

BACKGROUND ON EDMANDS PARK

Many Newton residents do not know the location of Edmands Park. Many Newton children graduate from the Newton school system -- have spent one or more sessions at Peterborough or Camp Union, New Hampshire -- but have never set foot inside Edmands Park.

The park has 33.17 acres and is located in Newtonville. Its western boundary is Blake Street and its southern boundary Mill Street. On the eastern side of the park is the Newton College of the Sacred Heart which fronts on Centre Street. The park's northern boundary abutts the back yards of houses facing Cabot Street.

History of Ownership of Edmands Park Land*

In 1638 Thomas Mayhew owned 500 acres in the vicinity of Cabot School and Cabot Park. Jonothan Hyde, in 1656 owned a larger tract which included what is now Edmands Park. The early farmers required large farms to raise food and shelter. All this can be seen by studying a Map of Newton made in 1700. In 1633 the General Court ordered that all swamps above 100 acres be common property. The swamp in the region of what is now Newton Cemetery was, therefore, common property, as was the Common at Newton Centre given by Jonothan Hyde, Sr. in about 1700. In 1846 Gardner Colby bought 35 acres of land opposite the old cemetery (at Centre and Cotton Streets). He was born in Maine in 1810, and like J. Wiley Edmands, came to Newton for rural living. A map of Newton in 1874 shows Colby's Estate and the site of his mansion. When the City map of 1895 was printed, the Colby land was still 35 acres; 16 acres was owned by A. Lawrence Edmands, 7 acres by Converse and Cobb, and Mary Shannon held 29 acres on Cabot Street. James H. Young owned two parcels to become Edmands Park along the east of Blake Street of 19 and 7 acres each. The land between Newtonville Avenue and Homer Street that was originally owned by three settlers was now being divided into smaller and smaller lots, a change from 500 acre estates to the large 35-acre estate of Gardner Colby. By 1917 the Colby tract had been divided into 13 acres for Harriman, 19 acres for the Colby Realty Company, and 2 acres about the old homestead set aside for Mary C. Colby. Today the only large tracts of land in the vicinity are Edmands Park, Cabot Park, and the property of Newton College of the Sacred Heart.

Edmands Park Deeded to the City of Newton

On February 3, 1913 Edmands Park was accepted by the Newton Board of Aldermen from the Trustees of Edmands Trust in memory of J. Wiley Edmands and A. Lawrence Edmands. J. Wiley Edmands was a financier and businessman who came to Newton in 1847 "for country living". He was one of the first promoters of the Newton Horticultural Society and proved a responsible

* From Edmands Park - The Report of a Survey by William G. Vinal, Newton Public Schools, Division of Instruction. April 15, 1952. p. 5.

all-round citizen - contributed \$17,000 toward the Free Public Library of Newton. The trustees of his estate "believed that the City of Newton would be a worthy trustee for all time, and exhibited that faith by donating the 33.17 acres as a memorial park."

The deed to the park, accepted by the Board on the aforementioned date, begins as follows: ORDERED, (in Board of Aldermen) "That his honor the Mayor be and is hereby authorized to accept the offer 37893 of the Edmands estate of about 30 acres of land to be used for park, parkway and playground purposes, on the following conditions.

That the grantors will agree with the City of Newton that they will not request nor require the city to expend any money for the development or improvement of the land so granted, and

That a right of way to said land be granted over the private way known as Colby Road."

One dollar was paid by the City of Newton for the park. The deed then stipulates which sections of the park shall be used for "park and parkway" purposes and which other sections shall be used for "park and playground purposes". According to the deed Colby Street is by no means a definite dividing line between the areas to be used for parkway and those to be used for playground purposes. The deed describes as many as four or five sections or parcels and their uses.

The document concludes as follows: "The granted premises are conveyed subject to the taxes assessed thereon for the current year which the grantee hereby assumes and agrees to pay; and this conveyance is subject also to the express condition that the above described parcels and each of them shall be used for park and parkway or park and playground purposes as is herein specified with reference to said parcels.

To Have and To Hold the above granted premises with all the privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging to the said City of Newton and its successors to their own use and behoof forever."

WPA DEVELOPMENT

The wording of the deed may account for some of the past disagreement and uncertainty as to the best and most proper uses for the park. However, Edmands Park was developed according to definite plans by WPA labor in 1934 and 1935. Constructed items included a log-cabin shelter, lake for skating, a dam and spillway, stone walls, log fences, stone fireplaces, cement picnic seats, trails, and an entrance and parking area.

