

GENESEE
VALLEY
PARK
WEST



MASTER PLAN

03

THE HISTORIC
LANDSCAPE

2015



City of Rochester


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This document was prepared for the New York State
Department of State with funds provided under Title 11
of the Environmental Protection Fund Act.

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THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE



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1902

Once used as a natural fording point by Native Americans and European settlers, this September 1902 photo of the "Genesee Rapids" bed rock formation was once located within the Genesee River near Brooks Avenue. The rapids were both covered by water elevation changes and removed by blasting to make the river more navigable .

Rochester Public Library, Local History Division



1900

Idyllic scene c.1900 along the Genesee River near Genesee Valley Park. The park site was well south of the City, but specifically chosen by Olmsted for its pastoral and soothing scenic qualities.

Rochester Public Library, Local History Division

The Historic Landscape

Genesee Valley Park is one of three large parks in Rochester designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., in the 1880s-90s as the heart of the city's comprehensive park system. Located on gently rolling farmland straddling the Genesee River south of the city center, the park was conceived as a pleasure ground devoted primarily to passive recreational activities such as strolling, carriage riding, and picnicking. While still under development, the park, particularly on the west side of the river, also came to accommodate a variety of amenities geared to more active pursuits such as boating, swimming, track and field, and tennis, beginning a cycle of development and redevelopment that has continued to the present. Today, the park retains some evidence of each phase of its development, although its predominant features date to the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Local Context

The Genesee River, flowing north from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario, has played a principal role in the history and development of Rochester. River crossings were key points on Native American trails and European-American roads. The river provided a means of transportation; the waterfalls created by the Niagara Escarpment provided water power that attracted European settlers to specific locations.

When Frederick Law Olmsted was engaged to guide the development of the city's park system in the 1880s, his primary advice to the Park Commission was to protect portions of the city's dramatic river corridor against industrial development so that citizens could enjoy its incomparable scenery. In accordance with Olmsted's recommendations, the Park Commission acquired land north and south of the city center and developed Seneca Park (now Seneca and Maplewood Parks) and Genesee Valley Park. ⁽¹⁾

The city park system, in turn, played a key role in influencing the direction and character of Rochester's growth. The parks determined transportation routes as they became destinations for streetcar lines; they attracted desirable residential neighborhoods around their borders; and they did, as Olmsted envisioned, protect large stretches of the river corridor from development, with the result that today's Rochesterians can still enjoy virtually unspoiled river scenery. As Olmsted hoped, the parks attracted citizens from all walks of life to enjoy tranquil, naturalistic

⁽¹⁾ Olmsted did not play a role in selecting the site of Highland Park, which had been donated to the city, but did design it, albeit reluctantly as he did not find the site as appealing as the locations along the river.

surroundings; they also became major features in the city's cultural life, providing venues for hugely popular musical events, ethnic festivals, holiday celebrations, and other gatherings.

State and National Context

Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., designed complete park systems (consisting of a network of several large parks and linking parkways) for just four cities in the United States: Buffalo (beginning in 1868), Boston (beginning in 1878), Rochester (beginning in 1888), and Louisville (beginning in 1891). These systems are notable within the large body of Olmsted's work because in these cities, Olmsted was able to work at a grand scale, utilizing a full range of landscape styles and profoundly influencing the future development of each city. Each city also enjoyed a long association with the Olmsted firm as Frederick Law Olmsted and then his successors spent decades working with local park administrators to design, implement, and modify the parks, and to design additional parks when the original systems expanded.

The history and significance of the Rochester Municipal Park System, including the Olmsted parks as well as their predecessors and later parks that expanded the system, are documented in a National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form that was approved by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and National Park Service (NPS) in 2003.

National Register Eligibility

Genesee Valley Park, as a whole, has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a classic example of an Olmsted-designed Pastoral-style park. This eligibility encompasses both the east and west sides of the park, which were designed as a single entity although managed separately since 1966. Genesee Valley Park has experienced alterations that diminish its integrity, yet as a whole, the park still retains enough of its historic character from the Olmsted and Olmsted firm eras that SHPO considers it eligible for the National Register.

Within the context of the park as a whole, the west side has retained most of its historic boundaries, some aspects of its circulation system, and its general purpose as the location for active recreational uses. The two major intrusions on the original Olmsted design for the park, the Barge Canal

and the I-390 Expressway, are much less disruptive on the west side of the river than on the east, where they bisected large meadow areas. Few of its features from either its original Olmsted design or its early evolution as a turn-of-the-century Reform Park survive, however; built features in the park primarily represent its late twentieth-century function as a city recreation and athletic center.

Analysis of Historical Development

The Genesee River: Prehistory to 1952

The Genesee River originated as a pre-glacial waterway that meandered through what is now Southern New York, connecting with the ancient Ontarian River in the present Lake Ontario basin. From Fishers northward, the river generally followed the course of present-day Irondequoit Creek and Irondequoit Bay. When the Laurentian Ice Sheet advanced about one million years ago, it deepened existing north-south rivers and carved new valleys. The final retreat of the ice, about 20,000 years ago, left fundamentally changed topography in its wake; such characteristic features of upstate New York as the Finger Lakes and terminal moraines (such as the Pinnacle Hills) were formed by the advance and retreat of the glaciers. The reshaping of the land altered the route of the Genesee River from its pre-glacial curving path into a more direct south-to-north orientation. For example, an eastward curve in the river near Avon was blocked by glacial deposits, forcing the river to carve a new northward route to Lake Iroquois, predecessor of today's Lake Ontario. As the river encountered alternating hard and soft rock layers in this new valley, it formed Rochester's notable gorge and the series of waterfalls that would prove so significant in the city's history. (2)

In contrast to the deep gorge and dramatic waterfalls from downtown to the north, the river valley in Genesee Valley Park and the surrounding area south of downtown is tranquil and calm. Originally the river did have a noticeable drop in this location, known as the Rapids. This feature was concealed in 1822 when New York State constructed a dam to supply water to the Genesee Feeder, and later obliterated by blasting related to construction of the Barge Canal (see below). (3)

While clearly a boon to the city of Rochester, the Genesee River was also a periodic threat, as spring thaws and heavy

storms caused flooding that affected farmland, Genesee Valley Park, and urban areas on a regular basis. The flood of 1865 was the most catastrophic for downtown Rochester; near-annual floods in the early twentieth century were less damaging to downtown but caused extensive damage farther south, including in Genesee Valley Park. In the 1910s the city implemented a flood control project that included deepening the river bed through downtown; this did serve to reduce the danger, as did work done in conjunction with the Barge Canal project. Construction of the Mount Morris Dam in 1952 finally provided reliable flood prevention for the city of Rochester and surrounding areas.

Native American Activity

The villages of the Seneca, who inhabited western New York when European settlers arrived, were located about thirty miles south and east of what is now the city of Rochester. The area of the present city was a hunting ground, where they camped but did not establish permanent settlements. The presence of the relatively shallow Rapids made the present Brooks Avenue area an attractive point for fording the river. The Seneca also used this point, upstream of the series of waterfalls, to disembark and portage to the Irondequoit Creek, which led them north to Irondequoit Bay and Lake Ontario. Because this was such an important transportation node, several Native American trails converged in this area. Brooks Avenue, Scottsville Road, Genesee Street, and Plymouth Avenue all roughly follow the route of former trails. (4)

Early European Settlement and Castletown

European-American settlement of western New York began in earnest in the early years of the nineteenth century, a small community developed around the Rapids. This settlement was known as Castletown after Isaac Castle, hired by landowner James Wadsworth to run a tavern and store at the Rapids in 1800. Wadsworth's vision was that farmers in the southern Genesee Valley would transport their goods by river to the Rapids, where they would have to unload to bypass the series of waterfalls between the Rapids and the Lower Falls. Castletown was dealt the first of several blows in 1812, when construction of the Main Street Bridge in Rochesterville, the settlement to the north that became downtown Rochester, provided a considerably safer and more reliable river crossing. Rochesterville received another boost, and Castletown another setback, in 1817 when the location of the Erie Canal was set to cross

Rochesterville. A related impediment to Castletown's growth followed in 1822 when a feeder canal was built on the east side of the river to supply water to the Erie Canal; boats were able to take the feeder canal directly to the Erie Canal rather than unloading at the rapids. With its reason for being obliterated, Castletown went into decline, developing a seedy reputation; today the only visible remnant of the hamlet is a pioneer cemetery on Congress Avenue. (5)

Genesee Valley Canal

The tremendous success of the Erie Canal as an economic engine for New York State spurred other canal ventures around the state and nation, one of which came to fruition as the Genesee Valley Canal. This canal was conceived and promoted by its advocates as a critical link from the Southern Tier to the Erie Canal. Canal construction was begun in 1837 and completed in 1854, creating a navigable waterway from Olean to Rochester. Within the present city of Rochester limits, the canal ran roughly parallel to the west side of the Genesee River south of Violetta Street, where it turned north toward its terminus at the junction with the Erie Canal, near the present intersection of West Broad Street and Industrial Street. Unlike the Erie Canal, this waterway failed to live up to expectations, and by the 1850s, suffered competition from the Erie Railroad. The canal was abandoned in 1878, having been profitable during only one year of its existence. (6)

Genesee Valley Railroad

In 1880, the Genesee Valley Canal right-of-way was sold to the Genesee Valley Canal Railroad, which ran from Rochester to Hinsdale, connecting there with the Buffalo, New York and Philadelphia Railroad. This entity was purchased in 1887 by the Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad (later Railway), which was later operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad. The rail lines ran either on the Genesee Valley Canal towpath, or in some cases directly on the canal prism. The line remained in use until it was abandoned, in stages, from 1968-71; tracks were removed by 1977. (7)

The Rochester Park System

In 1888, Rochester nurserymen George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry donated some of their former nursery land to the city and stipulated that it be developed as a public park. After interviewing several candidates, the City of Rochester

Park Commission hired Frederick Law Olmsted, then well known as the designer of Central Park, the Buffalo Park System, and other public parks around the country, to design a comprehensive park system.

Olmsted used the term "the genius of the place" to describe the inherent characteristics such as topography, water features, and natural vegetation, which he then enhanced or reshaped in accordance with his vision for the landscape. In order for park visitors to achieve the goal of thorough immersion in their surroundings, everything within a park, from plantings to circulation systems to bridges and buildings, was to be consistent with the overarching design intent, with nothing appearing out of place.

Olmsted's best-known styles were the "Pastoral," the gently rolling park based on the undulating terrain and mix of pastures and groves he had seen in the English countryside; and the "Picturesque," a more dramatic style suitable to rugged terrain that was meant to seem more untamed. Olmsted believed each style had important psychological benefits for urban dwellers who spent most of their time in artificial, manmade surroundings: the pastoral would soothe the nerves and allow the visitor to relax and unwind from the stresses of city life, while the picturesque would inspire awe and reverence for the power of nature. Designing a complete park system offered Olmsted the rare opportunity to create multiple parks in the same city with each expressing a single style, allowing citizens to experience the varied emotional effects of different types of landscapes.

In designing the Rochester park system, Olmsted's primary goal was to protect the Genesee River as a scenic asset. He was impressed by the contrast between the gently curving river and rolling terrain south of the city and the steep, rocky gorge walls and dramatic waterfalls north of downtown, and saw an ideal opportunity to pursue both pastoral and picturesque design goals in the same system. Olmsted's plan for Rochester consisted of three large parks linked by a network of landscaped parkways. Although the parkway plan was not fully implemented, Olmsted's designs for the three large parks – Seneca (now Seneca and Maplewood), Highland, and Genesee Valley – were largely carried out.



1872 The Genesee Valley Canal, 1872 Beers Survey



c.1905 Spectators watching a ball game in the park, Rochester Municipal Archives.

(2) Charles F. Wray, "Rivers and Lakes of the Rochester Area," in *Getting Acquainted with the Geological Story of the Rochester and Genesee Valley Areas* (Pittsford, New York: Rochester Academy of Science, 1968). Accessed online at <http://www.rasny.org/geostory/toc.htm>, 1 February 2013.
(3) Thomas X. Grasso, "Geology and Industrial History of the Rochester Gorge Part Two," *Rochester History* LV, No. 1 (Winter 1993), pp. 7-8.
(4) Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck, "At the Rapids on the Genesee: Settlement at Castletown," *Rochester History* LIV, No. 3 (Summer 1992).

(5) Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway, "The History of the Genesee Valley Canal," <http://www.fogvg.org/about/history/canal.php>, accessed 31 January 2013.
(6) Ibid., and James Warlick, "The Genesee Valley Canal: An Extension of our Grand Canal," *Rochester History* LVI, No. 4 (Fall 1994): 3-16.
(7) Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway, and Warlick, 16.

