Park, Montreal (1875-6) and advised on Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

In 1878 Olmsted began advising the Boston Park Commission. In 1879 he drew up the Back Bay Fens plan and for the next 15 years worked on the rest of the the Boston Park System; Back Bay Fens - 1881-1895; Muddy River Improvement - 1890-1894; Jamaica Park - 1892-1895; Arboretum - 1883-1886; and Franklin Park - 1886-1896 Olmsted's plan for Boston is unique in that it is a system rather than a single design for one green space.

Olmsted's "rationale behind the plan was very far from what was commonly understood as a park, as Olmsted painstakingly explained; the design was primarily a sanitary improvement".[1] His "... solution for controlling the waters of the Back Bay Fens was not remarkable in the strictly technological sense; he modified a standard engineering scheme into an appropriate landscape design. The brilliance of his solution lay in his synthesis of the practical and the aesthetic, rather than in any engineering innovation as as such."[2]

1 Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System, Cambridge, 1982, p.55.
2 Ibid, p.161.

Olmsted commented on the design of the park:

> "it is a direct development of the original conditions of the locality in adaptation to the needs of a dense community. So regarded, it will be found to be, in the artistic sense of the work, natural, and possibly to suggest a modest poetic sentiment more grateful to town-weary minds than an elaborate and elegant gardenlike work would have yielded."[3]

Olmsted believed that bridges and other structures in a park should harmonize with and complement the scenery. The major architects for the park, including H.H. Richardson and Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, respected Olmsted's philosophy.

Among Olmsted's important later projects are the design for Stanford University, the Biltmore Estate and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. After a lengthy illness, the founder of American landscape architecture died in 1903.

3.3 Development of the Back Bay Fens:

On Wednesday evening, June 7, 1876, Boston citizens gathered at Faneuil Hall to endorse the recommendations of the Park Comissioners, contained in a report released on April 24, 1876, for a system of parks in Boston. Most of the attention focused upon the health factors of open space. Dr. Edward Clark addressed the gathering on the

> "sanitary aspect of the park ... Let us not forget that a park laid out in accordance with the plan of the Park Commissioners will utilize localities that would otherwise become plague spots ... Portions of the Back Bay ... are sure to become unhealthy localities unless they are preserved and left unoccupied."

Landowners and speculators, realizing that the continued development of the Back Bay would be stymied without a solution to the Fens problem, lobbied long and hard in the City Council to pass a bill authorizing funds for the park. This was done in 1877.

In deference to local political opinion, a competition was held for plans. F.L. Olmsted declined to submit or to judge the entries. He wrote,

> "No aid I could give in the selection of a plan
> to receive your premium would materially lessen
> either class of ojbections to the competition,
> which I have indicated. Advising your choice
> I should place myself in a leaky boat with you.
> Keeping out of it I retain a professional position
> in which it its possible I may yet be of service to
> you."[1]

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3 Olmsted, "Report of the Landscape Architect Advisory", in City Doc. no.15 -- 1880, 12.

1 Olmsted to Dalton, May 13, 1878, Olmsted Papers, Library of Congress Washington, D.C.

Although a $500.00 prize was awarded to Hermann Grundel, his plan was inappropriate. Even though the Boston park commissioners had requested a park for the Back Bay they needed, instead, a solution for Stony Brook flood waters. They asked Olmsted to prepare a plan. Olmsted accepted this engineering problem as the dictating factor in his design and declared that his undertaking not be aimed at anything with the slightest resemblance to an urban park.

Olmsted's design was primarily a sanitary improvement, the main feature of which was a storage basin for the storm waters of Stony Brook. A second aim was to restore the salt marsh to its original condition."2

Intercepting sewers were to be constructed, the Muddy River would be diverted to the Charles by a conduit, and the ordinary flow of Stony Brook carried out by a similar conduit. The flow of salt water in and out of the 30 acre basin was to be carefully regulated. During times of flood, approximately twenty additional acres could be covered with water".3 Olmsted created a salt creek, bordered by salt marshes, and enclosed by high banks. The banks were covered with wild flowers, compact shrubs and vines, grasses and trees that thrived on salt water.

Olmsted met with many problems while building the park. The most serious was the small size of the site. Of the 100 acres, purchased at $450,000., half was committed to the basin. Only 50 acres could be used for recreational purposes. Along this land Olmsted developed the major parkway of the system, now the Fenway, parallel to a bridle path. "Several city streets had to traverse the park, necessitating the construction of several bridges."4

An engineer of the Park Commission, Thomas Doane, had superintended the filling in and laying out of the border roads around the Fens site. Consequently, through no fault of Olmsted's, the Fenway roads lack attractive views of the park.

The third major problem Olmsted faced was the size of the conduit needed to carry Stony Brook overflow directly to the Charles River. Due to the expense of such a large conduit, a smaller one was decided upon by the City engineer. Olmsted compensated by making the Fens basin two feet lower than usual.

The Back Bay Fens was simple by design, a passive park made up of walk ways and a bridle path. Traffic lanes were segregated by slight grade changes and plantings. Architecture was kept to a minimum and what exists is low key.

Agassiz Bridge was deliberately kept low to provide a long view of the park, and Fenbridge is tucked into the banks of Park Drive and planted so closely as to be nearly invisible. Even the enormous Boylston Street Bridge never intrudes in the park because of its undulating surface, exact proportions to the land around it, and earth tone granite facing. The bridge's great arch was carefully designed to be a window on the Fens from Commonwealth Avenue, inviting visitors into the park. All three original bridges are barely noticeable on the roadways and appear to be part of the landscape from the park. The gatehouses are heavily planted to also be as unobtrusive as possible.

