

*Bruce Park - Binney Park - Byram Park - Montgomery Pinetum*  
*Historic Parks of Greenwich, Connecticut*

# *Historic Landscape Report*



*prepared by*

*Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC*  
*313 Elm Street*  
*Northampton, Massachusetts*  
*01060*

2009



# *Historic Landscape Report*

*for*

*Bruce Park – Byram Park – Binney Park – Montgomery Pinetum  
Historic Parks of Greenwich, Connecticut*

*prepared for the*

*Town of Greenwich Department of Parks & Recreation  
Division of Parks & Trees  
101 Field Point Road  
Greenwich, Connecticut  
06836*

*by*

*Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC  
313 Elm Street  
Northampton, Massachusetts  
01060*

*2009*



## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
A Brief History of Greenwich and its Parks	5
Bruce Park	9
Byram Park	21
Binney Park	37
Montgomery Pinetum	53
Management Guidelines	69
Appendices	
A: Historical Chronologies	A-1
B: Public Participation	B-1
C: Preservation Resources	C-1
D: Bibliography	D-1

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC thanks the following individuals and organizations for their valuable participation in the Historic Landscape Report for Bruce, Byram and Binney Parks, and the Montgomery Pinetum:

Bruce Spaman, Superintendent, Division of Parks and Trees, Town of Greenwich

Bill Burgess, Operations Manager, Parks and Recreation Department, Town of Greenwich

Division of Parks and Trees, Town of Greenwich  
Lenore Caserta-McClester, Administrative Assistant  
Lucia Febbraio, Administrative Staff Assistant  
Anthony Chiapetta, Foreman, Byram Park  
Mark Wyner, Foreman, Binney Park

The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich  
Anne Young, Curator of Archives  
Debra Mecky, Director

The Greenwich Library  
Carl White, History Librarian

The Perrot Library  
Linda White, Librarian

The Garden Education Center  
Adrienne Parker, Managing Director  
Lisa Beebe, Director of Horticulture

*...and the people of Greenwich for their thoughtful comments and enduring enthusiasm.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, The Town of Greenwich began acquiring land to develop into places where its residents could freely enjoy passive and active recreation. The first acquisition came in the form of a bequest from textile merchant Robert Bruce, a gift of 100 acres near the center of the Town. In 1908, Bruce Park became Greenwich's first official public park. Ten years later, the Town purchased land along Long Island Sound from the Ritch family of Byram, and created a spot for public bathing, Byram Park. Two other significant donations of parklands came between 1929 and 1952, with the gift of Binney Park in Old Greenwich, and finally, the Montgomery Pinetum in Cos Cob. Today, in addition to these four historic parks, the Town owns dozens of parks, recreation sites and conservation area totaling hundreds of acres, each maintained by the Greenwich Department of Parks and Recreation, Division of Parks and Trees.

Bruce, Byram, and Binney Parks and the Montgomery Pinetum are the town's most historic parks, and retain much of their original historic character. However, many historic features, including contexts, vehicular circulation routes and drainage patterns, have changed. Other features, such as plant materials and landscape details have deteriorated or have been altogether removed. It is because of these changes, that the Division of Parks & Trees selected the four parks for inclusion in this Historic Landscape Report. The document provides a roadmap for preserving the parks' historic character, and in so doing, respecting the original visions intended for them by their founders.



*Binney Park, located in Old Greenwich, was the gift of Edwin Binney, a summer resident of Sound Beach. It remains a centerpiece of the easternmost section of the Town.*

### Goal

The Historic Landscape Report researches the history of each park, and documents, assesses, and provides recommendations for preserving the parks' historic features. The report balances the need to retain the parks' historic character and maintain their historical integrity, with the need to provide for contemporary and future uses.