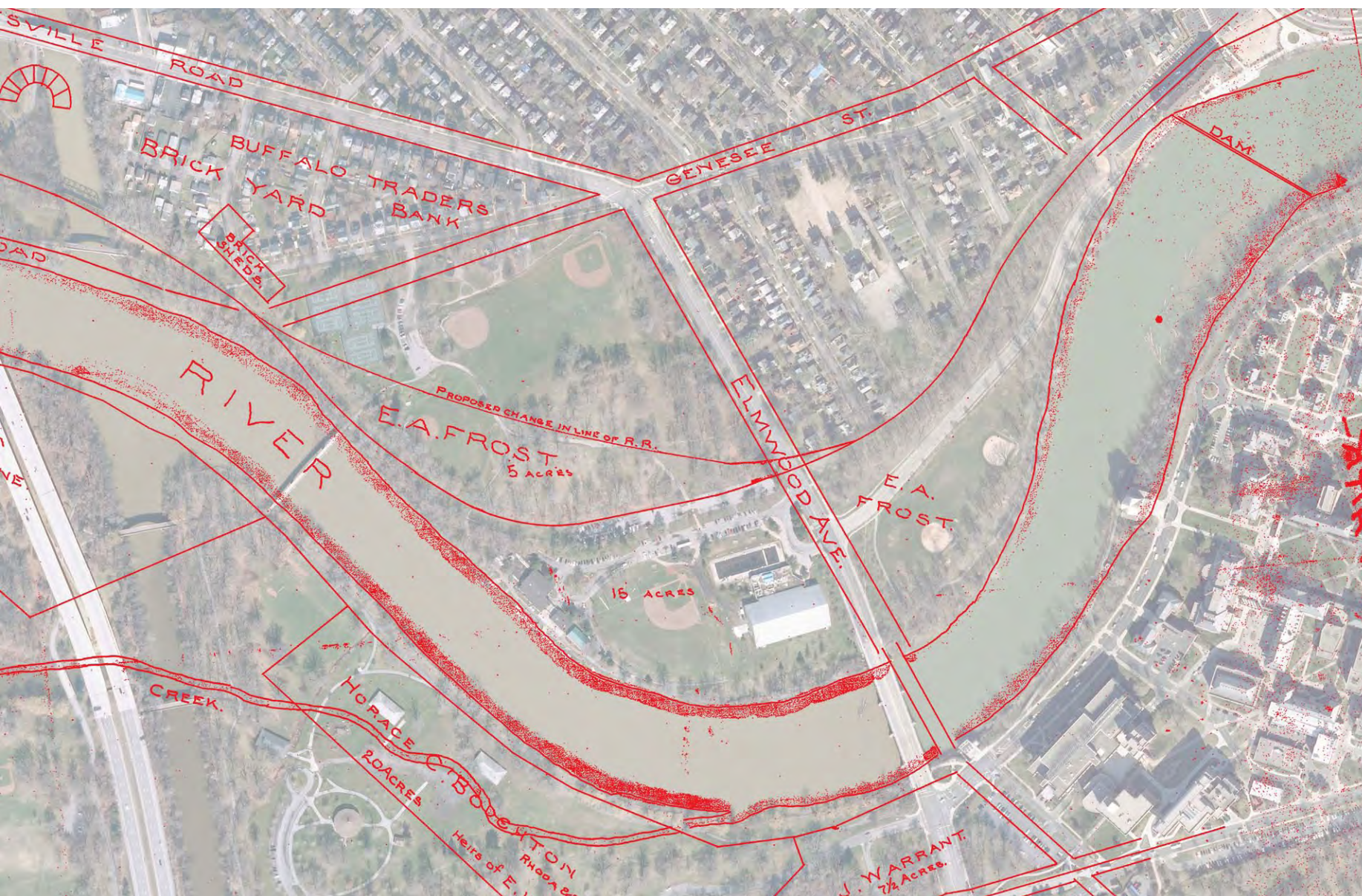
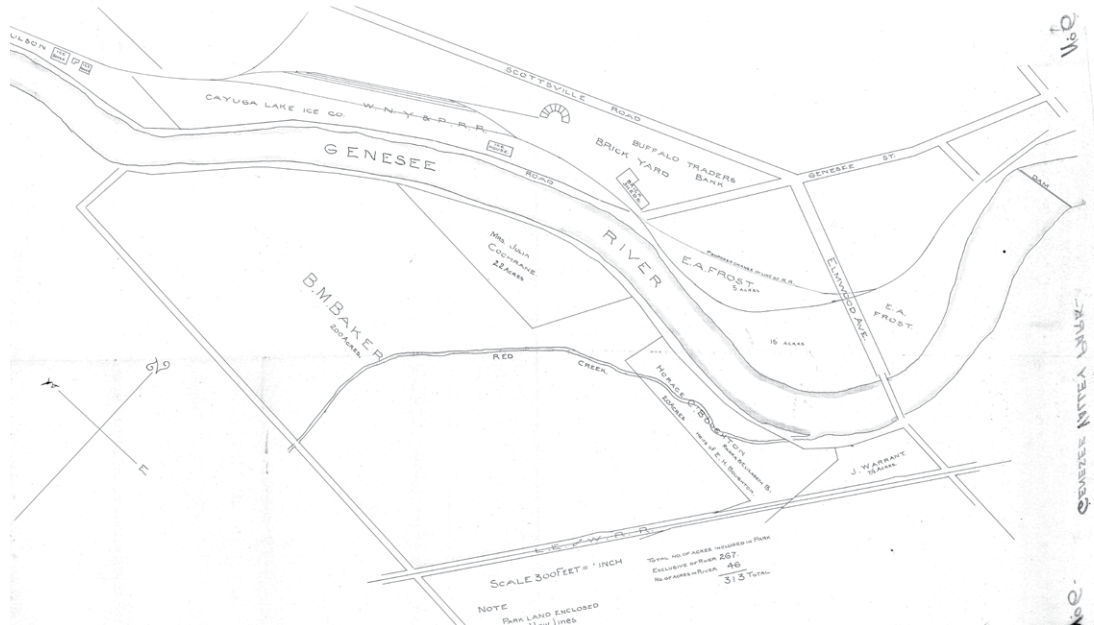
c.1888

Survey of the "South Park" (Genesee Valley Park) site provided to Olmsted once the firm was selected by the newly developed Parks Commission to work on Rochester's parks. In personal correspondence to Dr. Edward Mott Moore (president of the Commission), Olmsted recommends that the City purchase as much land as possible along the river.

Above all, Olmsted's desire was to work with the land on the river at Genesee Valley Park, even at one point suggesting to the Commission that the Highland Park project be given to someone else.

Below: Survey overlaid onto 2010 aerial photo.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site Plan #1102-006



Olmsted's Design for Genesee Valley Park

The design for Genesee Valley Park, conveyed in Olmsted's General Plan for Genesee Valley Park (1890), has been described by Charles Beveridge, Olmsted scholar and editor of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, as "one of the six great examples of pastoral park landscapes that Frederick Law Olmsted designed between 1858 and 1895, a period of time in which he and his partners created over one hundred parks and public recreation grounds, and carried out in all some five hundred commissions." (8) On the east side of the river, Olmsted modified the topography, removed and planted trees (and sometimes moved trees within the park), and created a curving circulation system of roads and paths that took advantage of his signature S-curves to offer shifting and changing views. Two great open areas, designated on Olmsted's General Plan as "Deer Park" and "The Meadow" exemplified Olmsted's pastoral design philosophy.

In Olmsted's design, the west side served two main purposes. First, it protected the west river bank from development, so that views from the large meadows on the east side would not be compromised by incongruous uses across the river. Second, it provided a suitably peripheral location for more active uses. This was in keeping with a key Olmstedian principle with respect to his large Pleasure Ground parks: active uses, such as sports, should be separated from passive uses, such as carriage riding, strolling, and picnicking, and should be relegated to inconspicuous sites at the margins of his parks. At Genesee Valley Park, his design relegated built features related to active uses to the west side of the park, north of the Elmwood Avenue bridge; he designated this as the site for boat houses and ball fields, keeping the area south of Elmwood Avenue open in character so as to protect views across the river.

Olmsted explained his design intent for the west side of the river in a letter to Parks Commissioner Edward Mott Moore:

"The land possessed by the Commission on the west side of the river has been purchased primarily in order to prevent the possibility of buildings being erected upon it, and the plan of the plantations has been made with the object of shutting out of view buildings and constructions that have been, or that may be in the future, established on ground beyond the property. This not alone because such buildings might be ugly, but because it is the intention to give the people of the city in this part as complete an escape as possible consistently with convenience in its use, from artificial objects. This motive applies

more particularly to that part of the park above [south of] the mouth of Red Creek. All the ground held by the Commission north of this district has been regarded as a vestibule, approach and ante-room to it. In this narrower northern district therefore, constructions of convenience for the keeping and use of the park, including club houses, have, as far as practicable, been located, and it has been thought advisable to make a place for the most of them on the north side of the bridge, and where they could be hardly discerned by visitors on the broader and more open part of the park; that is to say, from the park proper, in distinction from its approaches and appendages." (9)

Olmsted's original plan for the park on the west side of the river was initially limited to the area between the river and the railroad tracks, which generally paralleled the river. Olmsted recommended moving the tracks westward in one particularly narrow spot; this never happened. His design for much of the west side of the park consisted simply of a thick border of trees and shrubs to screen the railroad tracks, naturalistic plantings to define the river's edge, and a gently curving carriage drive alongside the river. Where the park broadened south of Elmwood Avenue, the carriage drive split to form a loop, circling an open central area Olmsted indicated as a location for a "ball ground."

North of Elmwood Avenue, in the area Olmsted described as a "vestibule," he designated another ball ground, a pear-shaped "gymnastic ground," and, at the north end of the park where the railroad again approached the river and the parkland narrowed, a series of small boat houses.

Implementation of the Olmsted Plan in the Reform Park era

The early history of Genesee Valley Park coincided with a major shift in the public understanding of the societal purpose of city parks. Whereas Frederick Law Olmsted's "Pleasure Ground" philosophy viewed parks as restorative, naturalistic environments suitable for passive recreation, a new concept known as the "Reform Park" movement envisioned a more proactive social role in which parks would be the setting for programs and activities designed to promote positive values. This new philosophy, a manifestation of the widespread progressive social reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, encouraged the development of supervised play areas, organized classes, athletic tournaments, concerts, and other structured activities aimed in part at improving urban dwellers' lives and moral character. (10) At the same time, members of the growing middle class were increasingly seeking activities to fill their expanding

(8) Charles Beveridge, "The Historical Character and Significance of Genesee Valley Park." Typed manuscript, 25 August 1989. Genesee Valley Park Vertical File, Landmark Society of Western New York.
 (9) Frederick Law Olmsted to Dr. E. M. Moore, 17 August 1891, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress, Reel 56..

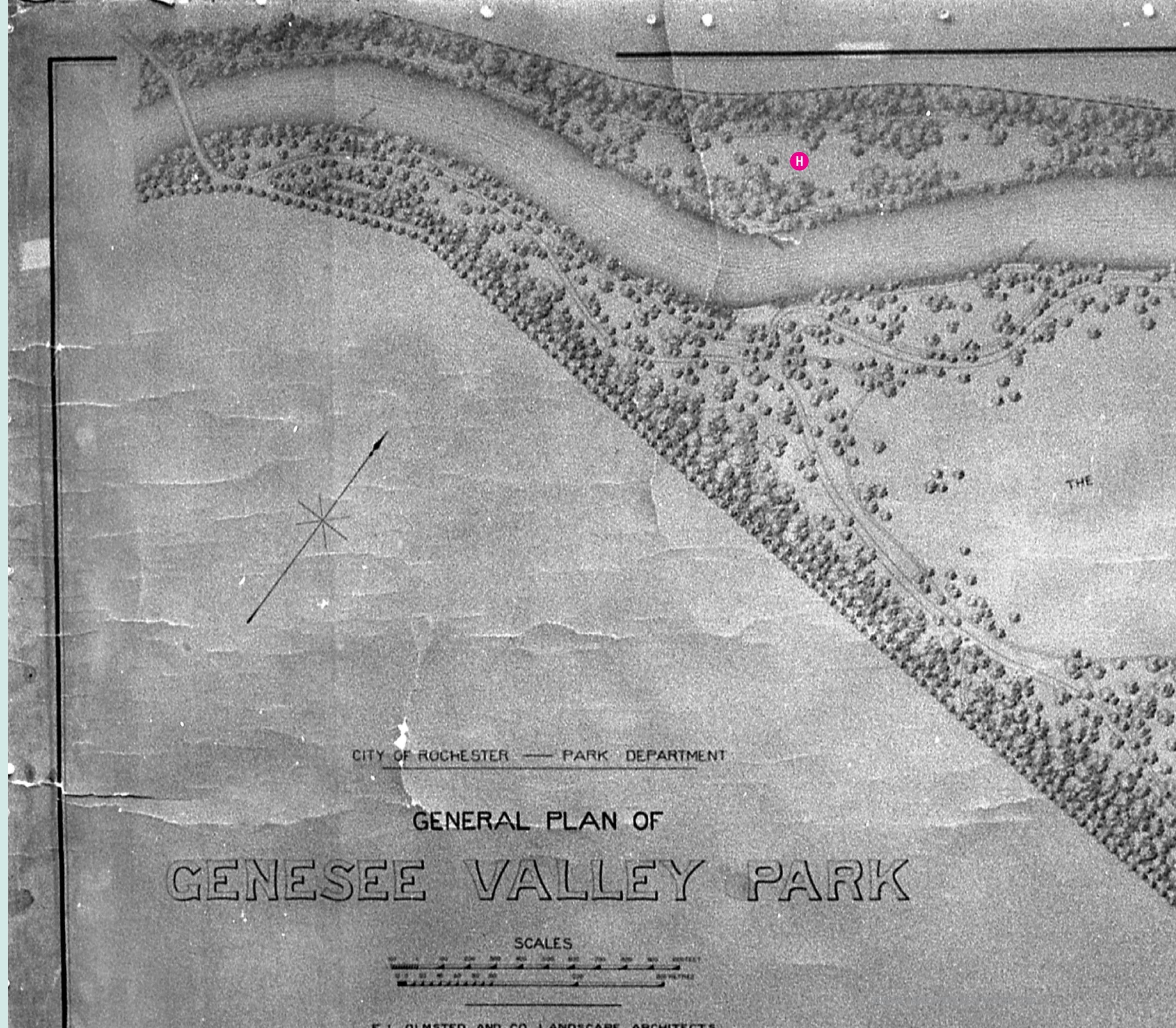
1890 Master Plan

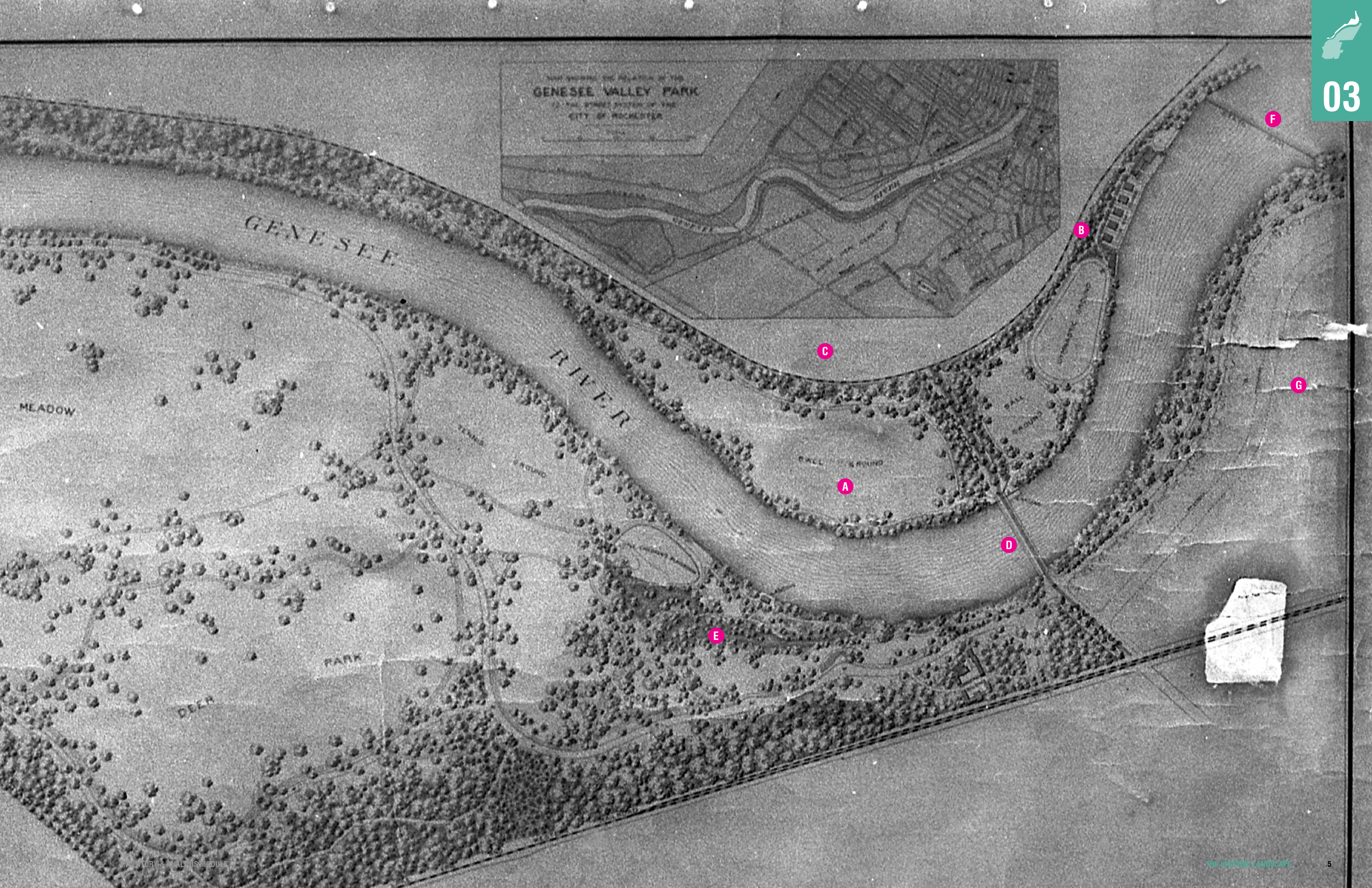
For the western “recreational” component of the planned Genesee Valley Park, the 1890 General Plan included ball fields south of Elmwood Avenue and clustered the high-intensity recreational related infrastructure (such as boat houses, track and field sports areas, and other structures) north of Elmwood Avenue. This arrangement was meant to preserve the wide river vistas of the pastoral river plain - as experienced both east and west across the Genesee River.