All formal elements were kept to the edges of the park - especially the four entranceways. Reaching out like arms from the main body of the park, these entranceways connect the park with main public roadways: Huntington

Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, and Brookline Avenue. Olmsted always urged that main public roadways be the boundaries of his parks to provide easly access by as many people as possible. In the Fens the high price of land made this impossible so, in a clever way, Olmsted extended the park out to the thoroughfares by short ribbons of parkland.

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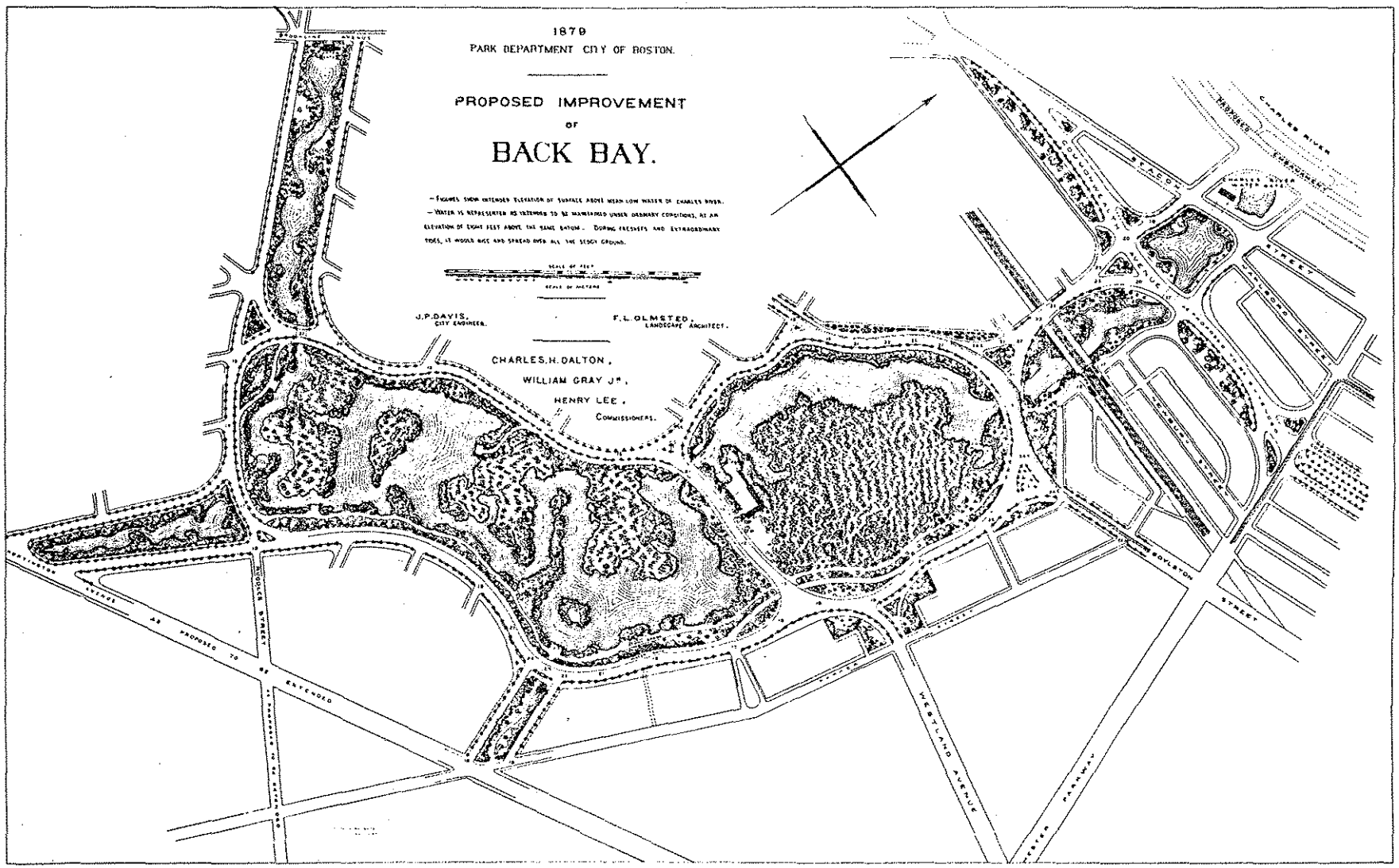
2 Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System Cambridge, 1982,p.57.
3 Ibid.
4.Ibid.



Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Parks System, Cambridge, 1982.

Figure 31
Olmsted's first published plan for the Back Bay Fens, 1879.

The Tremont Entrance, today called Evans Way, adjoins the Gardner Museum. It was originaly planned as the beginning of the parkway system. A parkway was designed to extend over Parker Hill through a planned park on that elevation and down to Jamaica Pond. Expensive land prices scuttled the plan. On December 30, 1887, the Boston Park Commission voted on a continuous parkway from the Fens to Franklin Park using the Muddy River Valley. The Tremont Entrance was completed as planned in 1893 to Huntington Avenue. It served as an entrance from Tremont Street and the Mission Hill neighborhood.

The Muddy River , with its polluted water and flooding , brought as many problems to Brookline as Stony Brook did to Boston. As a solution to their common troubles, Brookline and Boston collaborated on the Riverway and Leverett Park. The project was made possible by the Brookline Park Commission Chairman, Charles Sprague Sargent.