## **Process**

The Division of Parks and Trees collaborated with Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC (MLLA) to prepare the Historic Landscape Report. They followed a four-part process which included historic research and documentation, assessment, recommendations, and management. Research, completed in the summer and fall of 2008, involved combing historical material housed at the Greenwich Parks Department Office, office of S. E. Minor, Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, Greenwich Library, Perrot Library, and Garden Education Center.<sup>1</sup> MLLA also obtained information from the Montgomery Botanic Center (Coral Gables, Florida), and New York Botanic Garden. MLLA then assessed the current conditions of each park's landscape, comparing them to historical records. From the historical research and assessment, MLLA then prepared a series of preservation recommendations, along with a set of general management guidelines.

To gauge public opinion about each park, the Division and MLLA conducted a two-day series of stakeholder's meetings. Residents and interested citizens were invited to attend, listen to a short presentation, and then offer comments and suggestions about each park's future. The Division posted the presentations on the department website and received many comments via e-mail. MLLA folded information retrieved at the meetings into the preservation recommendations. The Division and MLLA concluded the project with an evening public meeting, where residents and interested citizens were able to view the report in its entirety and offer final comments.

## **Period of Historical Significance**

To develop preservation recommendations for each park, MLLA established a *Period of Significance* for each landscape. The Period of Significance is defined by the National Park Service as the span of time for which an historic landscape attains historical significance. This period, along with the assessment of existing conditions, provides the basis for preservation recommendations.

## **Recommendations for all Parks**

The foregoing report contains separate sections for each park, with specific preservation recommendations for each. However, over the course of the project several recommendations emerged:

- Nominate each of the four parks to the National Register of Historic Places, as a way of honoring their historical significance and making them eligible for future funding opportunities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The historical collection housed at the Byram Branch of the Greenwich Library was inaccessible throughout the duration the Historic Landscape Report project, due to a library renovation project. Information from that collection was not included.

- Develop a sign program for all of the Greenwich parks that includes welcome signs, way-finding signs, interpretive and commemorative markers, and tags for the arboretum. Work with a graphic designer to develop an overall concept.
- Wherever and whenever possible, utilize organic and/or sustainable measures of when managing the park landscapes, including introducing native plantings and applying organic fertilizers.
- Provide opportunities for Greenwich's diverse ethnic groups to create individual garden spaces within the parks – spaces that honor and reflect the groups' cultural traditions.
- Work with interested citizens to establish a Greenwich parks friends' group, modeled after the Central Park Conservancy (New York) and/or the Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery (Cambridge, Massachusetts). Such a group can support the efforts of the Division of Parks and Trees in areas of fundraising, public relations, and implementation of the preservation recommendations found in Sections 3 through 6 of this report.

*(page intentionally blank)*

## A BRIEF HISTORY of GREENWICH and its PARKS

The Greenwich landscape has attracted humans for centuries for its fertile soils, tidal-powered waterways, deposits of granite, and perhaps most of all, for the beauty and calm of its open spaces. The earliest humans, the Native American Siwanoy tribe, camped along the waterfront in hut-like tepees, harvesting fish from the waters of Long Island Sound. They remained until 1640, when they deeded land to four English-born settlers from the Massachusetts Bay, farmers who cultivated crops in the floodplains and tidal zones. By the late 1600s, European settlers had built a tide-powered mill on Indian Harbor Inlet (located on the site of Bruce Park), a grist mill that continued to operate for the next 200 years.

Mill and farming operations continued to dominate the Greenwich economy through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and by early 1800, maritime and fishing industries had taken hold. Ships, docking and loading at three Greenwich landings, transported agricultural goods 35 miles westward to New York. In the 1830s, steamboats began ferrying both passengers and goods, stopping at both Greenwich Harbor and Byram, and in 1840, the Ritch family opened a granite quarry in Byram (located on the site of Bryam Park), extracting stone for several major New York-based construction projects. Up through the mid 1800s, most agricultural, maritime, industrial and civic activity in Greenwich centered on its long waterfront.



