

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT NO. 48.
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF
METROPOLITAN PARK
COMMISSIONERS. JANUARY,
1899**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649460502

Public Document No. 48. Report of the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners. January, 1899 by Charles Francis Adams

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CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

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BOSTON:
WRIGHT & POTTER PRINTING CO., STATE PRINTERS,
18 POST OFFICE SQUARE.
1899.

Metropolitan Water Commission 4-4-65

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

REPORT.

The Metropolitan Park Commission presents herewith its sixth annual report.

At the presentation of its last report the Board was preparing to continue the acquirement of the banks of Charles River, and was engaged in the investigation of available shore frontages and of certain proposed boulevards.

Towards the close of its last session the Legislature made an appropriation of \$1,000,000 as an addition to the Metropolitan Parks Loan, but further takings were delayed until the uncertainties of war were clearly passed. Acquirements of land and restrictions have been made or provided for however along Charles River as far as Hemlock Gorge, so that the banks for 19 miles, except where occupied by great manufacturing concerns, are in the control either of this Board or of some other public or quasi public body. A noble gift of about 700 acres of woods and beautiful intervalles south of Blue Hills and almost surrounding Ponkapog Pond has been accepted under the will of the late Henry L. Pierce. A field in Cambridge at the rear of "Elmwood," bought as a memorial to James Russell Lowell, has been transferred to the care of this Board, one-third of the purchase price having been paid by the Commonwealth and the remaining two-thirds by popular subscription, and will be available if desired as part of a parkway from Charles River to Fresh Pond. After careful investigation of the probable cost of the shore frontage at Squantum Head, Quincy and Winthrop, it has been deemed inadvisable to acquire additional lands at either place. A large part of the

land for a future extension to Paul's Bridge of the parkway through Stony Brook Reservation has been acquired, and land has also been acquired for a connection between the northerly end of Mystic Valley Parkway and Middlesex Fells. Revere Beach Driveway was completed early in the year to its southerly circle. This circle will hereafter be known as Charles Eliot Circle, and be marked in some suitable way to perpetuate a recollection of the work of Charles Eliot, the first landscape architect of the Board, in designing the development of this reservation. Fellsway has been practically completed and is open to public use. The subgrading of the Speedway along Charles River is nearly completed. Investigation is being made for acquisitions along Mystic and Neponset rivers, and for an extension of Revere Beach Parkway through Chelsea, Everett and Medford to Fellsway. Investigations have been made which it is hoped will make it possible to begin within the coming year construction of the bridge over Saugus River, directed by chapter 547 of the Acts of 1898. No action to secure the consent of the United States government to the construction of the dam across Charles River, as authorized by chapter 531 of the Acts of 1898, has yet been thought advisable.

The only unpleasant event of the year was the burning of the roof and laundry of the bath-house at Revere Beach. When the building was erected the circumstances of a limited appropriation made completely fire-proof construction impossible, but the great water tanks in the roof and the slow-burning construction of the floors prevented severe loss. It has been thought necessary to provide a new fire-proof roof, and it is hoped that funds will be provided this year for the expense thus incurred and for a necessary increase of dressing rooms and for a separate building for laundry, administration and police. All the reservations and the parkways now open are in better condition and the forces in them are better organized than in any previous year. The Commission has taken new offices at 14 Beacon Street, which provide better accommodations in a fire-proof building near the State House at a rent proportionately

lower than that formerly paid. As this is a Metropolitan Commission, the Commonwealth does not provide offices for it in the State buildings.

The purpose of the Board at this time, however, is not so much to discuss the details of the past year's work, which will be found in the admirable accompanying reports, as to review the work of the full five years which have now passed, and to give some consideration to that of the future.

The Metropolitan Park System was a natural outgrowth of the desire in more than one locality to save from increasing population some beautiful spot which for generations had been so generally resorted to as to seem public property. This desire took active form in the agitation for preserving Middlesex Fells, and led to the passage of chapter 342 of the Acts of 1892, and the appointment of a special Commission to investigate and report on the advisability of laying out ample open spaces for the use of the public in the towns and cities in the vicinity of Boston. After personal examination of all the more important available open spaces near Boston, and conferences with citizens and public bodies of the various municipalities, this preliminary Commission submitted to the Legislature of 1893 its own brief report and accompanying reports of its Secretary and Landscape Architect, together with a bill calculated to provide for carrying out its immediate recommendations. The bill was enacted in practically the form proposed, as Metropolitan Parks Act, chapter 407 of the Acts of 1893. Additional general appropriations have been made to enable the Commission to advance along the lines indicated by those first reports and the accompanying plan. A comparison of that plan with the one submitted this year by the Landscape Architects shows how little change has been found advisable.

That the Commonwealth had adopted the policy outlined in these preliminary reports and committed itself to the far-reaching consequences of this policy was even more apparent at the close of the next legislative session of 1894. Indeed, it may be said that during the five full years just passed there has never been occasion to force public sentiment, and that the only anxiety felt by the Commission has been lest

it should not be so fully prepared in the details of its plans as to avoid sporadic schemes and unnecessary petitions for specific legislation. Fortunately the permanent Commission was in perfect accord with the preliminary Board, and was assisted by Charles Eliot, who had mapped out the definite scheme of acquirements in his previous report; so that it was, in effect, a continuation of the preliminary Commission, actuated by the same purpose and ready for prompt action. Within nine months all the woods reservations were taken except Hemlock Gorge, which is rather a part of Charles River. Of these reservations, that of Stony Brook was taken more for its value as a part of a future parkway in extension of the Boston Park System from Arnold Arboretum to Great Blue Hill than as a reservation. The lands north of Washington Street, charged to West Roxbury Parkway, were transferred to the city of Boston, under agreement that they should be cared for and developed in connection with other lands for the same purpose then taken by its Park Commission. During the winter of 1894 a Joint Board of the State Board of Health and of this Board by direction of the previous Legislature reported a plan for reclaiming Charles River to a fit condition for its location in the midst of a great city. The larger recommendations of this report were referred to another State Board for re-examination as to certain conditions with which alone they could be supposed to be especially familiar, and an appropriation of \$300,000 was at once made for the acquirement of lands below Waltham line. An appropriation of \$500,000 for acquirements at Revere Beach was also made, which the Legislature of 1895, on further report prior to any expenditure by the Board, increased by a still further appropriation of \$500,000.

At the outset it was feared that the general public idea of parks, as including formal roads and paths, such as those of Central Park in New York and the Boston Park System generally, might cause a demand for road building before the lands for the reservations were secured. While recognizing, therefore, that its plans must be based upon consideration of ultimate development, including road building,