Sargent, who was the first director of the Arnold Arboretum, and served in this capacity for over fifty years, was also a friend and neighbor of F.L. Olmsted. Upon assuming the newly formed position of chairman of the Brookline Park Commission in 1830, Sargent turned to Olmsted to solve the Muddy River problem. Olmsted submitted his first plan in 1882 and $40,000. was appropriated to begin land taking. Over the next seven years, sufficient land was purchased and the boundary line between Brookline and Boston was redrawn to go down the middle of the new waterway. A revised plan was submitted, based on the actual amount of land purchased, to the Town of Brookline on January 28, 1890. Work commenced in the spring of 1890.

The original Muddy River Channel was completely rebuilt from the meandering stream it once was. An 1873 Boston Atlas shows the Muddy River once winding through what is today Temple Israel, Wheelock College and Simmons, and exiting to the Charles River through present-day Queensbury Street.

In February, 1886, Stony Brook flooded 63 acres of lower Roxbury causing extensive damage and posing serious health problems. The flooding proved that the old Stony Brook Conduit of 1881 was far too small.

In 1887 a twelve by twelve foot channel was built, going directly from Roxbury Crossing to the Back Bay Fens. The sole purpose for this channel was the prevention of upstream flooding and no provision was made for foul flow. The work at the Fens was completed in 1889.

The widening and extension of Columbus Avenue and the extensive rebuilding of the Boston and Providence Railroad, beginning in the mid 1890's, spurred more action to sufficiently control Stony Brook. In 1896, work began on a newer and much larger conduit in lower Roxbury called the Commissioners Channel. The conduit stopped at Huntington Avenue in 1897 since flood control was still the primary concern. Pollution of the Fens from sewage in the channel became a serious problem for the Park Department and dredging was carried out in 1898. The sludge deposits and the odor from the Fens prompted more action and finally in September of 1903, a foul flow channel was begun from Huntington Avenue to the Charles River. This was an extension of the 1897 Commissioners Channel. A new gatehouse was built in 1904 to control foul flow and the original Richardson gatehouse was moved under a new substructure with wider gates. Unfortunately the state legislature vetoed a plan for a separate system for foul and clean water flow and for a larger foul flow channel; the state wanted to keep the Harbor water as pure as possible. As a result only a seven by seven foot foul flow channel was built under the new gatehouse, despite objections by the chief engineer of the Sewer Division.

The project took five years and caused the digging of vast trenches down Huntington Avenue Entrance and out the Charles River. Over 100,000 cubic yards of sludge was dug out of the Fens by the Park Department using a unique hydraulic barge which carried the waste out to sea. Failure to build a segregated sewer system in 1904 has resulted in sanitary problems for the Fens.

Misuse and overloading had caused problems almost from the beginning for the tide and flood control system carefully worked out by Olmsted and the city engineer. When the Charles River dam was completed in 1910, the water flowing into the Fens from the Charles was fresh instead of salt, thus rendering the entire design obsolete. The dam kept the Charles River Basin at a constant level of fresh water and the tides no longer washed up the Fens and filled in the marshes. The marshes were no longer needed and soon the salt water grasses, trees, and shrubs began to die out. As the marshes were filled in, fresh water plantations were added although original willows can still be seen.

The three large marshes in the southern half of the Fens, just below Agassiz Road, were filled in stages, just prior to and after the First World War. An athletic field was filled in 1912 on the site of the present Roberto Clemente Field and landscaped between 1925 and 1928.

The Western side of the parkland, or, as Olmsted referred to the banks of the marshland, the Fenside, has been changed beyond recognition from its original appearance.

In 1911 the eleven acre site of the present Victory Gardens began to be filled in order to build a recreation field. As money became available during the teens of the 20th century, the flats were filled in by the Park Department, shaping the land mass which is more or less evident today. The Back Bay Fens was completed in 1893 at a cost of $18,000,000. However, in the years that followed many changes took place, leaving behind little of Olmsted's original design.

In 1904, Harvard Medical School chose a site on Longwood Avenue for its new school and it proposed a realignment of the roadway to the Fens to accomodate the site. This was agreed upon by the Park Department and the City Street Department. The aptly named Avenue Louis Pasteur was built in 1906.

Other changes were more disruptive. The actual site of the infamous Sears parking lot was a lovely lagoon crossed by a handsome stone bridge which carried the parkway to Park Drive. Both bridge and lagoon were plowed under in 1958-1959.

The construction of Boston State College's new building blocks forever the Tremont Street/Mission Hill connection and isolates the entranceway into an island. Moreover, the enormous height of the Boston State building is a visual intrusion and ruins an otherwise fine view from the Boylston Street Bridge of unobstructed greenspace.

The largest intrusion into the Back Bay Fens was the Bowker Overpass, connecting the Fens with Storrow Drive. The Bowker construction amputated the Boylston Street Bridge, obliterating the original Olmsted landscaping of Charlesgate. Bowker Bridge construction also destroyed the wall of a metal bridge which carried Audobon Road (now Park Drive) over

the Boston and Albany Railroad. This bridge had been built in 1893 from Richardson's plans of a decade earlier. Olmsted himself requested the plate girder deck bridge over the railroad and Richardson designed it in crisp, clean lines with only slight ornamentation. The metal truss bridge was essentially a wide break in the stone wall which continued the sweep of the Boylston Street Bridge around to Commonwealth Avenue, almost to the Hotel Somerset. The railroad bridge was demolished in 1964 for the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension. All that remains today is the massive central masonry support.

In 1982 major changes were again introduced to the Back Bay Fens:

- Agassiz Road was narrowed and a new curb and sidwalk installed.

- The rotary at the Westland Avenue Entrance was removed, changing the pattern of traffic and returning some land to park use.

- The southern portion of The Fenway was narrowed. New walks, curbs and trees were added.