In building the entrance and parking lot, the northern end of the esker running south from Cabot Street to Commonwealth

Avenue, was destroyed. Along the summit of the esker, the laborers dug a wide deep trail that has proved an invitation for erosion.

The City and Federal Governments shared the expense of the WPA Project. Thousands of dollars were spent, but the structures were not only unused, but were destroyed by the very people whom they were intended to serve. Most of the destruction was by children. By 1952 there was no shelter, the lake had gone downstream, picnic areas were destroyed and the fences were toppling.

Vinal's Recommendations for the Park - 1952

1. The school is the logical place to interpret Edmands Park to children and the community.
 2. The schools alone cannot succeed in a complete educational program in and around Edmands Park. The participation and co-operation of many agencies is required:
 - a. The Forestry Division of the Street Department.
 - b. The Recreation Department.
 - c. The Police Department - responsible for preventing vandalism, but must have support of all other individuals and agencies.
 - d. The School Department is responsible for instruction and conservation education.
 - e. The Health Department - responsible for sanitation.
 - f. Co-operation must also come from PTA Associations.
 3. Needed - A Neighborhood Co-ordinating Council. During the last 30 years (prior to 1952) Newton has changed from a rural community to one essentially urban. In this change, the very existence of "the last island of trees" has been lost sight of, and consequently a sense of responsibility for its maintainance and the preservation of the values that were once available to all local children has been lost. The aim of the co-ordinating council would be to deal with this problem. Every school, public or private, every PTA, every church and temple, every other agency, private or public, interested in co-operating to meet the problem, should be urged to elect a representative to such a co-ordinating council.
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Another Proposal for Edmands Park as a pilot project for other natural areas in Newton is the one which follows (author and date unknown):

A CONSERVATION PROGRAM FOR NEWTON

I. Introduction - the purpose of the plan.

- A. To determine the needs for such a program.
- B. To carry on what work has been done.
- C. To establish a long range plan.

II. Purposes and uses of Edmands Park.

- A. Keep it in its natural state.
- B. Develop a community project.
- C. To clean up and redevelop the park.
- D. To provide an opportunity for outdoor living.
- E. To provide real experiences in conservation.
- F. To give children an opportunity to practice citizenship.
- G. To provide an outdoor laboratory for science and social studies.
- H. To provide opportunities for experience in many subject areas.
- I. To provide a positive approach to the problem of juvenile delinquency.
- J. To provide a program which will meet the needs of children.

III. This could be a pilot project for other natural areas in the city.

- A. Largest single natural area still available.
- B. Reasonably well located.
- C. Needs it more than others.
- D. Lends itself to teaching situation - good examples of many phenomena.

IV. The Plan.

- A. Co-ordinator (ranger) starts out with Edmands - program expands to other areas as quickly as possible - hired by Newton on a fulltime basis.
 - 1. A person who is both educator and naturalist.
 - 2. One who has respect of all city groups - governmental, civic, and lay groups.
 - 3. Should have had experience in this type of work - state or national park experience - camping, etc.
 - 4. Must be adaptable - ingenious - superman.
 - 5. His job (some phases of the job of co-ordinator)
 - a. Understands and appreciates total program.

- b. Understands and appreciates municipal aspects of problem - controls, etc.
- c. Co-ordinates the various activities in the total program.
- d. Collects and disseminates printed materials for use in the schools and for use by other groups.
- e. Acts as a consultant for group leaders coming into the area - sets up workshops.
- f. Is responsible for directing the care of the property.
- g. Community participation. Should be available to speak before interested civic groups - be able to contact private and parochial schools.
- h. Should call in resource personnel.
- i. Should know the principles of first aid.
- j. Should orient people and groups to the park.
- k. Would act as consultant in improvement of school grounds.
- l. Would identify and make available the facilities in this area.
- m. His headquarters would be in Edmands Park.

B. Facilities (Headquarters Building should be located strategically.) This would be a city structure - not a school project alone - could be, if necessary, built on unit plan.

- 1. Water - electricity - fuel.
- 2. Toilet facilities.
- 3. Storage - tools - visual aids materials - cook-out equipment - maps, charts, photographs.
- 4. Classroom activities - lectures, slides, etc.
- 5. Center for children, adult, teacher groups to meet.
- 6. Provide shelter.
- 7. Provide first aid facilities.
- 8. Display area.
- 9. Home for co-ordinator.
- 10. Resource library for teachers.
- 11. Weather station.
- 12. Provide a place for out-of-school club activities.
- 13. Day camp
 - a. Area for crafts.
 - b. Eating facilities for bad weather.
 - c. Large toilet facilities.
 - d. Refrigeration.
- 14. Warm-up for skating and skiing - other recreational facilities.
- 15. A dressing room for outdoor activities in the amphitheatre.
- 16. A laboratory for experiments within the building.
- 17. Office for co-ordinator.