The idea is consistent with Olmsted’s design principles, including promoting the soothing pastoral experience, management of views and the subordination of individual park elements to the overall broader design.

- A** “Ball Ground” area designed for active recreation, while limiting visual impact of recreation infrastructure on larger park.
- B** “Gymnastic Ground” and Canoe Clubs were proposed for the northern end of the Park. This was consistent with Olmsted’s desire to cluster buildings and structures closest to existing urban development and away from the broader “naturalistic” experience of Genesee Valley Park.
- C** Park boundaries were constrained by an active rail line at this time (formerly the path of the Genesee Valley Canal). While lands to the west were added to the park in the early 20th century, the rail line was not abandoned and removed until the late 1970s.
- D** Elmwood Avenue bridge, rebuilt three times in this location.
- E** Former location of Red Creek and Olmsted’s associated “naturalistic” riparian area design. Creek was severed and natural outlet to river was removed by Barge Canal construction.
- F** Former “State Dam” constructed in mid-19th century to carry water to the “Feeder Canal” and into the Erie Canal in downtown Rochester.
- G** A high bluff over the river at the time of Olmsted’s plan, this area was the western terminus of the “Pinnacle Range” of glacial deposits. The site of Oak Hill Country Club beginning in 1901, the location was ultimately graded much more flat when the University of Rochester purchased the property for the development of the River Campus in the 1920s.
- H** A wide area of park land on the west side, between the active rail corridor and the river. This land was ultimately alienated and utilized for the construction of a Police and Fire Training facility in the 1950s.

Image courtesy of the National Park Service,
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site





Aerial photograph showing the location of the
GENESSEE VALLEY PARK
IN THE SWISSESS SECTION OF THE
CITY OF ROCHESTER

GENESSEE

RIVER

MEADOW

TENNIS
GROUND

BALL
GROUND

D

E

PARK

DEER

C

A

B

F

G

free time, and many people turned to sports and clubs. One result of these converging trends was the proliferation of buildings, playgrounds, athletic facilities, swimming pools, clubhouses, and other built features both in new parks designed as Reform Parks and in existing Pleasure Ground-style parks.

The shift in park philosophy coincided with the close of Frederick Law Olmsted's career and transition to a new generation. As his health declined, he increasingly relied on younger members of the firm to carry out the work before retiring in 1895, turning the firm over to his son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and stepson, John C. Olmsted. The younger Olmsteds and other members of the firm continued to advise the Rochester Park Commission on the implementation of designs for the original large parks, alterations to the parks, as well as new parks into the 1910s.

The tension between the Pleasure Ground philosophy and emerging Reform Park ideals was evident as soon as the Rochester Park Commission began carrying out Olmsted's plan for Genesee Valley Park. The commissioners quickly experienced difficulty and conflict as they attempted to balance the elegance and simplicity of the General Plan, with its clear goal of excluding development (including recreational development) from the river's edge, with the desire of many Rochesterians to take advantage of new opportunities to experience the river as a recreational asset.

Olmsted's goal of limiting waterfront buildings to the area north of Elmwood Avenue was soon upended as Rochester Park Commission members fielded requests from members of boating and athletic clubs to locate their facilities farther south, in the area Olmsted wanted set aside for ball fields in order to preserve unspoiled river views from the east river bank. By May 1889, even before Olmsted had completed his original design, commissioners were writing to Olmsted to request his assistance with plans for private boat houses. Olmsted repeatedly and eloquently advised the commission to preserve the riverfront south of the bridge free of buildings. Commissioners responded that the clubs insisted on southern sites because the river was better suited for water sports south of the bridge, being "full of rocks at low water" farther north. (11)

Over Olmsted's objections as to the location, but apparently with his input on the design, the first club building, a canoe boathouse, was built "on the west side

of the river near the entrance to Genesee Valley Park" (south of the Elmwood Avenue Bridge). By 1892 this building was moved to a site north of the Elmwood Avenue bridge. After lengthy negotiations with the club and many letters to and from Olmsted, the Park Commission voted to allow the Rochester Athletic Club to build a clubhouse in the park in the spring of 1892. Contrary to Olmsted's recommendations, the commission accepted the club's request to build well south of the bridge on a riverside site the club persistently lobbied for in order to "have a view of the course when there may be a boat race from the boat house, and also the better view offered of the park across the river." (12) Club members worked with the commissioners, who in turn sought advice from Olmsted, on the design of running and bicycle tracks, gymnastic grounds, track and field facilities, and tennis courts. A public boat house, possibly a repurposed farm building, was built on or moved to a site north of the Elmwood Avenue bridge in the early 1890s as well.

In 1893 or 1894, a distinctive octagonal building, providing a refreshment stand and public dressing rooms and known as either the Athletic Building or the Refectory, was built near the river bank south of Elmwood Avenue as a public amenity. (This public building was distinct from the similarly named, but private, Rochester Athletic Club.) Unlike the Rochester Athletic Club building, the subject of several years of correspondence between Olmsted and the Park Commission, the location of this building seems to have caused little controversy, perhaps because by this time the athletic track and associated facilities were firmly in place south of Elmwood Avenue, and the logic of locating athletic buildings near the track was clear. The building functioned year-round, operating as an ice skating shelter in winter. It was moved to a new location, still just south of Elmwood Avenue but farther west, in 1915, and was demolished in the early 1930s after a new refectory building was constructed.

Also in 1893, the Rochester Railway Company began operating electric railway service from downtown to the park, on tracks the company laid parallel to the Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad line terminating at the Elmwood Avenue bridge. The advent of streetcar service to the park negated one of the arguments of skeptics who had claimed that both Genesee Valley Park and Seneca Park were impractically far from the city and proved an immediate success.

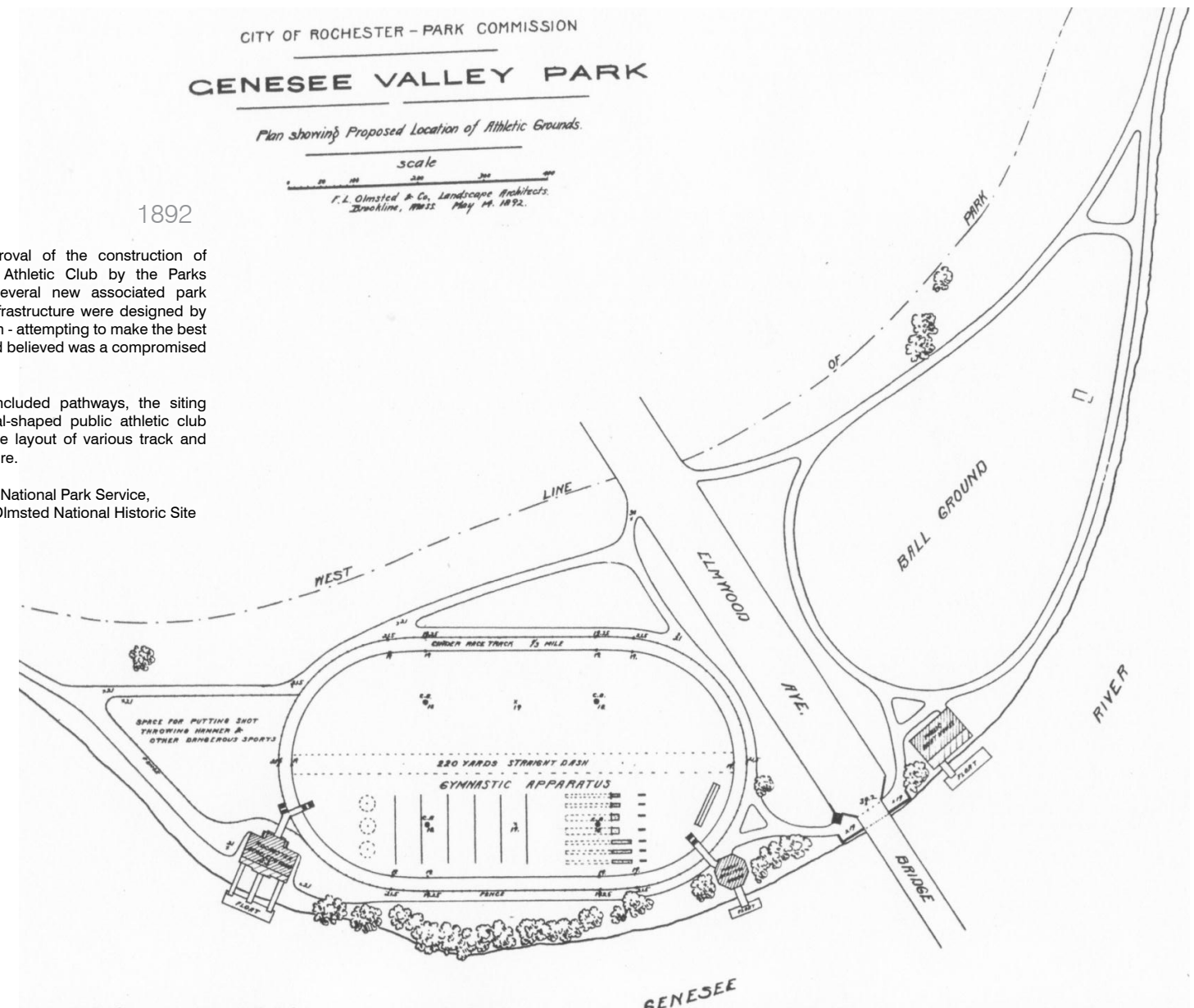


1892

The "Rochester Athletic Club" building, shown in this later photo from the 1920s, was a privately owned clubhouse constructed on public parkland for the exclusive use of members. The Rochester Athletic Club negotiated with the Parks Commission and ultimately chose this site along the river (south of Elmwood Avenue) for its enhanced views of the park land on the eastern side of the river.

The placement of the building was contrary to Olmsted's master plan and he repeatedly advised the Parks Commission on the value of preserving the park experience as free from "artificial objects" as possible. Ultimately, the building was approved, setting a precedent for infrastructure along the river bank south of Elmwood Avenue.

Photo courtesy Rochester Public Library, Local History Division



1892

Upon the approval of the construction of the Rochester Athletic Club by the Parks Commission, several new associated park features and infrastructure were designed by the Olmsted firm - attempting to make the best of what Olmsted believed was a compromised site.

The features included pathways, the siting of an octagonal-shaped public athletic club building and the layout of various track and field infrastructure.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

(10) Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (MIT Press, 1989): 59-99.
 (11) E.M. Moore to F.L. Olmsted, 3 July 1890, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Microfilm Reel 56.



1915

View of Public Athletic Club Building (Octagon building) at its second location near electric trolley line waiting room. The building's original location was along the river, just south of the Elmwood Avenue bridge (at the northeast corner of the track oval).

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

1933

Looking southwest at the Durand Boat House from the Elmwood Avenue bridge.

1905 Rochester Common Council report.



Changes to the Park in the Early Reform Park Era

Construction of the first few buildings in the park opened the door for additional private and public recreational facilities. New features built in the park between 1895 and about 1905 included an addition to the existing refectory, containing locker rooms and restrooms for women; a building for the Y.M.C.A.; a larger public boat house often called the "Durand Boat Livery" (about 200 feet south of the Elmwood Avenue bridge); additional private boat houses north of the bridge; and a swimming pool near the river south of the Athletic Club.

The largest addition to the west side of the park occurred in 1896 when the city purchased the "Frost property," bounded by the Genesee Valley Canal/railroad bed, Elmwood Avenue, and Genesee Street. This property, separated from the rest of the park by the railroad tracks, was initially used as a municipal nursery and subsequently developed with ball fields.

Barge Canal construction and park reconfiguration 1915-1920

In 1903, New York State began planning an enlargement and rerouting of the Erie Canal to accommodate larger boats, setting the stage for what would be the most significant disruption of the original plan for Genesee Valley Park. The original Erie Canal bed, which ran through downtown Rochester and crossed the Genesee River on a stone aqueduct, was too narrow and the turns too sharp to accommodate the large barges then required for commercial shipping. By 1904, the approximate new route was known; John C. Olmsted, in his report on a visit to Rochester in September of that year, noted, "I was horrified to learn that the new Erie (barge) canal is to run across this park." (13) During a visit in 1908, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. toured the future canal site to provide his "expert testimony as to [the] damage it will do." He proposed to "make detailed plans showing what is the best that can be made of a bad job if [the] canal goes through" and advised the park superintendent, Calvin Laney, and city solicitor to request reimbursement for the cost of doing the desired repair work plus compensation for "damage to park due to curtailment and cutting in two." (14)

The subjects of, first, attempting to persuade state officials to change the route to avoid bisecting the park, and second, obtaining appropriate compensation, were debated

extensively among city officials and park commissioners, who continued to request and receive guidance from the Olmsted firm throughout the process. (15)

Representatives of the Park Commission as well as City and County government strenuously objected to the state's plans to re-route the canal through the park, arguing, as one newspaper article put it, that "to dig the barge canal through the middle of the park will be to practically ruin it forever and drive people away from it for at least ten years." (16) The debate went on for several years, with citizens and officials alike urging an alternate route that would avoid the park. Ultimately their pleas were unsuccessful and the route through the park, while adjusted to avoid notable trees, was confirmed.

The Olmsted firm provided numerous plans for mitigating the damage to the park caused both by the waterway itself and the accompanying rise in river level required to bring the level of the river to the level of the canal. (17) Most of these dealt with the east side of the park, where the broad meadow areas and meandering park drives that formed the core of the original pastoral design were severed. On the west side, the canal was located south of the widest part of the park, in a narrow wooded area traversed by paths.

To minimize the disruption of the park circulation system, the Olmsted firm designed a series of three graceful concrete bridges, similar to the bow bridges in Central Park, spanning the canal and connecting to a reconfigured network of drives and trails. One of the three is west of the river and remains a significant structure linking the north and south sections of Genesee Valley Park West. These were among the Olmsted firm's last contributions to the Rochester park system: the firm's involvement ended in 1915 when the Park Commission was abolished and a new Department of Parks, an agency of city government, was established. Thereafter, park design and development work was primarily handled internally by city employees rather than by outside firms. Fortunately, the new department included a number of employees who had worked extensively with the Olmsted firm and had a deep understanding of the firm's principles, including Alexander B. Lamberton, second president of the Park Commission, who became Commissioner of Parks, as well as William S. Riley, Calvin C. Laney, John Dunbar, Bernard Slavin, and his brother Patrick Slavin.