*The Davis Mill, located on Indian Harbor Inlet, was powered by tides and operated at the same location for approximately 200 years. Photo courtesy of the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich.*

The 1848 opening of the New York and New Haven Railroad to freight and passenger traffic brought significant change to Greenwich – to both profile of its residents, and its residents’ relationship to the land. The rail line allowed businessmen from New York to own homes outside the city, and take a short train ride to work. Businessmen, such textile merchant Robert Bruce (founder of Bruce Park), could purchase sizeable pieces of land, construct comfortable homes, and raise families outside of the crowded city. Vacant land, both within the established part of the Town as well as northward, in the “back country,” was divided into building lots and sold to New York executives for peaceful retreats. Frederick Gotthold, owner of Gotthold & Company makers of straw goods, purchased such a parcel in 1880, and constructed “Wild Acres” (known today as the Montgomery Pinetum).

The rail line also spurred the growth of another industry, seasonal tourism. Greenwich's location along the water made it an ideal location for summer homes, boarding houses and guest houses, and several stretches of waterfront held such warm-month operations. In 1894 Robert Bruce constructed a two-story, gambrel-roofed building on the Davis Mill Pond and rented its rooms during the summer months to working women from New York. Sound Beach, located in Old Greenwich, began as a summer community, with the first cottage built by Edwin Binney, a New York manufacturer of "lamp black," in 1889. Greenwich attracted a large population of immigrants, including Germans, Poles and Italians, to work as laborers in the building trade.



*The Anchorage, located in Byram, was constructed in 1925. Photo courtesy of Anthony Chiapetta.*

By the 1920s, Greenwich had the highest per capita income in the country, and building of waterfront estates and country retreats continued in earnest. One such waterfront property, known as "The Anchorage," was constructed in 1925 on the site of the former Ritch family quarry in Byram. Known today as the Rosenwald Estate of Byram Park, this five-acre site contained a sprawling 17-room cliffside mansion, landscaped gardens, a gardener's cottage, tennis

courts, a swimming pool, a one-hole golf course, and a private boat slip for the owner's yacht. Another such country property, located in Cos Cob, was purchased in 1922 by Robert Montgomery, a New York accountant. Originally owned by Frederick Gotthold, "Wild Acres" was 55 acres with a mansion, several outbuildings, gardens and ponds. Montgomery expanded the land holding to 125 acres, and over the course of 30 years transformed the property into a world-renowned collection of conifers.

The formation of public parks in Greenwich coincided with the growing and diversifying population. While many Greenwich residents owned large, private tracts of land, many others either rented or owned small homes. This latter group had little land for active recreation. The first public park came in 1908 as a bequest of Robert Bruce - a 100-acre parcel located near the center of Greenwich on the Davis Mill Pond. Bruce intended the property to be used to "benefit the public..." and within a year, the Town had named the property "Bruce Park," and had begun making necessary improvements for public use. Ten years later, Greenwich purchased 20 acres in the Byram section of Town from the Ritch family, for use as a public park. Byram and neighboring Chickahominy were home to a several immigrant groups, including Italians who had come to work the quarry and assist in the building trade. Byram Park provided active and passive recreation space, along with a beach, to these and other residents of Greenwich.

Binney Park, established in 1927, was the gift of Edwin Binney, who wanted to set aside land in his beloved Old Greenwich for "park and recreation purposes only." Binney Park's original

ten acres had been considered for building lots but Binney, at the urging of his conservation-minded daughters, purchased the land and within five years had converted it into what a 1928 newspaper article called “...a marvel of scenic grandeur and beauty unsurpassed anywhere in the United States.” The next park acquisition came in the 1950s with the addition of the 125-acre Montgomery Pinetum, a gift of Nell Montgomery, Robert Montgomery’s widow.

Mrs. Montgomery asked, with her donation, that active recreation at the Pinetum be restricted to walking trails, and that the land be used for cultivation of the arts and horticulture.

Other parks established around this time were the 6.3-acre Roger Sherman Baldwin Park (1952), and 143.7-acre Greenwich Point, the former Tod Estate acquired by the Town in the mid 1950s. Over the last 50 years, Greenwich has acquired and/or established thirteen additional parks, bringing the total number to nineteen. The Town continues to conserve land, largely in the form of open space, maintaining its near-360 year history of connecting to its diverse, seaside landscape.



*Binney Park as seen from the upper pond, looking north toward to the Perrot Library. Courtesy of the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich.*

*(page intentionally blank)*