- The Boylston Street intersection was entirely rebuilt. In addition to the relocation of the John Boyle O'Reilly statue, new walks were installed and The Fenway widened.

- Boylston Street has also been widened, the median strip removed and a new traffic pattern to the Bowker Overpass put into effect.

- At Fenway West a residential parking lane was created out of the west lane of the 1925 roadway. Park land was added at the gas station, at the corner of Boylston Street and The Fenway.

- Residential parking was also added in the Fenway Southwest section. Here a grade change of traffic lanes also occurred.

3.4 The Back Bay Fens as City Planning

One of the main groups lobbying for the Fens construction was composed of landowners and speculators wishing to protect their investment in the Back Bay development and exploit its grand success. Landowners demanded that boundary roads, facing private lots, be built by the Parks Department. These roads insured access to the property which began to be built upon in 1892. Land values had begun to rise as early as 1882 due to the control of the Stony Brook and marsh.

Unlike the Back Bay, the Fens could not simply be filled over. The great flow of water from Stony Brook made this impossible. Olmsted's brilliant solution permitted the growth of Boston around the Fens.

By keeping architecture to a minimum and providing for only passive recreation the Fens remained a large green for the residential blocks which surrounded it. Such a lay out allowed a maximum number of people to enjoy a park of minimal space.

Boundary roads that reached house lots were segregated by Olmsted into residential and park roads so that visitors could get the most out of their park. The several entrances, which reached out like arms to main public throughways, provided easy access to the park. Without these entrances the park would have been completely surrounded by private property.

The entranceways became even more utilitarian when streetcar lines began operating along Huntington Avenue and Brookline Avenue. For years the Park Commissioners wisely resisted attempts to put a streetcar line through the park along Boylston Street. This issue was resolved with the construction of the Boylston Street subway in 1912. This line goes under the watercourse at Charlesgate, midway between Commonwealth Avenue and the Boylston Street Bridge, and is 100 feet below ground.

Because the Fens is flat Olmsted had to use two design techniques. He moved Agassiz Road somewhat south of the Westland Avenue entrance to prevent the Avenue from becoming a high speed throughway bisecting the Fens. He also placed Boylston Street as far downstream as possible, creating a gentle curve in the road before it crosses the Bridge.

Development of residential Back Bay insured that the Fens would also remain residential. The earliest house built in the Fens was a grand structure near the Westland Avenue Gates: number 48, The Fenway. Constructed in 1892, it was designed by Arthur Darrell. Number 22 was built by and for the noted architect and Park Commissioner Robert S. Peabody in 1900. Robert Treat Paine built a townhouse for himself at number one Queensbury Street at Park Drive. It was completed in 1901. The building's massive brick circular bay faces the Agassiz Bridge and makes for one of the most distinctive houses in the Fens. This western side of the park was developed much later and for years the Paine House was the only structure on that side.

The Back Bay Fens was so attractive that it invited institutions to build near it. In 1899, the Massachusetts Historical Society Building, designed by Edmund Wheelwright, was built at 1154 Boylston Street across from the O'Reilly Memorial.

In 1901 the Boston Medical Library was built at number eight the Fenway. This building is now The Boston Conservatory of Music.

Robert Peabody designed the first building of Simmons College, built in 1902 on a large tract of land near the Gardner Museum; later additions came in 1916. Emmanuel College was built in 1914 across from the Longwood Entrance.

The most famous house of the Fenway, built in Fenway Court between 1899 and 1903, was Isabella Stewart Gardner's. Interestingly, it was her husband who urged that they move out of their crowded Beacon Street home to the new land of the Fenway. After Jack Gardner died in 1898, Mrs. Jack purchased the corner lot at the Tremont Street entrance. A familiar sight from the Fens is the enormous "Y" formed by brick chimneys on the Fenway facade of the Museum. When a new fireplace was added to the Raphael Room in 1914, Mrs. Jack had the masons form the chimneys into the shape of a "Y" which is the first initial of Isabella in Spanish.

In 1905, negotiations took place between the trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Park Department for a transfer of park land to the museum. The trustees wanted a rectangular lot which was made when the Huntington Avenue Entrance was rebuilt in 1907.

The great institutional crush on the Fens was probably inevitable, given the vast amount of land now opened for building after the flooding and pollution problems were solved by Olmsted.

The Back Bay Fens is important for its great influence on the growth of Boston. The park's significance belies its size. Part of the significance of the Back Bay Fens is that it is an example of city planning on a par with the Back Bay plan of Arthur Gilmore. As Louis Mumford wrote in 1969:

> "It is impossible to write a history of city design or landscape architecture in the United States without reference to the Back Bay area".

4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

4.1 Current Assessed Value and Property Tax

Total : $81,998,504
Annual Taxes : The Back Bay Fens are tax exempt, Class E.

4.2 Current Ownership and Status:

According to Assessor's Records, the Back Bay Fens are owned by the City of Boston.

In 1956, the City of Boston's Parks and Recreation Department transferred to the Metropolitan District Commission the "care, control and maintenance" of the public ways and parkways (or portions thereof) of the following:

a.) The Fenway
b.) that portion of Park Drive which lies between Audobon Circle and Boylston Street
c.) that portion of Boylston Street which lies between its junction with Ipswich Street near Park Drive and Hemenway
d.) Charlesgate West
e.) Charlegate East
f.) Agassiz Road

"For the sake of definiteness, such transfer is hereby further declared to include:

a.) all roadways within the limits of the public ways and parkways (or portions thereof) of the above mentioned.
b.) all walks and paths along, and approximately level with, every such roadway, if within twenty-five feet thereof, whether or not constructed as a sidewalk, an
c.) all lands lying between such roadways or between such walks or paths and such roadways, irrespective of the size, shape or purpose thereof, but excluding all monuments and other memorials subject to the supervision of the Art Commission of the City of Boston.

