

**HISTORY OF THE WEST ROXBURY
PARK: HOW OBTAINED. DISREGARD
OF PRIVATE RIGHTS. ABSOLUTE
INJUSTICE. ARBITRARY LAWS. RIGHT
OF EMINENT DOMAIN. 1873 TO 1887**

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History of the West Roxbury Park: How Obtained. Disregard of Private Rights. Absolute Injustice. Arbitrary Laws. Right of Eminent Domain. 1873 to 1887 by Samuel Elwell Sawyer

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SAMUEL ELWELL SAWYER

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Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?—MATT. XX: 15.

HISTORY

OF THE

West Roxbury Park:

HOW OBTAINED.

Disregard of Private Rights.

ABSOLUTE INJUSTICE.

Arbitrary Laws. Right of Eminent Domain.

1873 TO 1887

Sawyer, Samuel Elwell

*Let us consider the reason of the case, for nothing is law that is not
reason.—SIR JOHN POWELL.*

GLOUCESTER:
CAPE ANN BREEZE STEAM BOOK AND JOB PRINT.
1887.

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DEDICATION.

The following pages, briefly outlining the history of the West Roxbury (now Franklin) Park, are respectfully inscribed to the enterprising, public spirited citizens of Boston, who, the writer is assured, will be glad to know something of the *modus operandi* by which the lands were secured for the great public Park.

S. E. S.

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WEST ROXBURY PARK.

Sometime during the spring of 1873 the question of establishing a system of Public Parks for the city of Boston was first suggested and brought before the citizens, who heartily and earnestly approved the project.

It was felt that a large enterprising city like Boston, the metropolis of New England, possessing ample wealth and enjoying such a wide-spread reputation at home and abroad for refinement and culture, should not fall behind other noted cities of the world in providing for its citizens broad fields and acres for a public domain, where our own citizens and strangers alike could meet together with freedom, on common ground, to breathe the pure air of heaven; to bask in the health-giving sunshine of the country; to enjoy its sylvan shade, its rustic scenery, and the pleasure of friendly meetings and friendly greetings.

The city government, after a long delay interspersed with hostile conflicts and hard fought battles, finally concluded to follow the example of other thrifty cities, and commence a series of public parks, to be established in different parts of the city, in order to accommodate, and at the same time to satisfy the tax payers and tax grumblers in the various sections.

Thus was inaugurated an enterprise worthy the high standard Boston occupies as one of the leading commercial cities in this country.

With strong assurances that the citizens of Boston will be interested to know something of the process,—the *modus operandi*, the scheme by which the great West Roxbury Park lands were obtained for luxurious purposes, the indulgence of her own citizens and the surrounding and rapidly increasing population,—the writer felt that it became his especial duty, being one of the foremost movers in the enterprise, as well as owning the largest and most valuable interest within the park area, consequently being the largest sufferer by the several seizures, to expose the cupidity of the city government in coveting and dooming these lands, and then reducing the valuations to meet the small appropriation made to pay for them.

There were no doubt many obstacles to be overcome before obtaining the appropriation, because of the opposing action of some members who did not favor the park scheme from the first, but finally voted for it grudgingly.

These members did not choose to consider that every great public improvement, whether for practical utility or for luxurious purposes, gave instant employment to a large number of the laboring classes, thus creating a ready demand, and at the same time lessening the supply, or surplus, of labor-seeking men.

They should have borne in mind also, that the money spent in either case comes out of the pockets of the capitalists, or the enterprising middle classes mainly, and not from those who are struggling for their daily bread by the work of their hands. These are facts that should not have been ignored in making a miserly appropriation at first.

Prompted by his conviction, and by assurances of good will and support, the writer at once diligently began to examine the unoccupied fields and wooded hills in the neighborhood of Boston, especially those tracts of massed lands within an easy distance and conveniently accessible to the citizens by steam, horse-cars or by carriage.

Such a region, admirably adapted for the purpose was found and approved; first, by its proximity to the city; next, for its nearness to the horse-cars, or to the more rapid transit by steam power, both of which conveyances were located on either side of this great area, and both running at short intervals during the day and night, to and from the city, the fare being only five cents each way.

These frequent and cheap conveyances were strong inducements to encourage the selection of this territory for park purposes, but furthermore the attractiveness was increased by the charming locality; its undulating surface, composed of upland and meadow, hills, terraces and valleys, woody slopes, copses and fields, all embraced within an area of 366.80 acres, and lying between three and one-half and four and one-half miles from the City Hall.

This beautiful tract of land, bounded northerly by Seaver street, easterly by Blue Hill avenue and Canterbury street, southerly by Morton street, westerly by Scarborough street and Walnut avenue, with two cross streets running through it, east and west, was embraced in twenty-seven different lots, held by about as many different owners.

To see personally or to communicate with these sev-