

**THE PUBLIC PARKS OF THE CITY OF ALBANY,  
N.Y.: AN ILLUSTRATED PAMPHLET,  
CONTAINING A BRIEF OUTLINE OF  
THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF THESE  
PLEASURE GROUNDS, AND STATISTICAL  
INFORMATION RELATIVE THERETO**

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The Public Parks of the City of Albany, N.Y.: An Illustrated Pamphlet, Containing a Brief Outline of the History of Development of These Pleasure Grounds, and Statistical Information Relative Thereto by Wm. S. Egerton

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**WM. S. EGERTON**

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William S. Egerton

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THERE TO.*

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ALBANY, N. Y.

WEED, PARSONS & CO., PRINTERS AND ENGRAVERS.

1892.

## P R E F A C E .

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Having received numerous inquiries from the citizens of Albany, from visitors sojourning in our midst, and more especially from officials and others connected with or interested in the development or maintenance of parks in other cities, for information of an illustrative and statistical nature concerning the parks of this city, I have been led to believe that this demand could be met by the illustrated pamphlet which is herewith submitted.

WM. S. EGERTON,

*Superintendent of Parks.*

*Albany, 1892.*

## WASHINGTON PARK.

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The early history of park development in this city was graphically portrayed in an article prepared by Mr. Wm. D. Morange, formerly the Secretary of the Board of Park Commissioners of this city, and by resolution of the Board printed in the minutes of Nov. 18, 1871. From this article the following extracts are taken :

“The duty of providing an ample park for the city of Albany was from time to time suggested in the history of the city, and occasionally some little effort was made to secure it. A number of newspaper articles appeared in 1859 and 1860, suggesting various localities and sundry appropriate designations for a new city park. The necessity of some movement in the direction of an extensive park was forcibly impressed upon the city authorities by the action of the Albany Institute in 1863. In a communication from that body to the Common Council, prepared by Prof. David Murray, they recount the benefits to be derived from a park with great force.”

“The paper shows that cleanliness, fresh air, the presence of vegetation are essential to health ; that private enterprise, even when aided by intelligence and wealth, cannot always in large cities obtain these ; that it requires the interference of public authority to provide open and accessible grounds for the enjoyment of these luxuries ; that a beautiful park in any city is a great moral power, and does more than criminal courts or policemen to repress crime. Men are wiser, better, more temperate and loving, when they have wandered amid trees and by waterfalls, and heard birds sing and children laugh and play. The slovenliness and filth which sometimes unnecessarily disgrace the tenements of the poor in cities, are put to shame by the sight of the beauty and freshness of nature.”

“The practical suggestion of the communication was, that Albany be provided with a park of 250 acres, to be laid out in the north-western section of the city, and a map was annexed and published in the Common Council minutes showing the location referred to.”

“The steps toward a park were delayed until the year 1869, when a law was passed entitled “An Act in relation to a public park in

the city of Albany," the area of the same extending over the Washington Parade Ground, the old State street burial grounds, the Alms-house farm and the Penitentiary grounds, with such other property as might be acquired by purchase or otherwise."

"Washington Square, or the Parade Ground, situate between State street, Madison avenue, Willett and Knox streets, ceded to the Commissioners by the law above referred to, was duly considered in the plan for a new park, and ground was broken early in July, 1870, for its improvement."

"The State street burying grounds were at this period surrounded by a common fence about ten feet high. Each congregation had its own gate for its funerals, and high steps on either side of the fence permitted egress and ingress to occasional visitors. In the earlier days these grounds were well kept, but the Rural Cemetery took away all the poetry from the willows and the elms and consigned it to the Troy road. There was a mouldy and neglected air about the place. The bodies had been removed to the Rural Cemetery, and the grounds subsequently were trespassed upon by vicious idlers."

From topographical maps prepared at this time, a plan for the extension of the park over the area of the burial grounds, and up the valley, now occupied by the lake in Washington Park, was submitted by Messrs. Bogart and Culyer, at that time employed as the landscape architects of the Board.

This plan is shown herewith, and can be compared with the completed plan of Washington Park, also submitted.

Subsequent purchases of contiguous real estate enabled the Board yearly to add to its area and to remove unsightly objects from the immediate surroundings of the portions improved.

This system of intermittent purchases and acquisition of contiguous property was found to be expensive and unsatisfactory, as values were enhanced by the successive improvements made, and property-owners were not to be cajoled or frightened into selling their property by increased assessed valuations or cumulative taxes. Each acquisition of new territory necessitated some modification of portions of the park area already defined, and still further advanced the value of lands ultimately found necessary to be taken for park purposes.

The narrow scope of the original design is made conspicuously apparent, when compared with that shown of the completed park. Even this is marred by the lack of symmetry, and by private proper-



ties surrounded almost entirely by the park improvement. Taken as a whole, however, Washington Park is unique in design, central in location, harmonious and natural in its treatment, and well deserving the many encomiums it receives.

To illustrate some of the many pleasing features within the limits of the park, several photographic views are reproduced and shown. The design has been to illustrate the landscape effects, showing the character of the topography and tree growth, the lake views and floral ornamentation, and not to present pleasing pictures of isolated or especially attractive corners of the park, or happy combinations of foliage and sky, which can be readily obtained by an expert photographer in any picturesque spot by the wayside or along the banks of the Normanskill.

To Albanians no description of the location or object shown is needed. For those unacquainted with the park, a short analysis of the views is affixed.

The Board of Commissioners of Washington Park proceeded to organize May 8, 1869, under the following:

Chapter 582.

"AN ACT IN RELATION TO A PUBLIC PARK IN THE CITY OF ALBANY."