Likewise for the sake of definiteness, such transfer is hereby also declared to include all signals and other devices (except parking meters) for the control of traffic on the public ways and parkways (or portions thereof) to which this communication relates, all traffic signs thereon (whether directional or regulatory), all trees and plantings on lands herein declared to be included in such transfer, an all street lights as well as catch basins and drains servicing the public ways and parkways (or portions thereof) as mentioned."

5.1 Planning Issues

The Back Bay Fens is one of the largest open spaces in the City of Boston and is an important facility and resource for the City and for the adjacent neighborhoods of the Fenway, Back Bay and Mission Hill. Planning issues for the park are numerous. They include, among others, management and also the conflict of use of recreational areas. A Master Plan, prepared in 1977 for the Department of Public Facilities by Carol Johnson Associates, addresses the park planning issues and design solutions in considerable detail.

Due to Proposition 2 and 1/2 and Federal cutbacks local and federal funding for capital improvements, as recommended by the Metropolitan District Commission Environmental Planning Department and the Metcalf and Eddy Combined Sewer Overflow Plan for Stony Brook, is currently unavailable.

Targeted community interest in other significant historic open spaces have been effective. Citizen advocacy groups, dedicated to the preservation of the park, could be modelled after successful organizations such as the Massachusetts Association for Olmsted Parks, Friends of the Public Garden and the Franklin Park Coalition.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

6.1 Alternatives

The Boston Landmarks Commission may choose to designate the Back Bay Fens as a Landmark, a part of a Landmark District or an Architectural Conservation District. However, the nature of the property and its significance, which is demonstrated by its inclusion in a National Register Historic District, indicate that designation as a Landmark would be appropriate.

In spite of its clear eligibilty for designation, the Commission may also choose not to designate the property.

6.2 Impact of Alternatives

Designation of the Fens would serve at least two purposes: it would bring added recognition and public attention to the park, and it would give the Landmarks Commission a role in protecting and determining the property's future.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission recommended that Back Bay Fens be designated as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended.

The Standards and Criteria recommended for administering the regulatory functions provided for in Chapter 772, as amended, are attached.

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Gratitude is expressed to Richard Heath of the Franklin Park Coalition for collecting , researching and preparing material for this Study Report.

9.0 BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION - STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

9.1 Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria to be Used in Evaluating Applications for Certificates

Per Sections 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the enabling statute (Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as amended, Standards and Criteria must be adopted for each Landmark Designation which shall be applied by the Commission in evaluating proposed changes to the property. Before a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of the Exemption can be issued for such changes, the changes must be reviewed by the Commission with regard to their conformance to the purposes of the statute.

The Standards and Criteria established thus note those features which must be conserved and/or enhanced to maintain the viability of the Landmark Designation. The intent of these guidelines is to help local officials, designers, and individual property owners to identify the characteristics that have led to designation, and thus to identify the limitation to the changes that can be made to them. It should be emphasized that conformance to the Standards and Criteria alone does not necessarily insure approval, nor are they absolute, but any request for variance from them must demonstrate the reasons for, and advantages gained by, such variance. The Commission's Certificate of Design Approval is only granted after careful review of each application and public hearing, in accordance with the statute.

As intended by the statute a wide variety of buildings and features are included within the area open to Landmark Designation, and an equally wide range exists in the latitude allowed for change. Some properties of truly exceptional architectural and/or historical value will permit only the most minor modifications, while for some others the Commission encourages changes and additions with a contemporary approach, consistent with the properties' existing features and changed uses.

In general, the intent of the Standards and Criteria is to preserve existing qualities that cause designation of a property; however, in some cases they have been so structured as to encourage the removal of additions that have lessened the integrity of the property.

It is recognized that changes will be required in designated properties for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which are under the complete control of the Commission or the owners. Primary examples are:

a) Building code conformance and safety requirements.

b) Changes necessitated by the introduction of modern mechanical and electrical systems.

c) Changes due to proposed new uses of a property.

The response to these requirements may, in some cases, present conflicts with the Standards and Criteria for a particular property. The Commission's evaluation of an application will be based upon the degree to which such changes are in harmony with the character of the property.

In some cases, priorities have been assigned within the Standards and Criteria as an aid to property owners in identifying the most critical design features.

The Standards and Criteria have been divided into two levels: (1) those general ones that are common to almost all landmark designations (with three different categories for buildings, building interiors and landscape features); and (2) those specific ones that apply to each particular property that is designated. In every case the Specific Standard and Criteria for a particular property shall take precedence over the General ones if there is a conflict.

GENERAL STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR PHYSICAL, LANDSCAPE OR TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURE(S) DESIGNATED AS LANDMARKS.

A. APPROACH

1. The design approach to the property should begin with the premise that alternation to the lanscape design will be minimized.

2. Changes to the property which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected. "Later integral features" shall be the term used to convey this concept.

3. New materials should, whenever appropriate, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities.

4. New additions or alterations to the landscape should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property.

5. New additions or alterations should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landscape would be unimpaired.

6. Priority shall be given to those portions of the property that serve as the more important public areas.

B. WALKS, STEPS AND PAVED AREAS

1. Deteriorated paving materials should be replaced with the same material or a material which matches as closely as possible. Consideration will be given to an alternate paving material if it can be shown that its properties will assist in site maintenance and/or will improve the original or later integral design concept.