Although the canal did not directly damage the west side of

1905
View looking southwest of the Park's first pool and bathhouse. Rail line in background and Genesee River to the left(out of frame)



1905 Rochester Common Council report.



1913

View of track and field facilities, looking northeast. Durand Boat House and Elmwood Avenue bridge (obstructed) in background.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

1912

Ice skaters exit the public athletic building (the octagon) in its original location along the river at the foot of the Elmwood bridge.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



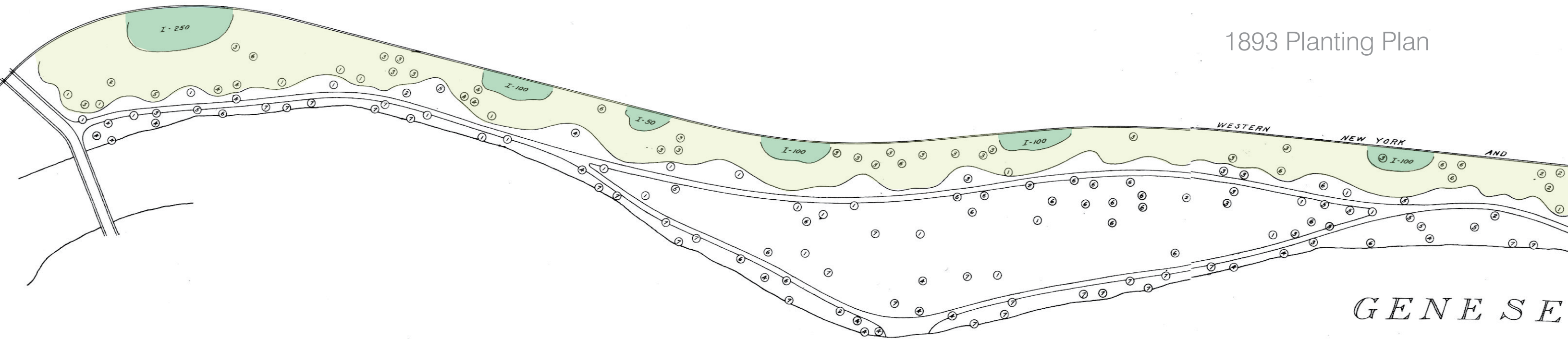
(12) Arthur R. Selden to Olmsted & Co., 19 February 1892; and Selden to Olmsted & Co., 29 April 1892, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress, Reel No. 56.

(13) J.C. Olmsted, "Rochester Parks," 29 September 1904, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Reel 56.

(14) F.L. Olmsted, Jr. Report on Visit to Park, 16 July 1908, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Reel 56.

(15) The city ultimately filed claims against New York State totaling \$79,825, about one-tenth of the amount Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., recommended; this seems to be because the state ended up doing the work directly rather than paying the city to have it done. Details of this process can be found in various papers in the Records of the Olmsted Associates, Reel 56; the process can also be traced through numerous newspaper articles, particularly "Claim filed by city in Albany," Democrat and Chronicle, 12 December 1911; and "To pass on millions in Monroe claims," Democrat and Chronicle, 8 May 1917.

1893 Planting Plan



GENESEE

TREE PLANTING LIST

1. *Ulmus Americana* American Elm.
2. *Acer rubrum* Red Maple.
3. *Acer saccharinum* Sugar Maple.
4. *Betula nigra* Red Birch.
5. *Betula lenta* Sweet Birch.
6. *Fagus ferruginea* American Beech.
7. *Quercus palustris* Pin Oak.

BORDER PLANTATION - BEDS No. 1.

1610 large trees planted 8 ft. apart. The plants are to be obtained by thinning from the already existing park plantations.

BORDER PLANTATION - BED No. 2.

55,000 plants to be planted 4 ft. apart over all the area.

- 570 *Fagus sylvatica*
- 380 *- ferruginea*
- 3800 *Quercus* in variety
- 190 *Betula papyracea*
- 950 *Gleditsia triacanthos*
- 190 *Liquidambar styraciflua*
- 1900 *Tilia Americana*
- 950 *Magnolia acuminata*
- 950 *Liriodendron tulipifera*
- 7600 *Acer glabrum*
- 5700 *Nanus alba*
- 1900 *Acer saccharinum*
- 380 *Sassafras officinale*
- 5700 *Populus monilifera*
- 190 *Carya alba*
- 11300 *Fraxinus viridis*
- 950 *Cerasus serotina*
- 1900 *Fraxinus Americana*
- 1900 *Catalpa speciosa*
- 5700 *Acer dasycarpum*
- 1900 *- rubrum*

1893 PLANT LISTS

Original Plants list for the 1893 planting plan.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

OLMSTED, OLMSTED & ELIOT.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS.
BROOKLINE, MASS.

Planting and order list for *Genesee Valley*

Date, Oct-11th 93

No. on Plan.	NAME OF PLANT.	Quantity Ordered.	Quantity Received.	Size & Co Order
	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	570		12-1
	<i>Fagus ferruginea</i>	380		2-
	<i>Quercus in var</i>	3800		1-3
	<i>Betula papyracea</i>	200		3-
	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>	950		15-
	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	190		2-
	<i>Tilia Americana</i>	1900		15-
	<i>Magnolia acuminata</i>	950		12-
	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	950		15-
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	7600		2
	<i>Nanus alba tartarica</i>	5700		2-
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	1900		2-
	<i>Sassafras officinale</i>	380		2-
	<i>Populus monilifera</i>	5700		2-
	<i>Carya alba</i>	190		4-
	<i>Fraxinus viridis</i>	11300		2-
	<i>Cerasus serotina</i>	950		2-

ANNOTATED 1893 PLANTING PLAN

Planting plan for the west bank of the river (currently GVPW) below Elmwood Avenue, prepared in 1893 by Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot.

The plan was developed at a time when the western edge of Genesee Valley Park was at the former Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad line. Though several sketches showing possible rail road relocation routes were prepared by the Olmsted firm, none came to fruition - and the rail line remained in place until the 1970s. The Parks Commission did acquire the parcel (known as the Frost Property) east of the rail line, but at the park's founding, this rail line was a visual and auditory nuisance to the experience of the park. The planting plan was developed in order to screen the nuisance as much as possible, as quickly as possible, and with cost-efficiency.

Olmsted designed the tiered planting scheme with wooded succession in mind, meant to fill in over time. The ultimate goal appears to have not only been creating the pastoral framing of views with large shade trees along the river and at edges of meadows and play fields, but the establishment of a heavy forested edge along the entire western park boundary.

The forested edge was to serve as a backdrop and view terminus for the broader park as a whole, designed to screen the railroad and other "man-made" infrastructure from view - especially views from the eastern side of the river.

The plan included three tiers of planting:

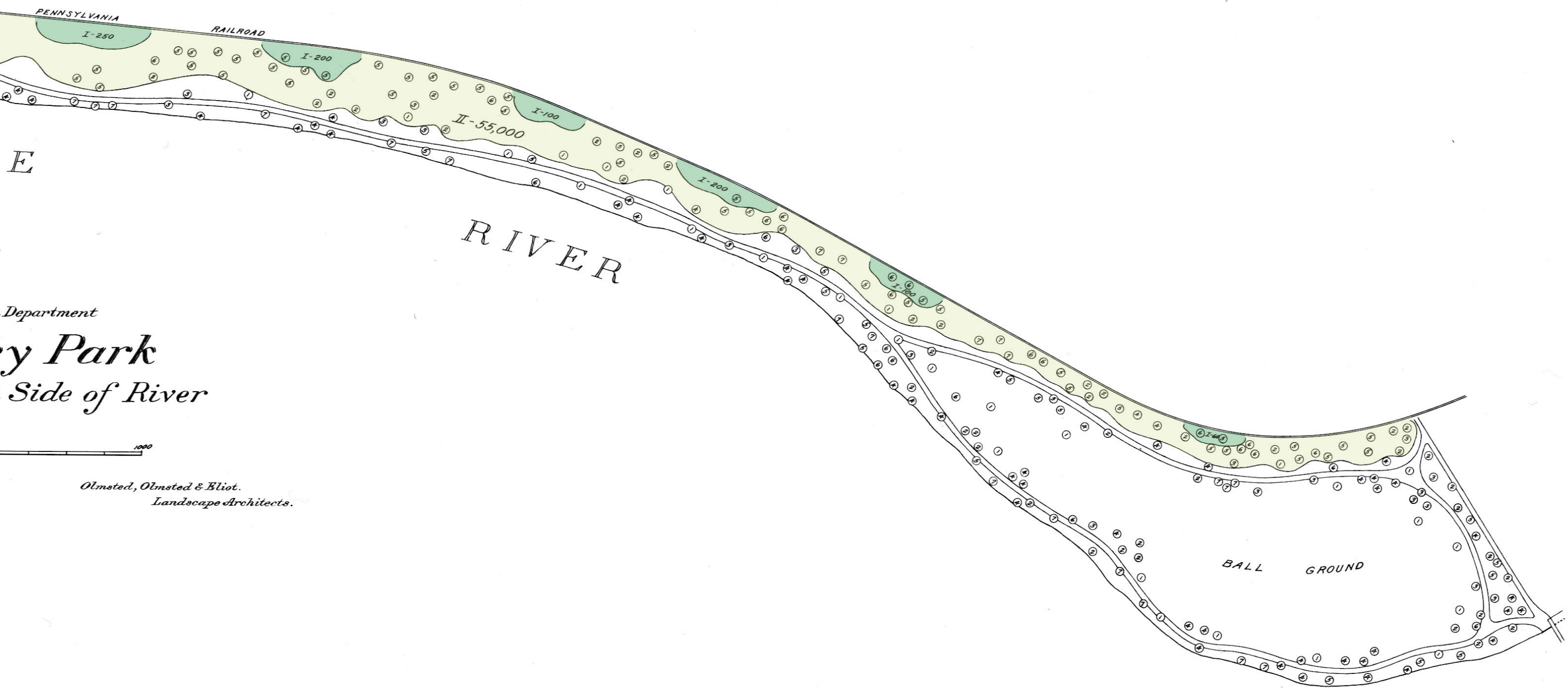
- Beds I** "Border Plantation - Beds No. 1": Immediate rail road screening along the western boundary using relatively large transplanted trees, specified to be thinned from existing vegetation within the recently purchased GVP park lands. These areas were specified as very dense (8 feet apart) and relatively large planted trees in multiple clusters, repeating along the railroad edge.
- Bed II** "Border Plantation - Bed No. 2": Extremely dense, but very young, tree plantings in a continuous mass along the entire western park boundary. Included 65,000 small trees, many of which were abundant colonizers, such as Box Elder and Catalpa. Planted 4 feet apart.
- Tree Planting List**: Highly selected (limited to 7 different species) plantings of relatively large shade and specimen trees to frame views, line pathways, define meadow spaces and provide shade for park users. The larger sized trees also extended into the Bed II area, likely an effort to relatively cheaply and quickly gain visual park edge definition while the young saplings of Bed II grew in over time to establish the thick wooded edge.

Plan courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

City of Rochester — Park
Genesee Valley
Planting Plan for North



No 132
Oct 12-93



Department
y Park
Side of River

Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot.
Landscape Architects.



1908

View of "canoe clubs" extending northward along the west bank of the Genesee River. The left-most building sat adjacent to the Elmwood Avenue Bridge.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., Detroit Publishing Company Collection



1912

Looking northeast across a frozen and purposefully-flooded track and field oval - the Park's first ice skating rink. Common council records indicate that water service was installed specifically to "flood" the area for winter skating.

The Elmwood Avenue bridge is visible in the background, behind the Durand Boat House (right) and the octagon-shaped public Athletic Club. Canoe clubs on the north side of Elmwood are visible on the left.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1913

Henry Jarratte of General Wadsworth School No. 12 competes (and wins) in the high-jump event of the Grammar School track meet, held at Genesee Valley Park.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1913

Canoe club buildings along the west bank of the Genesee River, north of Elmwood Avenue, are flooded and damaged from rising river water levels. Flooding was common and destructive along the Genesee River until the construction of the Mt. Morris dam beginning in 1948. Water elevations are now highly-regulated but still experience seasonal and storm-related variation.

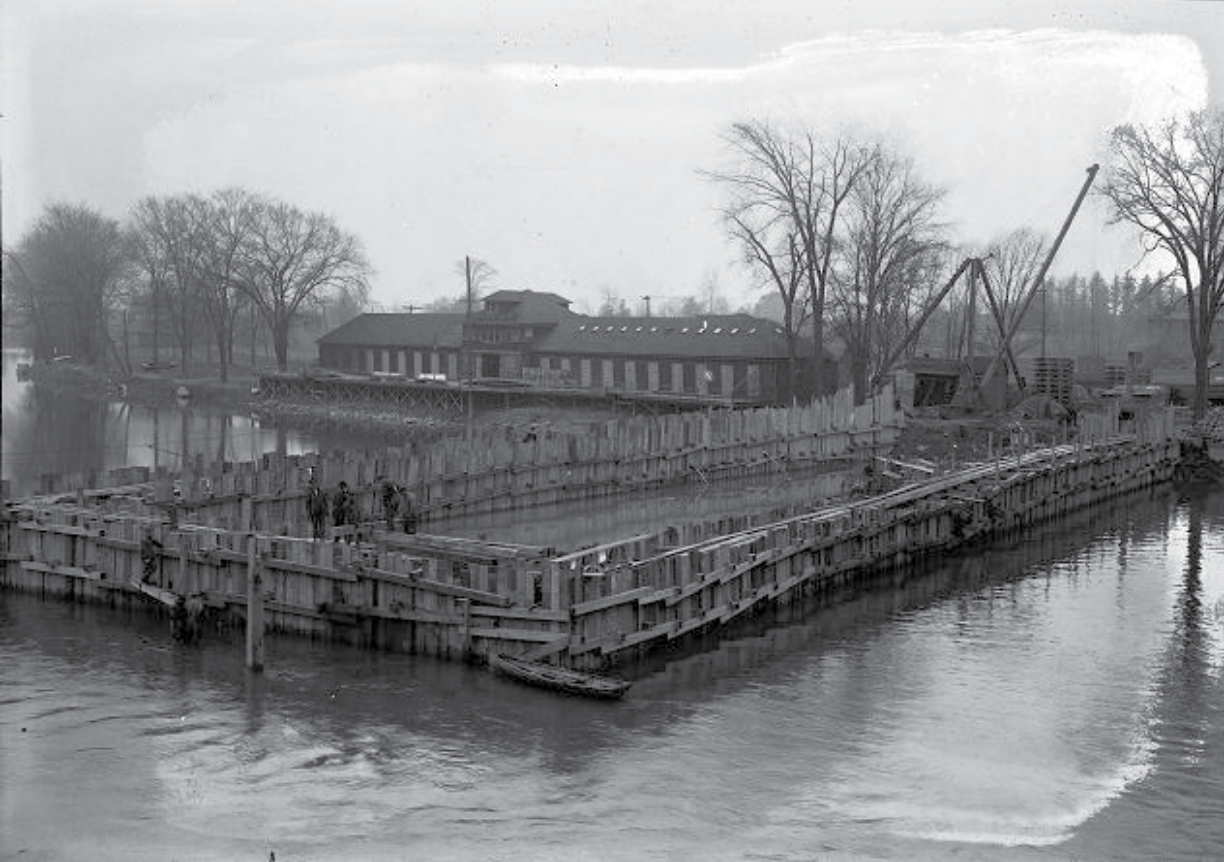
Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1913

Damage caused to the Durand Boat House during sever river flooding. The Durand Boat house (and other buildings along the river edge) were repeatedly damaged by flood waters.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1912

This April 1912 plan by the Olmsted Brothers shows park modifications being designed to alleviate the significant impact of the park being wholly severed by the forthcoming Barge Canal construction.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



1917

View looking southwest from pre-existing Elmwood Avenue bridge (1st bridge, constructed 1888) of a cofferdam setup within the waters of the river during the construction of the 2nd Elmwood Avenue bridge. The 2nd bridge was located parallel to the first, approximately 100 feet south. The Durand Boat House is seen in along the river bank.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1920

View of the pedestrian bridge over the Barge Canal on the west side of the River. Designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm in the preceding decade during their efforts to mitigate park impacts from canal construction, the bridges are one of the last municipal Olmsted projects undertaken by the City before severing ties with the firm in 1915.