PASSED May 5, 1869.

From which the following sections are taken:

SECTION 1. The property in the city and county of Albany known as the burial ground property, the penitentiary grounds and alms-house farm, are hereby set apart and devoted to the purposes of a public park, to be known as the Washington Park of the city of Albany.

Lands set apart for Washington Park.

§ 2. The title to said property is hereby vested in a Board of Trustees, to consist of John Bridgford, Arthur Bott, George Dawson, Dudley Oleott, William Cassidy, John Fair, Rufus W. Peckham, Jr., Samuel H. Ransom and John H. Van Antwerp, who shall hold it in trust for the city of Albany, for the purposes of a public park as aforesaid. The Recorder of the city of Albany shall act as counsel of the Board of Trustees, without compensation.

Board of Trustees.

Recorder to act as counsel.

§ 6. The Board of Trustees of Washington Park of the city of Albany herein provided for shall meet within ten days after the passage of this act and organize by the election of a President and Treasurer from their number, and a Secretary who may or may not be a member of the Board, in its discretion, and shall receive such salary as the Board may deem just, not to exceed the sum of five hundred dollars.

§ 7. The Trustees named in the second section of this act shall be divided into three classes, who shall hold their offices as follows:

The first class for three years; the second class for six years, and the third class for nine years. The Trustees who are to comprise the respective classes shall be selected by said Board of Trustees by lot, and such selection shall be made at the first meeting for organization, as provided in section six. All vacancies for the unexpired terms in the Board shall be filled by the remaining members of said Board. The successors of said Trustees shall be appointed by the Mayor of the city of Albany and hold office for nine years.

The following citizens of Albany have been identified with the history of Washington Park from the date of its organization to the present time as Commissioners. A list of the administrative officers during the same period is also given:

May 8, 1869, to May 8, 1892.

ARTHUR BOTT <sup>3</sup> ,	JOHN FAIR <sup>6</sup> ,
JOHN BRIDGFORD <sup>3</sup> ,	DUDLEY OLCOTT <sup>6</sup> ,
WILLIAM CASSIDY <sup>3</sup> ,	RUFUS W. PECKHAM <sup>6</sup> ,
GEORGE DAWSON <sup>6</sup> ,	SAMUEL H. RANSOM <sup>2</sup> ,

JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP<sup>3</sup>.

President — JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP.

Treasurer — DUDLEY OLCOTT.

Secretary — WM. D. MORANGE.

Chief Engineer — REUBEN H. BINGHAM.

Engineer in Charge — WILLIAM S. EGERTON.

Landscape Architects — MESSRS. BOGART and CULYER.

The Trustees or Commissioners to comprise the respective classes designated by the act of incorporation were elected as follows (indicated by figures):

First class — JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP<sup>3</sup>, JOHN BRIDGFORD<sup>3</sup>, ARTHUR BOTT<sup>3</sup>, to serve three years.

Second class — DUDLEY OLCOTT<sup>6</sup>, GEORGE DAWSON<sup>6</sup>, JOHN FAIR<sup>6</sup>, to serve six years.

Third class — RUFUS W. PECKHAM, JR.<sup>9</sup>, WILLIAM CASSIDY<sup>9</sup>, SAMUEL RANSOM<sup>9</sup>, to serve nine years.

The terms of office of Messrs. Bott, Bridgford and Van Antwerp having expired by limitation May 8, 1872, the Mayor appointed Messrs. Robt. L. Johnson, John Bridgford and John H. Van Antwerp to fill the vacancies. The Board reorganized May 13, 1872 as follows:

JOHN BRIDGFORD <sup>9</sup> ,	ROBT. L. JOHNSON <sup>6</sup> ,
WILLIAM CASSIDY <sup>6</sup> ,	DUDLEY OLCOTT <sup>3</sup> ,
GEORGE DAWSON <sup>3</sup> ,	RUFUS W. PECKHAM <sup>6</sup> ,
JOHN FAIR <sup>3</sup> ,	SAMUEL H. RANSOM <sup>6</sup> ,
JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP <sup>9</sup> .	

President — JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP.

Treasurer — DUDLEY OLCOTT.

Secretary — WM. D. MORANGE.

Engineer — WILLIAM S. EGERTON.

Mr. Reuben H. Bingham retired as Chief Engineer, and the services of Messrs. Bogart and Culyer were dispensed with.

The Board reorganized June 14, 1875, the first regular meeting subsequent to the appointment of Commissioners by the Mayor (Mr. Edmund L. Judson) to fill the vacancies occasioned by the expiration of the terms of Messrs. Dawson, Fair and Olcott; the Mayor having appointed Messrs. Dawson, Olcott and James D. Wasson.

The Board reorganized as follows:

JOHN BRIDGFORD <sup>6</sup> ,	DUDLEY OLCOTT <sup>9</sup> ,
GEORGE DAWSON <sup>9</sup> ,	RUFUS W. PECKHAM <sup>3</sup> ,
ROBT. L. JOHNSON <sup>6</sup> ,	SAMUEL H. RANSOM <sup>3</sup> ,
* DANIEL MANNING <sup>3</sup> ,	JAMES D. WASSON <sup>9</sup> ,
JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP <sup>6</sup> .	

President — JOHN H. VAN ANTWERP.

† Secretary — WM. D. MORANGE.

Engineer — WM. S. EGERTON.

\* Mr. Daniel Manning was elected by the Board Feb. 17, 1873, to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Mr. William Cassidy.

† Mr. Wm. D. Morange resigned as Secretary Dec. 10, 1877. Mr. Alfred Egerton was appointed Secretary Feb. 11, 1878, to fill the vacancy.