2. Original layout of the walks, steps, and paved areas should be maintained. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alteration will improve this without altering the integrity of the design.

C. PLANT MATERIALS

1. Existing healthy plant materials should be maintained.

2. All plant materials should be cared for according to good horticultural practices. Hazardous plants or portions of should be removed.

3. New plant materials should be added on a schedule that will assure a continuity in the existing landscape design and its later adaptations.

4. New plant materials should either be the same as the existing or be similar in form, color and texture.

5. New locations for plantings or new selection of species with a different form, color, or texture must not alter the overall site design.

6. Maintenance of, removal of, and additions of plant materials should consider maintaining existing vistas, creating new ones where appropriate, and maintaining new spaces.

7. Whenever appropriate, plant materials rather than structural materials should be used to solve erosion problems.

D. LANDFORMS

Not applicable.

E. ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

1. Whenever possible, original or later integral architectural elements such as benches, fences, fountains, statues, bridges, lighting, shelters and signs shall be retained.

2. Maintenance should not alter the original or later integral color, material or design. Consideration, however, will be given to alterations that will either improve the design or the function of the element.

3. Architectural elements that are replaced should be of the same or similar material and design of the original or later integral feature. Consideration, however, will be given to changes that will improve the function of the architectural element without altering the integrity of the design.

4. Architectural elements may be removed if they are no longer functionally useful and their removal will not alter to a significant degree the site design.

5. Architectural elements may be added if they will not alter the integrity of the design, are necessary for the site safety, are useful for site maintenance, and/or will improve site usage.

10.0 SPECIFIC STANDARDS AND CRITERIA - THE FENS

A. Approach

1. The intent of the designation is to maintain and to restore to the extent possible, the character of the Fens as established by Frederick Law Olmsted in his designs for the park. Thus, the major portion of the property, which was a direct development of the original conditions of the locality in adapatation to the needs of a dense community, should retain a natural quality. The development of additional hard, urban recreational facilities is to be avoided. Maintenance and replacement of existing trees, walls, bridges, gateways, terraces and other existing elements should be done in a manner consistent with the park's character. New elements, if any, should be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible.

B. Categories of Activities and Likelihood of Review

The Fens is a large and complex property, involving ongoing maintenance activities as well as scheduled capital expenditures. The Commission has no desire to interfere with the normal maintenance procedures of the City or the MDC. In order to provide some guidance for the agencies and organizations involved as well as the Commission, the activities which might be expected to take place in the Fens, and which might be construed as causing an alteration to the physical character of the park, have been categorized into:

1. Activities for which no application need be filed for a certificate from the Commission;

2. Activities which must be brought to the attention of the staff of the Commission but may be the subject of a Certificate of Exemption; and

3. Activities for which a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption must be obtained from the Commission.

I. The following activities shall not be subject to review by the Commission:

1. Normal pruning and feeding of trees and shrubs; removal of dead trees and shrubs; removal of invasive water plants;

2. Replacement or addition of light fixtures, bollards, trash receptacles and other such "street furniture" of identical design to those which now exist in the park;

3. Normal care of the stadium and minor alterations in its greens;

4. Painting or staining materials involving no change in color;

5. Minor repairs to road surfaces and paths involving no changes in material or design;

6. Mowing, plowing, cleaning similar activities;

7. Events and recreational activities; and

8. Victory Gardening.

II. The following activities may be considered to be "routine maintenance and repair: and may be determined by the Executive Director or staff architect to be eligible for a Certificate of Exemption:

1. Minor landscaping changes such as the planting or removal of limited numbers of shrubs;

2. Reconstruction of roads and paths, involving minimal changes;

3. Repairs to existing walls, terraces, bridges, gates, shelters, and similar structures; and

4. Removal of live, but unhealthy trees or shrubs.

III. The following activities will be reviewed (this is not an inclusive list):

1. New Construction of any type (including buildings, structures,* roads, paths, parking areas and recreation facilities.);

2. Alteration of any existing statues, fountains, structures*, or other elements** involving changes in design, material, color, location or outward appearance;

3. Installation of additional statues, fountains or structures*;

4. Installation of additional benches and/or tables or change in their color and appearance;

5. Major planting of new trees; cutting down or removal of live healthy trees; new grouping of trees; changes in type of trees;