There are four Olmsted Brothers-designed bridges in the larger Genesee Valley Park. The single bridge on the west side of the river represents one of the few surviving park features that remain from the Park's historic period of significance.

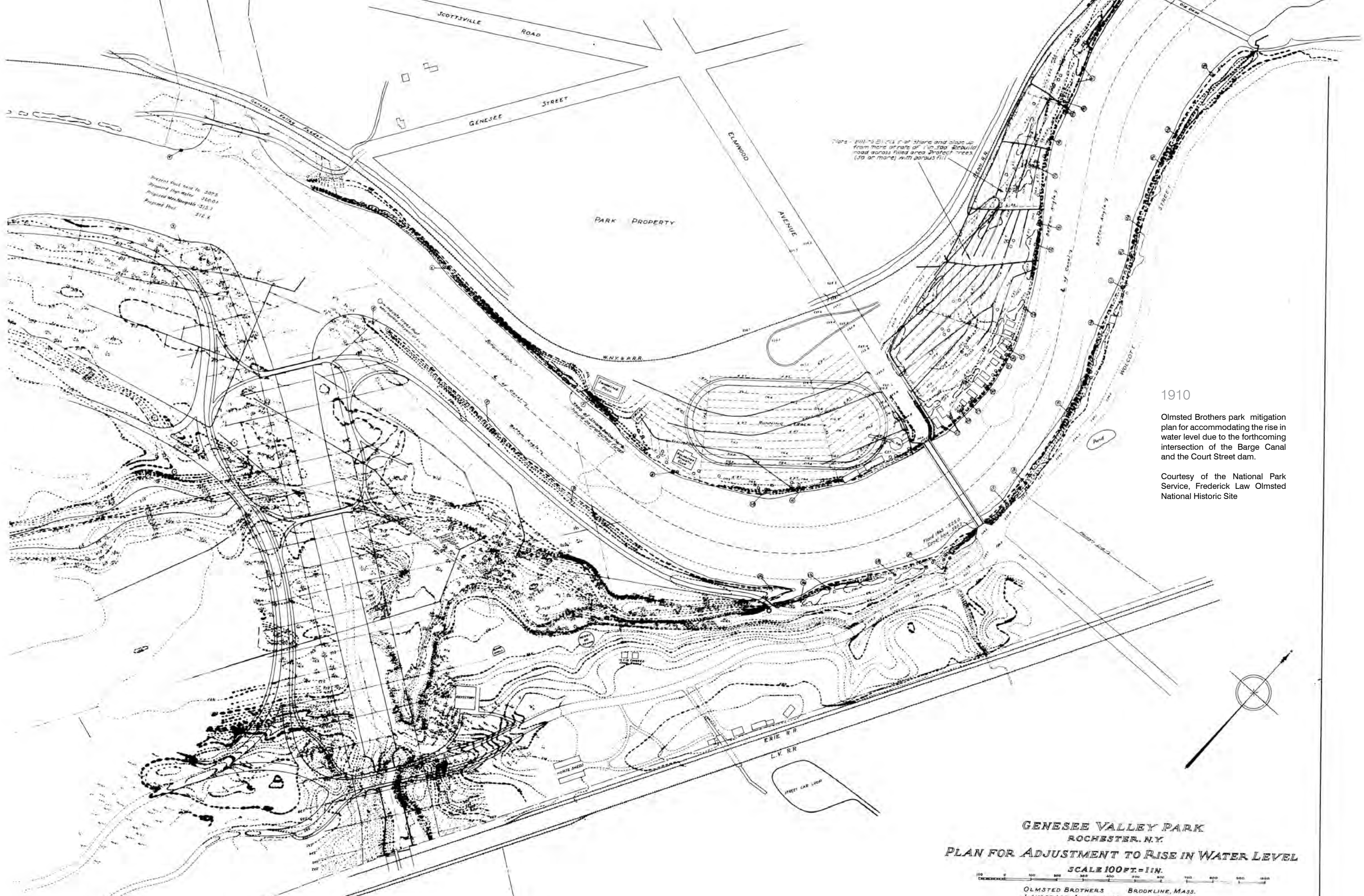
Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1918

Aerial photo from 1918 showing Barge Canal construction (left). The photo also coincides with the construction of the 2nd Elmwood Avenue bridge over the Genesee (left in photo), which was constructed just south of the 1st bridge.

Rochester Municipal Archives



1910

Olmsted Brothers park mitigation plan for accommodating the rise in water level due to the forthcoming intersection of the Barge Canal and the Court Street dam.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

**GENESEE VALLEY PARK
ROCHESTER, N.Y.
PLAN FOR ADJUSTMENT TO RISE IN WATER LEVEL**

SCALE 100 FT. = 1 IN.

OLMSTED BROTHERS BROOKLINE, MASS.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
GENESEE VALLEY PARK WEST MASTER PLAN
FILE No 1102
PLAN No 151



1917

View of the Durand Boat House at the Genesee
River edge, looking south from Elmwood Avenue
bridge

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs
Division Washington, D.C., Detroit Publishing
Company Collection

Genesee Valley Park as severely as the east, construction of the waterway was one of several factors that halted park development and use for several years. As a newspaper article heralding the end of canal construction noted,

From about 1917 up to the summer of 1921 there was very little boating on the river and very little activity on the part of the Park Department, on account of the extremely low water in the river, war conditions and the operations that were being carried on by the canal contractors. (18)

The Barge Canal was fully opened to traffic in May 1918, when the final section of earth was removed at the junction of the canal and Genesee River in Genesee Valley Park. For several years thereafter, work continued to remediate the damage done to the park, as well as to complete related projects such as creation of the Barge Canal Terminal on the Genesee River just south of downtown Rochester.

Genesee Valley Park in the 1920s

The 1920s were a heyday for Rochester's park system. By this time the parks were well developed, easily accessible by public transportation, and hosted a multitude of celebrations and activities year-round. Photographs taken in the park system in the 1920s show events like May Day celebrations in Seneca Park, the Lilac Festival in Highland Park, water carnivals in Genesee Valley Park, and band concerts in all the parks drawing thousands of visitors on a regular basis. New or redesigned smaller neighborhood parks throughout the city exemplified the Reform Park ideal of ensuring access to park facilities and park programming in all sectors of the city. Olmsted, Sr.'s vision of a park system thoroughly woven into Rochester's physical and cultural fabric truly came to fruition at this time.

In Genesee Valley Park, the years of disruption caused by canal construction came to a close in 1921. When water sports could resume in 1922, boating enthusiasts discovered that the approximately five-foot increase in river depth at Genesee Valley Park made boating conditions better than before. (19)

Heralding the return to river recreation after canal construction, in 1922 the Genesee Aquatic Club, formerly the Genesee Power Boat Association, built a new headquarters on the west river bank, between the Rochester Athletic Association and the YMCA building. This building survived at least until the 1930s; the organization was dissolved in 1952. (20)

(16) "Plan Vigorous Kick on Canal," Democrat and Chronicle, 15 September 1908.
 (17) The Court Street Dam in downtown Rochester was constructed as part of the Barge Canal project in order to raise the river level at the crossing.
 (18) "Planning busy aquatic season on upper river," Democrat & Chronicle, 2 April 1922.
 (19) Ibid

As the park with the most extensive public and private recreational facilities, Genesee Valley Park hosted numerous athletic and social events throughout the 1920s, such as regattas, track meets, fraternal organization picnics, and water carnivals. Despite the heavy use, this was a period of comparative stability in the physical character of the park, with little new construction or demolition.

Recreation Park Movement, 1930-65

In the 1930s, park planning nationwide began to be influenced by a new philosophy. Shifting away from the idealistic Reform Park movement aimed at social reform, the new Recreation Park approach placed greater emphasis on the efficient provision of facilities and services to meet increasing demand for leisure activities. This philosophy in part was a product of necessity, in that governments were forced to adopt austerity budgets in the Depression years of the 1930s and could not afford to provide the staff-intensive programming expected in the Reform era. Park historian Galen Cranz describes the entire period from 1930-65 as the Recreation Park era; the Multiple Property Documentation Form for the Municipal Park System of Rochester, New York defines two distinct periods, first the Depression Era in 1930-41, and second, World War II and After, 1941 until the end of the twentieth century.

Depression Era

During the Great Depression, a number of state and federal work-relief programs funded projects to build or repair facilities in national, state, and local parks. These project tended to display common characteristics, including elaborate engineering, indigenous materials, and a rustic, Arts and Crafts-inspired aesthetic. Landscape architects at the national level developed a characteristic rustic style often seen in national and state parks, where low fieldstone walls, log cabin-like architecture, and simple wood picnic and restroom shelters were common. Projects were typically designed to integrate built features into the landscape so that architecture would be unobtrusive. The same principles often guided Depression-era park projects at the local level as well.

The 1930s saw a flurry of construction activity in Genesee Valley Park West, as work-relief projects added new features and replaced some of the original park buildings.



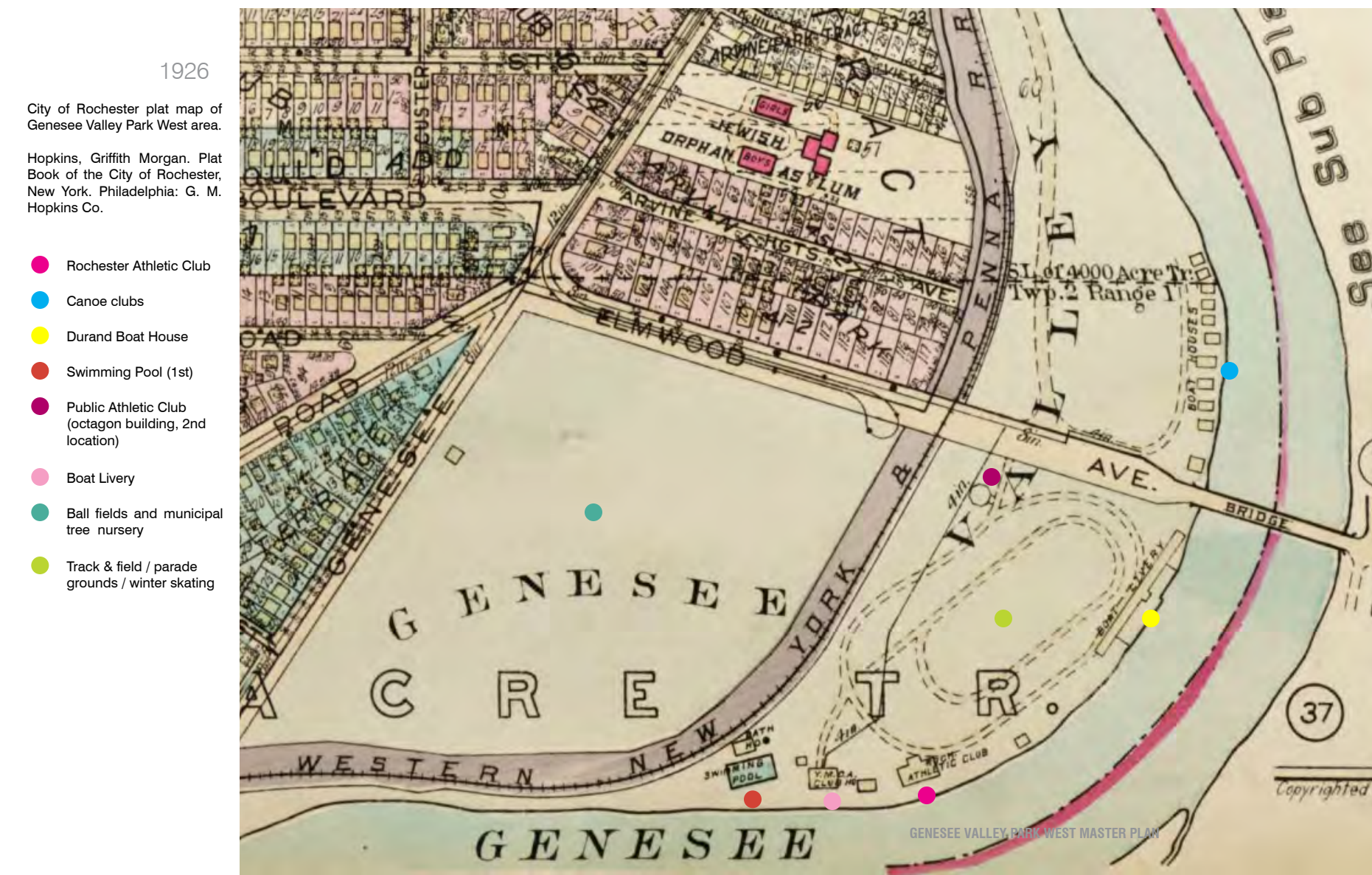
1921 Work is complete on efforts to remediate the damage done to the park landscape by the Barge Canal. View of Olmsted Brothers-designed pedestrian bridges across the canal.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



c.1925 View from east bank of river toward west bank, with pedestrian bridge in background and Rochester Athletic Club building at right.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



1926 City of Rochester plat map of Genesee Valley Park West area.

Hopkins, Griffith Morgan. Plat Book of the City of Rochester, New York. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Co.

- Rochester Athletic Club
- Canoe clubs
- Durand Boat House
- Swimming Pool (1st)
- Public Athletic Club (octagon building, 2nd location)
- Boat Livery
- Ball fields and municipal tree nursery
- Track & field / parade grounds / winter skating



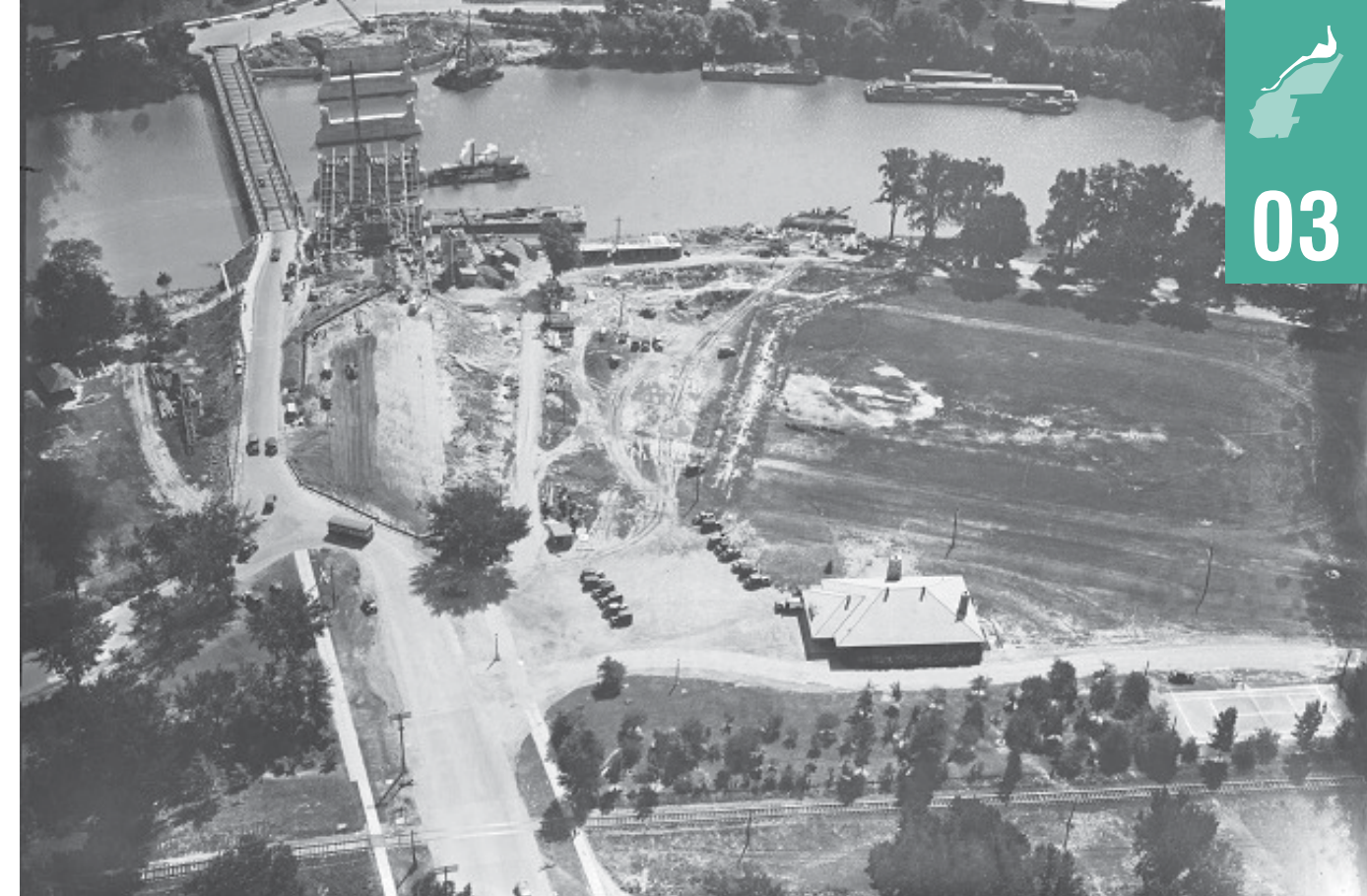
c.1935 Refectory Building / Concessions Stand

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



c.1935 Boat Livery constructed to replace the Durand Boat House.

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



1936 The third (and current) version of the Elmwood Avenue bridge under construction

Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

Construction complete on Elmwood Avenue bridge and landscape restored. Refectory in lower left. Relatively new buildings of the University of Rochester River Campus in upper left.

Rochester Municipal Archives

1935 City of Rochester plat map of Genesee Valley Park West area overlaid onto 2010 aerial photo. The 1935 plat shows changes made as a result of the construction of the (3rd) Elmwood Avenue bridge.

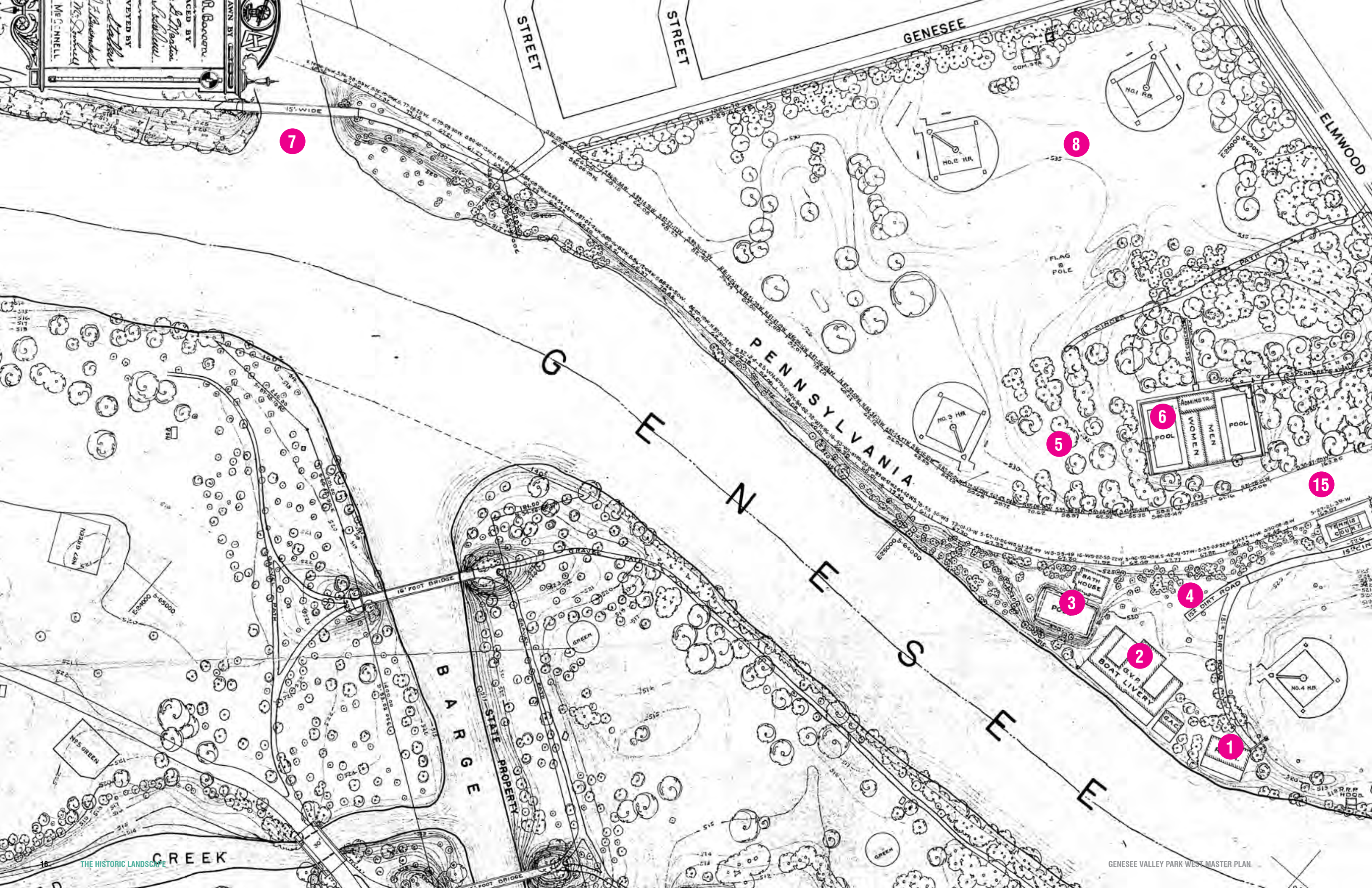
Hopkins, Griffith Morgan. Plat Book of the City of Rochester, New York. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Co.

- Rochester Athletic Club
- Canoe clubs
- New Swimming Pool and Bath House
- New Refectory Building
- New Boat Livery
- Ball Fields and municipal tree nursery
- New Ball Fields



c.1938





7

8

5

6

15

3

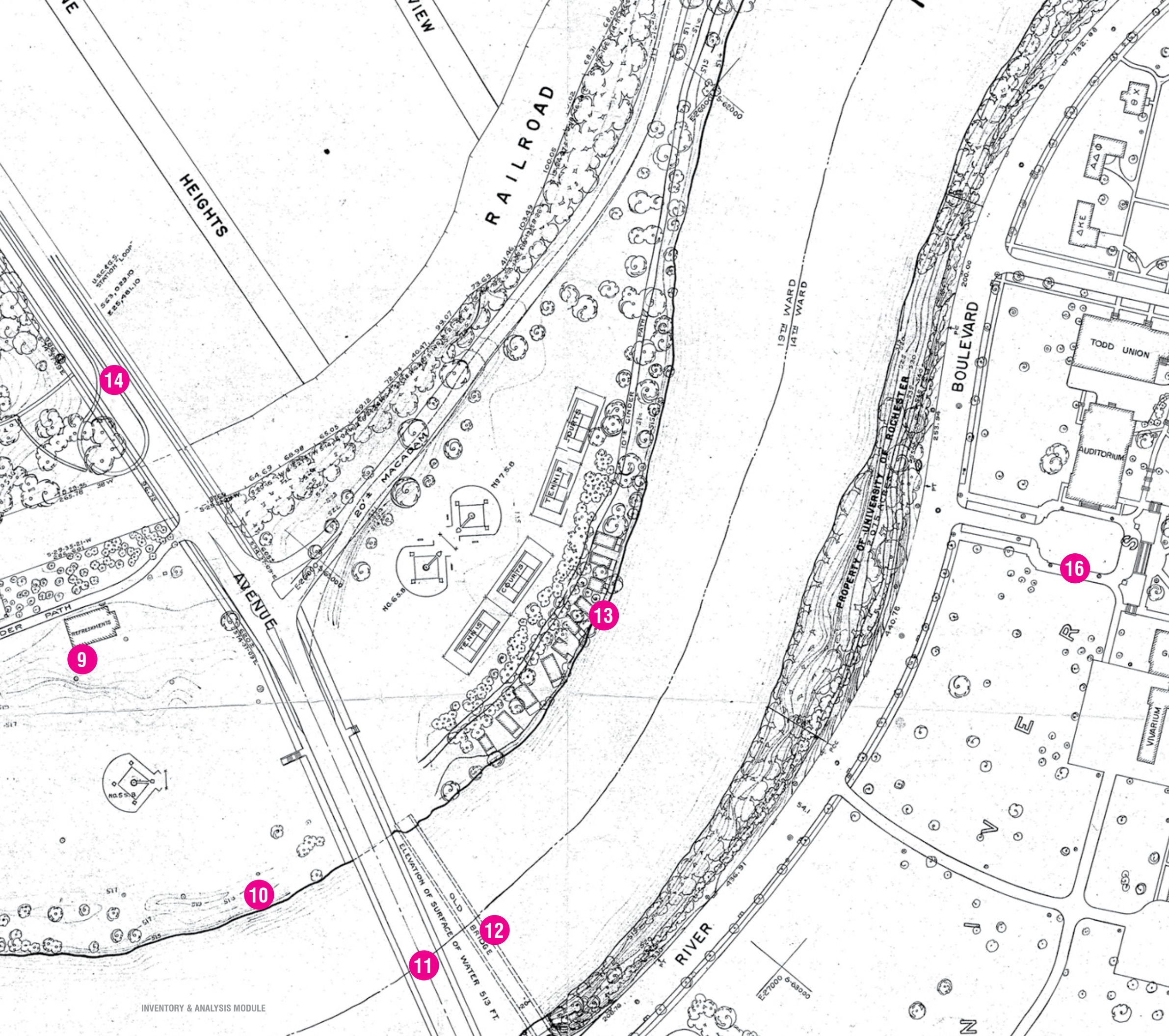
4

2

1

1935 Park Survey

In 1935 the City of Rochester performed a site survey of Genesee Valley Park and the adjacent lands. The resulting map reflects existing conditions during the period leading up to the construction of the new Elmwood Avenue bridge.



- 1** Rochester Athletic Club
- 2** Boat Livery (replaced Durand Boat House which was removed for bridge construction)
- 3** Original bathhouse and pool
- 4** Remnants of Olmsted's 1893 planting plan , including screening of active railroad
- 5** Remnants of "nursery" row tree plantings on Frost parcel, which was used for a municipal tree nursery
- 6** 1930's bath house and Pool(s), includes separate pools for women and men
- 7** Pedestrian bridged designed by Olmsted Brothers firm, at intersection of canal and Genesee River
- 8** Ball fields
- 9** 1930s Refectory / Concessions stand
- 10** Site of the former Durand Boat House, which was removed c.1934 to prepare for Elmwood Avenue bridge construction
- 11** 1936 Elmwood Avenue bridge (under construction in 1935)
- 12** Preexisting (2nd) Elmwood Avenue bridge
- 13** Canoe clubs along the Genesee River
- 14** Street car loop (last remaining within west side of park)
- 15** Pennsylvania Railroad corridor (formerly NY&Penn Railroad, and the route of the Genesee valley Canal)
- 16** University of Rochester's River Campus, formerly the site of Oak Hill Country Club (pre-1926)

In 1930-31, a new refectory was constructed, replacing the octagonal building that had been moved west from the river's edge in 1915. Around the same time a new public livery was built on the site of the YMCA building; the "Durand" boat house just south of the Elmwood Avenue Bridge disappeared from plat maps between 1926 and 1935. The replacement of the Durand boat house with the new livery was likely related to construction of the new Elmwood Avenue Bridge (see below). Also in the 1930s, a new pool complex, with two pools (one for men and one for women) flanking a shared bathhouse, was built just west of the railroad right-of-way on the former Frost property. In keeping with Depression-era park projects in national and state parks, these buildings tended to reflect an effort to blend with or enhance the existing character of the park. Both the refectory and the new livery displayed an Arts and Crafts design aesthetic similar to that of existing boathouses and recreational buildings, which in turn reflected Olmsted's favored designs for park buildings that were informal and subordinate to the landscape.

Finally, the Elmwood Avenue Bridge was reconstructed in 1936, replacing the earlier bridge built in 1888. The new bridge was located just south of the earlier bridge, on a slightly different angle; Elmwood Avenue was realigned east of the river at the same time.

World War II and After

During World War II, programming, improvement and even maintenance were put on hold at national, state, and municipal parks as priorities shifted to supporting the war effort. After the war, park budgets at all levels remained low; meanwhile, lifestyle changes, including the growth of suburbs and increased reliance on the automobile, gave potential park users more options for their leisure time. Concerts, festivals, and other activities at urban parks rarely drew the kinds of crowds seen earlier in the century. The automobile had other important effects on parks: drives designed for slow-moving carriages were now expected to handle higher-speed automobiles, which led to safety concerns about meandering S-curves Olmsted favored; and parks had to provide parking areas for growing numbers of automobiles.

Also in the post-war period, the Arts and Crafts aesthetic of the 1930s gave way to modernism in park design. This was partly a design choice based on changing architectural fashion and the desire to make more of a statement rather than blend with natural surroundings, and partly driven by

budget concerns, with modern materials such as cinder block with minimal detail considered cheaper to use and easier to maintain than traditional materials. The "Mission 66" program in the national parks set the example for state and local parks by promoting modernism in the design of new visitors' centers and other facilities.