6. Additions or removal of major planting area(s);

7. Changes in landform; and

8. Installation of visible drainage devices.

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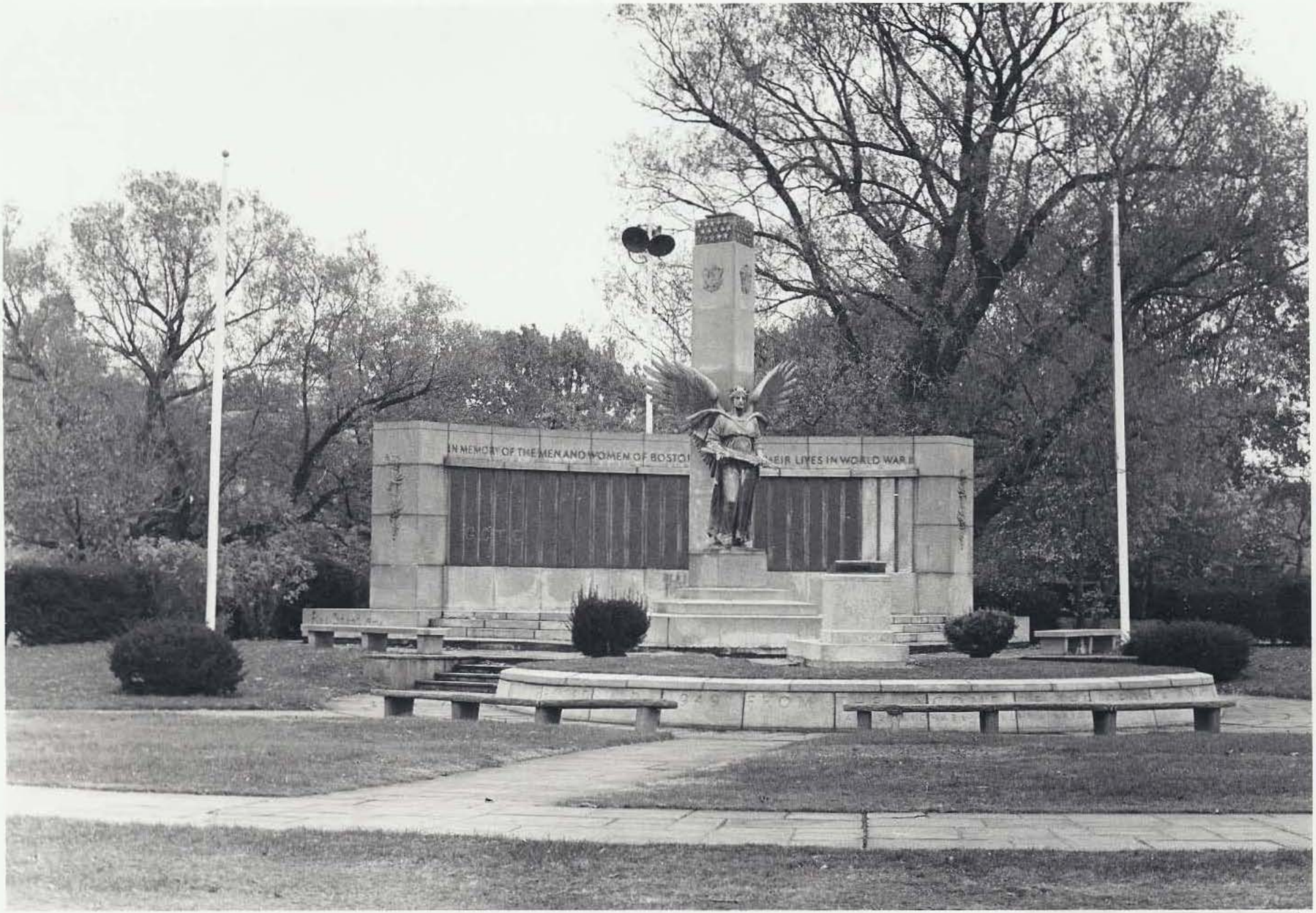
*"Structure" to include bridges, gazebos, shelters, cages and permanent fences, gates or pylons.

**"Elements" to include signs, fences, curbing, security items, lighting.

IV. In the case of an activity not explicitly covered in these Standards and Criteria, the Executive Director or his or her designee shall determine whether an application is required and if so, whether it shall be for an application for a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption.

1906 stone restroom, north of
Agassiz Bridge.