In the second half of the twentieth century, virtually all pre-World War II built features in Genesee Valley Park were demolished and replaced with new recreational facilities. The first two buildings constructed in this period, an artificial ice skating rink and Modernist skating shelter (1952-54) and a building for the Rochester Fishing Club (c. 1950), were both relatively short-lived, surviving only until the early 1980s and late 1990s, respectively. A field house built in 1964 along Genesee Street south of Elmwood is the only building approaching 50 years old that survives in Genesee Valley Park West. (Three structures are older: the railroad and pedestrian bridges over the canal (both c. 1917) and the Elmwood Avenue Bridge spanning the river (1936)).

A new use was introduced within the original Olmsted park boundaries in 1954 when the City established a Fire and Police Training Academy within the portion of the park west of the river and south of the canal. This had been a wooded area with no built features other than trails, in keeping with the Olmsted intent for this section of the park. Since then, the facility has evolved into the present Public Safety Training Facility now operated by Monroe Community College.

In 1961, under a long-term agreement between the City of Rochester and Monroe County, the county assumed management of the east side of the park (east of the Genesee River) to the county and the city retained responsibility for the west side. After that date, the city's annual reports and master plans referred only to the west side of the park, while the county reported on and planned for the east side of the park.

In 1973, the city commissioned the landscape architecture firm Kotz and Schneider to prepare a plan for short- and long-term redevelopment of Genesee Valley Park West. This document focused on the Genesee Valley Park West as an "attractive large neighborhood park" valuable both for its active recreational facilities, which primarily served residents of the southwest quadrant of the city, and as open space. The report made no mention of the park's Olmsted design or of its relationship to Genesee Valley



1953

View across the ice rink under construction, looking northeast towards the University of Rochester

City of Rochester Archives

c.1936

The second Genesee Valley Park pool, located across the railroad tracks on the later-purchased Frost property. The complex included a central bathhouse and both a men's and women's pool on either side.

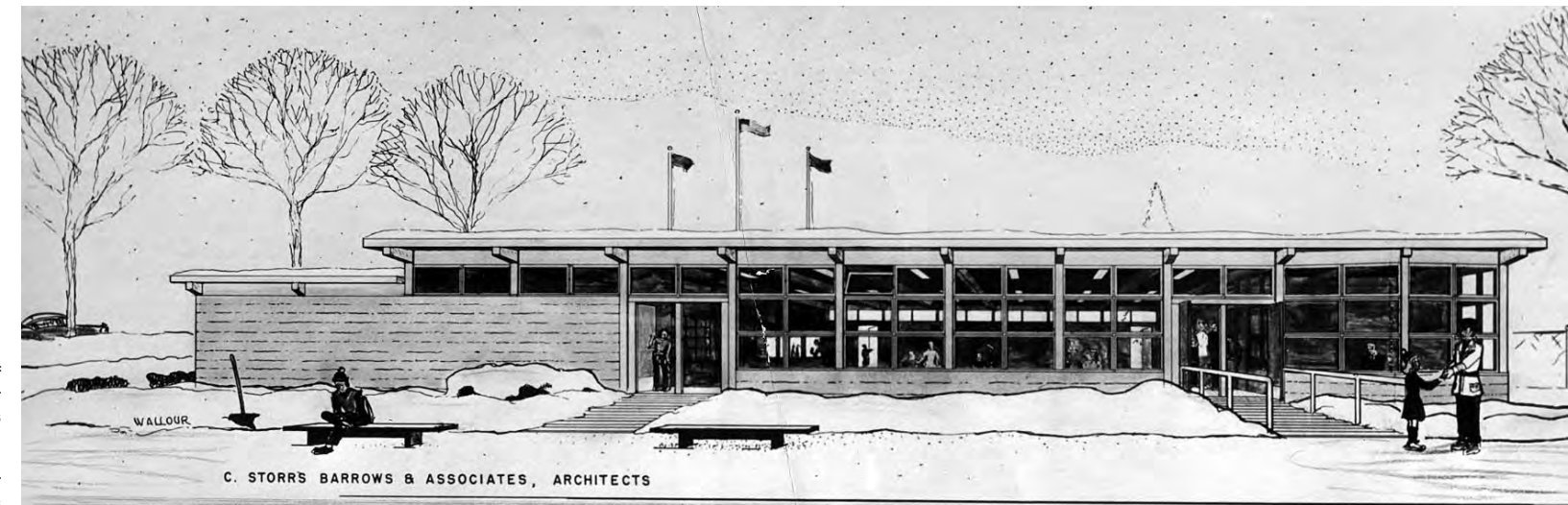
City of Rochester Archives



1952

Architectural rendering of proposed skating shelter and rink. The shelter was constructed by 1954.

City of Rochester Archives



1964

The existing Field House was constructed in 1964.

Time Union, May 29, 1964

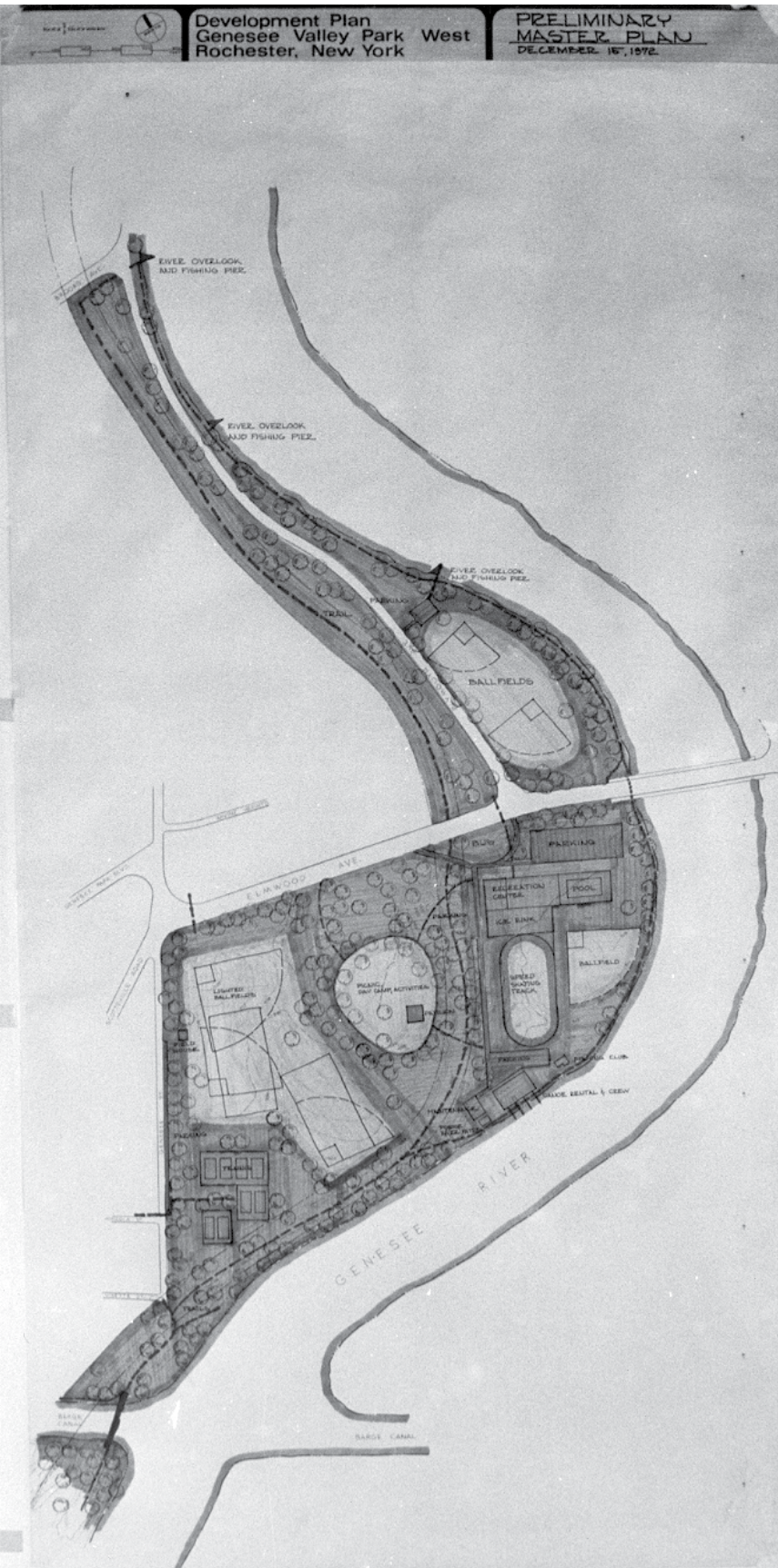
1956

Photograph of accompanying news article of the 1953 ice rink repairs. The rink was plagued by costly repairs and problems and was removed in the 1970s.

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, October 9, 1956



(20) Daily Record, 11 April 1952.
(11) E.M. Moore to F.L. Olmsted, 3 July 1890, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Microfilm Reel 56.



Workout's over *D. & C. APR 29 1979*
After blustery winds cut short his workout, Kevin Crerand carries his racing boat from the river in Genesee Valley Park yesterday. The high temperature for the day was 54 at 2 p.m. and then within the next hour the temperature dropped nine degrees to 45.
D&C photo by Talis Bergmann



1977 The outdoor pool and pool facilities (locker rooms, mechanical) opens in 1977. The pool and auxiliary building constitute the First phase of the current pool and ice rink complex. The ice rink was subsequently built behind the building and later enclosed with a roof.

Rochester Times-Union, July 6, 1977

Park East. The report's recommendations, which were perfectly in line with the "Recreation Park" philosophy of providing recreation-oriented park facilities in response to user needs and wants, established a framework for changes that were largely carried out in the 1970s to 1990s.

The Kotz and Schneider report concluded that every built feature in the park, with the exception of the c. 1950s fishing club building, the 1964 field house, and the three bridges, was at or nearing the end of its useful life and needed to be removed. This included the 1930s pool complex and boat livery, all surviving boathouses north of the Elmwood Avenue bridge, and the 1950s skating rink and shelter. Some of the sports facilities, including new tennis courts and some of the baseball and softball diamonds, were considered to be in better condition and could be retained and enhanced.

Park development in the last quarter of the twentieth century carried out many of the recommendations from the report. Specific projects included replacement of the pool and ice rink with a large sports complex combining both facilities along with community center space (pool 1977, ice rink 1980 and 1986), demolition of the 1930s boat livery and replacement with a new waterways center for public rental and club use (built in multiple phases starting in 1978) (21), and demolition of all small boathouses north of the Elmwood Avenue bridge (various dates). Tennis courts, baseball and softball diamonds, soccer and football fields, and playgrounds were also expanded and/or reconfigured, largely in accordance with the plan. A significant improvement to the safety and cohesiveness of the park, recommended in the plan and carried out a decade later, was acquisition of the railroad right-of-way, which was redeveloped as part of the Genesee Riverway Trail and Genesee Valley Greenway.

In 1977, the Interstate-390 Expressway was constructed through Genesee Valley Park, parallel to and just south of the Barge Canal (now renamed the Erie Canal). This reinforced the severing of the north and south sides of the park that had occurred when the Canal was constructed. Whereas the construction of arched concrete bridges (now known as the "Olmsted Bridges") had connected the north and south portions of the park on both sides of the river after the canal was built, the damage to the park caused by the expressway was more difficult to mitigate

because the viaduct was a much more prominent visual and psychological barrier between the north and south sections of the park.

The impact of the expressway, like that of the canal, was most severe on the east side of the park. On the west side of the river, the area south of the canal and expressway crossing was already limited in Olmsted's plan to a narrow strip between the railroad and river, and remained a location for passive recreation. Expressway construction reinforced the isolation of this southern strip, but left the rest of the park physically intact.

In an effort to compensate for some of the damage to the park's circulation system, a pedestrian bridge was constructed spanning the river north of the canal. On the west side of the river, the pedestrian bridge terminates just east of the tennis courts.

Two sections of Genesee Valley Park West near the north end of the park have been converted to nonpark uses: first, for construction of Plymouth Gardens, a high-rise apartment building for low-income senior citizen housing built as part of Rochester's Urban Renewal program (1963), and second, for a development known as Brooks Landing, a hotel project at what had been the northern terminus of the park (2006). Development in this area continues, with the Flats at Brooks Landing mixed-use project now underway.

(21) The Depression-era livery was demolished in 1978; on its site new docking, canoe rental, and storage facilities were built, along with a general park maintenance building. In the 1990s, when the city consolidated its maintenance operations elsewhere in the city, the maintenance building on the site was converted to a rowing center under an agreement with a nonprofit rowing organization. The former canoe rental building from the 1970s remains a boat storage building. The metal building north of the main building was added in the mid-2000s as a temporary facility for Friends of Scholastic Crew. Telephone conversation with Jim Farr, Assistant Director, City of Rochester Bureau of Recreation, 17 June 2013.

Establishing a Period of Significance: 1888 - c.1940

An important step in planning for the future of a historic resource is to identify an appropriate period of significance. A period of significance is defined by the National Park Service as “the length of time when a property was associated with important events, activities, or persons, or attained the characteristics which qualify it for National Register listing. Period of significance usually begins with the date when significant activities or events began giving the property its historic significance; this is often a date of construction.”

Genesee Valley Park has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. Because the east and west sections of the park were historically so closely linked in the original design and in their subsequent development until the 1960s, the National Register eligibility and period of significance of Genesee Valley Park West can only be considered in the context of the entire park on both sides of the river as it was designed and developed.

Genesee Valley Park, encompassing the east and west sections, is eligible as an example of a late-nineteenth-century Pleasure Ground, one of the property types for which registration requirements were established in the Multiple Property Documentation Form for the Municipal Park System of Rochester, New York (MPDF). A fundamental feature of Frederick Law Olmsted’s design for Genesee Valley Park was the coordinated development of parkland on both sides of the river, to achieve his central goal of preserving river views in both directions. As it developed gradually in the first decades of the twentieth century, it took on characteristics of the Reform Park and early Recreation Park philosophies. The Olmsted firm worked with the Rochester Park Commission until 1915; local park employees who worked closely with the Olmsteds on the park’s initial development continued to guide the evolution of Genesee Valley Park and other Rochester parks after the firm’s departure. The final phase of significant development in Genesee Valley Park occurred under public works programs in the 1930s. It was not until the 1961 that management of the park was divided between the City of Rochester and Monroe County.

The Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for the Municipal Park System of Rochester, New York,

established an end date of 1951 for the park system’s period of significance. According to the MPDF, during and after World War II, “projects in the parks were designed with utility, rather than beauty, in mind. In addition, parkland was often seen as ‘free’ land for projects such as subsidized housing or expressway construction that were not related to park use, programming, or aesthetics.” While an exact determination of the period of significance of Genesee Valley Park as a whole is beyond the scope of this project, a period extending from 1888, when Olmsted’s work with the Park Commission began, and ending around World War II period, is appropriate, as this encompasses the initial development of the park under the Olmsted firm’s guidance through the significant work done in the 1930s, and ends before the post-war shift to a more utilitarian approach to park management and development.

While the period of significance for Genesee Valley Park appears to extend to the World War II era, few extant physical features in Genesee Valley Park West relate to that period. Park boundaries are largely intact to the period of significance, with the exception of the extreme north end of the park where land has been alienated for development. The circulation system has been extensively altered, most recently with the construction of new boating and pool/ice rink complexes starting in the 1970s, and few remnants of pre-World War II paths and roadways survive. The only built features in the park that predate World War II are the Elmwood Avenue bridge, the two bridges (railroad and pedestrian) spanning the Erie Canal, and the canal itself.

Landscape and site features pre-dating World War II include minor remnants of the Genesee Valley Canal prism, patterns of vegetation relating to the former canal and rail road corridor, general aspects of park topography, and a significant number of trees.

Remnants of the Genesee Valley Canal’s topographic profile (prism) are almost entirely located south of where the Erie Canal (Barge Canal) bisects the park and consist of partially filled linear depressions that have reverted to wetland or semi-wetland ecologies. Depressions related to the former canal prism are most evident along the west side of the Genesee Valley Greenway between the park’s southern boundary and the Police and Fire training facility. Smaller and less defined linear depressions exist north of the training facility within the woodlands between the Genesee Valley Greenway and the Genesee River Trail.

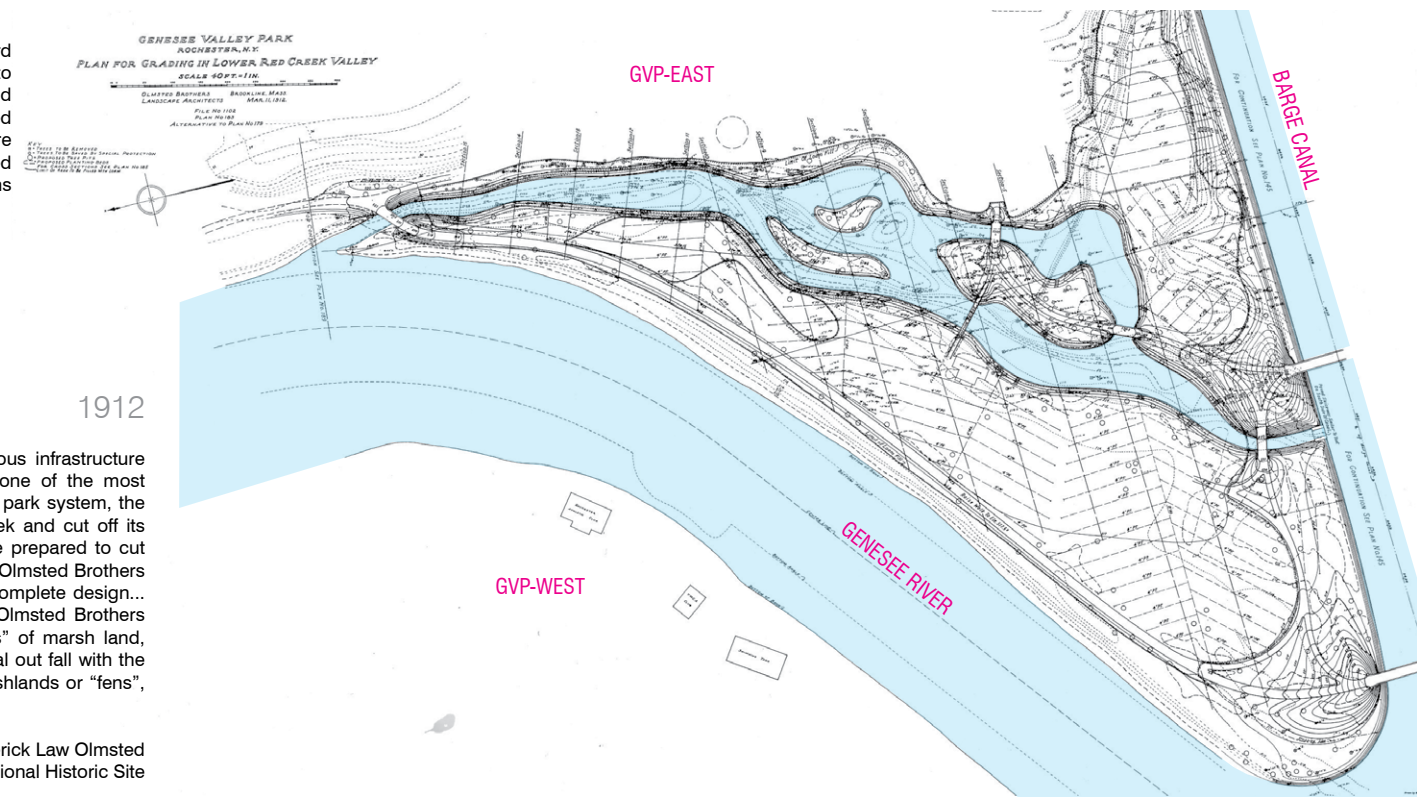
Several trees within the park were calculated to not only



c.1900

Photo of track and field area, looking northeast toward public Athletic Club and Elmwood bridge. Photo shows banked track ends, which are sometimes used on indoor tracks to this day. It is thought that a banked track end allows runners to run through a radius more comfortably, with less torque on the body. Banked ends on GVPW track is consistent with grading plans within the Olmsted drawing records.

City of Rochester Archives



Many landscape elements were lost through various infrastructure interventions in the park. Red Creek was once one of the most painted and photographed spots in the Rochester park system, the constructing of the barge canal severed Red Creek and cut off its natural outflow to the Genesee River. As the State prepared to cut the park in two with the rerouted canal system, the Olmsted Brothers firm made every effort to redesign the park as a complete design... This recolored May 1912 plan developed by the Olmsted Brothers explored the design of a man-made natural “fens” of marsh land, connecting the barge canal and red creek’s original out fall with the Genesee River through a series of naturalistic marshlands or “fens”, islands and connecting pathways.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



c.1920

Olmsted brothers took on the task of attempting to stitch back together a severed park landscape. A series of bridges were designed by the firm during the canal construction, along with the landscape restoration plans. These bridges are among the last works the Olmsted firm designed for the city of Rochester before severing professional ties with the municipality. As one of the last surviving features that contribute to the Olmsted period of significance, it's important to preserve, reconstruct or rehabilitate these structures.

City of rochester archives

2012

Lands along the canal in 2012, the bridge is still featured as one of the dominant landscape features of Genesee Valley Park - and an icon of the Rochester parks system as a whole. White oaks planted around 1920 have grown into a serene grove at the confluence of the river and Erie Canal.



pre-date World War II, but pre-date the development of the park itself. More than 30 trees are estimated to have been planted prior to 1895 or were pre-existing on the landscape when the park land was initially purchased by the City. These consist of Black Walnuts, Sugar Maples, White Oaks, Red Oaks, a nearly 80-inch diameter American Linden and several European Beeches. Nearly 140 more currently existing trees are estimated to have been planted between 1895 and 1940, still within the parks period of significance. One Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron*), calculated to have been planted around 1905, is potentially one of several seedlings noted in the Rochester Common Council Records as taken from George Washington's Mt. Vernon and planted in Genesee Valley Park. A handful more Tulip Trees of apparent similar age are known to exist within the east side of Genesee Valley Park. More information on the park's historic trees can be found within the general site inventory and analysis section of this master plan.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties were established by the National Park Service as professional standards for the treatment of historic buildings, landscapes, and other properties. These are used as evaluation criteria for formal state or federal review of projects affecting historic resources, have been adopted by many local preservation commissions for their review of projects, and are often used to guide projects where their use is not mandated but where sensitive treatment is a goal.

The Standards define four approaches to historic properties: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction. The appropriate treatment is selected based on the significance and integrity of the property and on the project goals, including the intended future use.

The four treatments are defined as follows:

Preservation is "the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction." This treatment is appropriate where substantial historic fabric

remains and the intent is to retain the current form of the property, not update it or return it to a past appearance. Treatment focuses on repair and maintenance of existing features, not the restoration of missing features or introduction of new elements. In Genesee Valley Park, this would mean retaining and repairing existing features in their current form with minimal changes.

Rehabilitation is "the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." The goal is to retain character-defining features while allowing compatible alterations and additions that adapt the property to a new use. Like preservation, rehabilitation is respectful of existing historic fabric; however, rehabilitation is appropriate where more repair and replacement of historic fabric is required. Features that are extensively damaged or missing may be replaced with either traditional materials or compatible modern substitutes. Alterations may be made as long as they do not destroy or radically alter character-defining historic features. In Genesee Valley Park, this would involve identification of and retention of significant historic elements and the introduction of new features compatible with the park's historic character. Existing, nonhistoric features, such as post-World War II buildings or parking areas, could be retained, altered, or removed to accommodate new uses and design features.

Restoration is "the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period." This treatment is chosen where the goal is to return a property to its appearance during a specific time period; for example, the restoration of a house museum and its surrounding landscape to its appearance during the period when a particular occupant lived there. Limited alterations to accommodate modern needs such as life safety and mechanical system upgrades are appropriate, but otherwise elements postdating the period of significance are removed and missing features are replaced as accurately as possible. In Genesee Valley Park, this would mean identification of a specific period of significance, removal of all materials that postdate that period, and recreation of missing features from the selected era to recapture the appearance of the selected time period as closely as possible.

Reconstruction is “the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.” This is the rarest of the four treatments, and is chosen when there is little or no historic fabric surviving, a compelling reason to recreate something that has disappeared, and sufficient physical and/or documentary evidence to support an accurate reconstruction. Reconstruction of a total landscape is rare; this treatment is not applicable to Genesee Valley Park as a whole or to large sections of it, although it could apply to specific lost elements within the park.

Specific Park Area Treatments

North of Elmwood Avenue / Plymouth Avenue Approach

Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., described his conception of the section of Genesee Valley Park West north of Elmwood Avenue as a “vestibule, approach, and ante-room” to the rest of the park. His intent was that most buildings required for the park be located in this area, where they would be minimally visible from the east side of the river. Ball fields, tennis courts, and boat houses were built in this area, along with the gently curving south end of Plymouth Avenue and a pedestrian path near the river’s edge, south and west of the boat houses. Plans for and surveys of the park showed the north park boundary extending past Brooks Avenue. Subsequent development in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries alienated some of the historic parkland for nonpark development, with the result that today the north limit of the park is south of Brooks Avenue.

This section of the park retains some remnants of historic circulation and topographic elements, including the general alignment of the remnant of the park road (still a road, but no longer connected to Plymouth Avenue), the open central area still occupied by baseball fields, and remnants of the railroad/canal bed. None of the boat houses survive, and the historic boundary has been altered at the north end. Integration of surviving historic elements into a new, compatible design, consistent with a **rehabilitation** approach, is the most appropriate historic treatment for this section of the park.

Riverfront Recreation Areas / Elmwood to the Erie Canal

This section of the park is within the area defined by Elmwood Avenue to the north, the railroad right-of-way to the west, and the Genesee River to the east. The railroad right-of-way is not fully visible in this area; it was located approximately where the western of the two linear parking lots west of the pool and ice rink are found today. Although it was Olmsted’s intent to protect this section of the park from riverfront development so as to ensure unhampered views of river scenery from the east side of the park, this became the most intensively developed and redeveloped section in all of Genesee Valley Park. Most built features in this section of the park date to the last quarter of the twentieth century, when structures that predated World War II were removed (with the exception of the Elmwood Avenue Bridge) and replaced by new facilities and the circulation system was reconfigured to accommodate heavy automobile use and parking demands.

Because so little historic fabric remains, **rehabilitation** is the appropriate treatment for this section of the park. Remnants of historic vegetation and circulation systems can be incorporated into new designs that reflect but do not attempt to reconstruct the historic character of this area. The many nonhistoric buildings and other features in this area can be retained and integrated into the design or removed and replaced with new features designed for better compatibility with the park’s historic character.

Two bridges span the Erie Canal between the Frost Property and the South Woodland (below): the railroad bridge and one of three arched bridges designed by the Olmsted firm to mitigate the damage caused by the rerouting of the Canal through the park. These two bridges are the oldest built features in the park. Rehabilitation of the railroad bridge for pedestrian use would be appropriate. The “Olmsted Bridge,” like the two matching bridges east of the river, is deteriorated and in need of either restoration or rehabilitation. A full restoration would be ideal, given the historic and architectural significance of the bridge, which is individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; if alterations are needed to accommodate accessibility or other modern requirements, sensitive rehabilitation that protects the character-defining features is appropriate.

HISTORIC TREATMENT AREA RECOMMENDATIONS & SURVIVING CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

- NORTH OF ELMWOOD AVENUE / PLYMOUTH AVENUE APPROACH
 - RIVERFRONT RECREATION AREAS / ELMWOOD TO THE ERIE CANAL
 - THE FROST PROPERTY
 - THE SOUTH WOODLAND
- A** Genesee Valley Canal Prism Topography
 - B** Significant Historic Trees, in Picnic Area and Other Areas of the Park
 - C** Pedestrian Bridges
 - D** Protected From Development - Natural Woodland - As Envisioned, Needs Thinning At River Bank





The Frost Property

The Frost Property refers to the pie-shaped area south of Elmwood Avenue and west of the railroad/canal right-of-way (the linear parking lots). This area was added to the park in 1896 and initially used as a municipal nursery; by the 1930s the majority of the land was used for baseball fields and remains in that use today. Although not part of Frederick Law Olmsted's original design, it was added and developed as parkland during the period of significance. Few built features were ever located here, and it does not appear that formal designs were ever prepared for this area; a double pool was built in the mid-1930s but otherwise, the primary use was baseball. The locations of ball diamonds have been fairly consistent in this area since at least the 1930s, although the orientations of the diamonds have been modified. Tennis courts were introduced to the southern end of this area in the 1960s and later expanded to their present configuration; expansion of parking areas accompanied more intensive development of tennis courts and greater reliance on the automobile in general. The 1963 field house and the playground, both near the Genesee Street perimeter, postdate the period of significance. The most notable features are the topography and significant tree specimens, with a pronounced knoll near the northeast corner.

This section of the park is best suited to a **rehabilitation** approach, which would retain its open character and distinctive topographical and vegetative features, while allowing compatible modifications. Baseball, as a use, has a long-standing presence in this part of the park, although the specific features associated with the baseball and softball fields (fencing, backstops, etc.) do not have particular historic significance. This section of the park exhibits the highest concentration of early planted or pre-existing (pre-1900) trees. Several of the trees appear to be remnant of the parcel's uses as a municipal nursery, with a handful of older specimens still aligned in nearly-imperceptible rows. Estimated planting dates correlate to the parcel's use as a nursery and appear on later surveys as visibly within nursery-style rows; however, adjacent removals over time and the increasingly non-linear planting addition of new trees have made the rows undetectable from within the landscape.

The South Woodland

South of the Erie Canal, Genesee Valley Park West is a narrow strip of land between the historic railroad/canal right-of-way and the Genesee River. This area was never intensively designed but was intended to remain an undeveloped, wooded area with a sinuous path along the river; the path was to split in the widest portion of the park. The purpose of acquiring this narrow strip for parkland was to protect the west river bank from development, thus protecting views across the river from the east side, and to offer opportunities to view the meadow areas on the east bank from the west side. This section of the park was severed from the rest of the park by the Barge (now Erie) Canal and the I-390 Expressway and was interrupted by the Fire and Police Training Academy (now the Public Safety Training Facility) in 1954. There are now two trails in this system as a portion of the Genesee Riverway Trail runs along the original railroad/canal right-of-way, roughly parallel to the original river-edge trail.

For this section of the park as well, rehabilitation is the appropriate approach. Most of the area is not in need of any specific historic treatment. The most significant modern intrusions, the Public Safety Training Facility and the expressway, are unlikely to ever be removed, but some modifications could be possible to better integrate these areas with the historic character of the park.