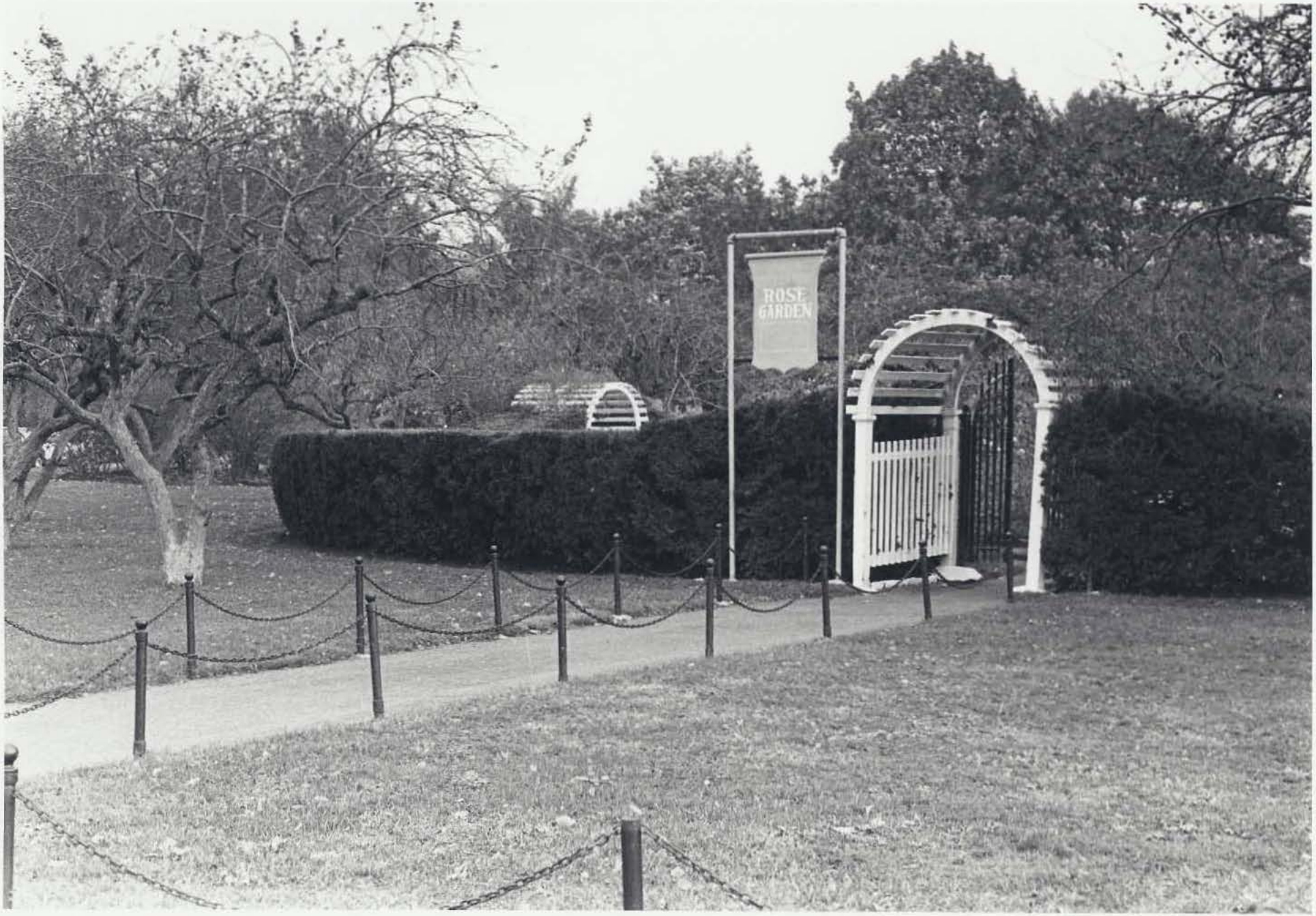


War Memorial

Johnson Memorial, Westland Avenue Entrance.

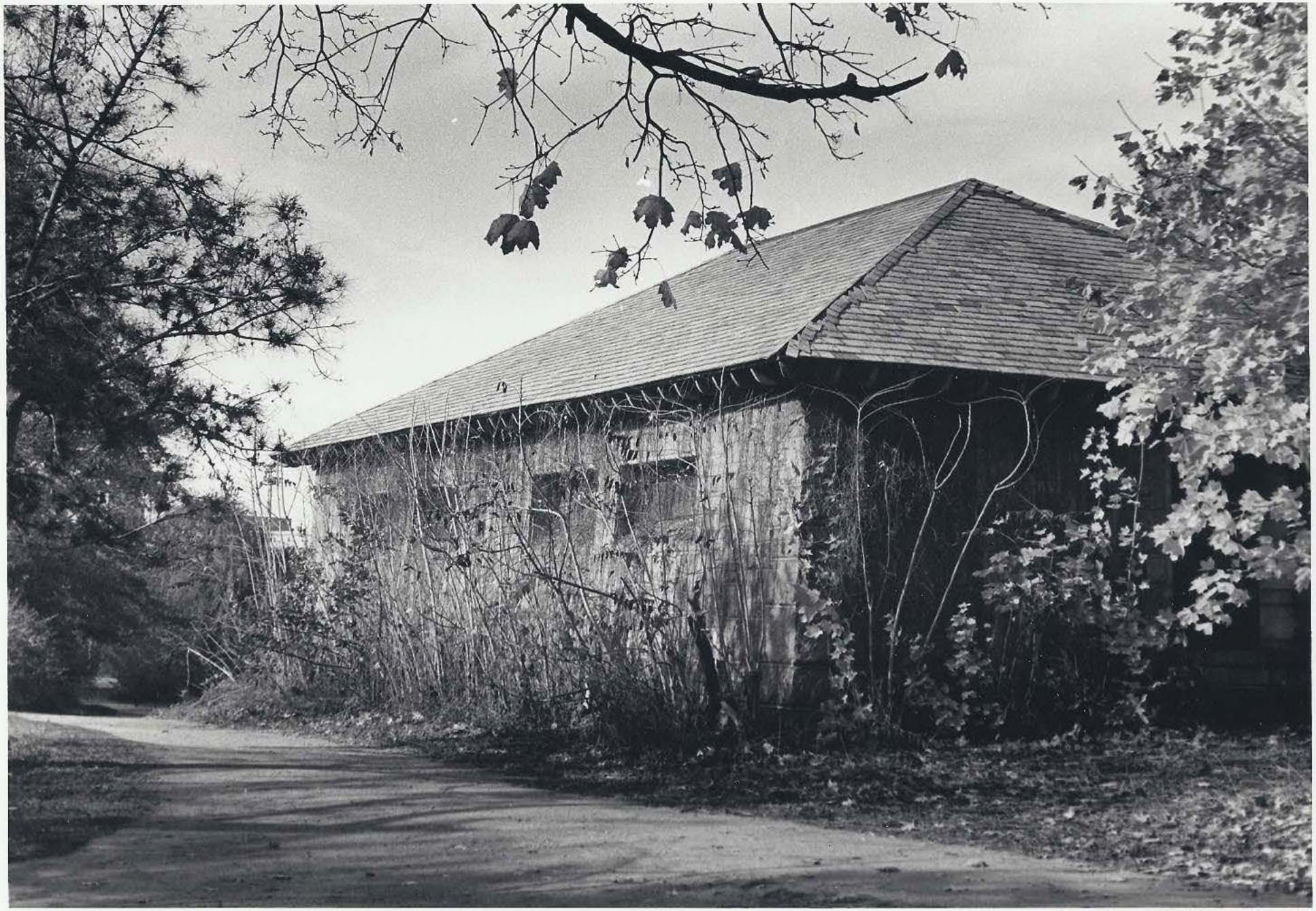
Fieldhouse and bleachers,
Roberto Clemente Field

John Boyle O'Reilly Memorial
prior to relocation.



Rose Garden

Gatehouse #1 in foreground,
Gatehouse #2 in rear



Gatehouse #2