C. Source of building.

1. Built by the City.
2. Trade school could build one.
3. Obtain building from other sources - state engineers - have community volunteers build one with donated materials.

D. Physical improvements needed.

1. Clearing up and maintaining the area (not refuse).
2. Benches, tables, disposal cans for picnic area along Colby Street.
3. Designation of a limited area as cook-out area with necessary provisions for fire safety.
4. Guide posts for the area - signs.
5. Pond water level to be maintained at a minimum of 3 feet.
6. Stock pond with fish.
7. Improvement of trails through the area.
8. Landscaping reserved for the Headquarters area.
9. Amphitheatre for choral groups and summer outdoor activities (keep man's construction to a minimum).
10. Improve Colby Street - appropriate signs (no parking) - designate as a public reservation.
11. Remove the fireplaces which are not in the designated picnic area.

E. Some suggested uses of the park.

1. Adult.

- a. Garden Clubs should be encouraged to participate in a planting program in the Headquarters area (should be restricted to this).
- b. Cooking out in the designated area.
- c. Skating.
- d. Meetings of clubs - women's clubs - improvement organizations.
- e. Recreational area - relaxation - walking through park area.
- f. Used by bird watchers or similar groups.
- g. Used for adult education purposes.
- h. Amphitheatre could be used by such groups as choral, dramatic church groups.
- i. Meeting place for Norumbega Council of Boy Scouts, PTA, could be used for general recreational purposes.

2. Children - out of school.

- a. Nature clubs - could result from outgrowth of school activities.
- b. Boy and Girl Scout groups.
- c. Seasonal activities - skiing, skating.
- d. Picnics, cook-outs.
- e. Set off a special area for planting by assignment.
- f. Day camp - junior counselors.
- g. Have a junior naturalists' organization to learn about and protect the area.
- h. Opportunities for special cases.

3. Children - in school (these are generalities - specifics will follow).

- a. Outdoor workshop at all levels to study - biological and other scientific phenomena.
- b. To provide practical experience in citizenship in working together to enhance the community.
- c. To recognize and do something about conservation.
- d. Trying to produce a generation of children which will respect property.
- e. Recreational - provide for worthwhile use of leisure time - to develop hobbies - provide for and develop an appreciation of the values which come from the proper use of a recreational area.

4. Specific activities.

- a. Establishing nature trails.
- b. Observing insect life.
- c. Observing and cataloging birds in the area.
- d. Establishing feeding stations.
- e. Collecting seeds for planting.
- f. Studying plant and animal life in brook and pond.
- g. Studying geological land formations.
- h. Learning use of compass - map making.
- i. Setting up a news service related to the area.
- j. Plant a garden of wild flowers.
- k. Control of erosion in a gully or hillside.
- l. Have a reforestation day.
- m. Study the history of the tract.

During the 1950's the Newtonville Improvement Association organized work parties at intervals to clean up rubbish in Edmands Park and rubbish dumpers were reported to the police.

Renewed Interest in the 1960's.

On April 8, 1960 Edmands Park was informally surveyed by a group of some 45 persons representing many agencies and interests in the City of Newton. Dr. William Vinal conducted a brief tour of the park prior to a discussion at the Division of Instruction about possible solutions to the park's problems.

The fifteen groups represented were: Campfire Girls, YMCA, Newton Federation of Women's Clubs, Cabot PTA, Girl Scouts, Newton Public Schools, Pomroy House, Newton Junior College, Newtonville Improvement Association, Recreation Department, Newton Planning Board, City Engineers, Nature Conservancy, one garden club and abutters to Edmands Park..

The general consensus at this meeting seemed to be that Newton must show good use in Edmands Park before moving on to other land areas in the city. There is also need for a resolution of the differences in opinion on the use of the park - natural museum or park-playground?

It was suggested that an interim committee could be organized to study Newton's need for a conservation program. Such a committee would determine whether there should be a permanent committee and how it might co-ordinate with city agencies. Miss Adelaide Ball proposed that an interim committee organize under the jurisdiction of the Newton Community Council.

On May 31, 1961 in a report to the Newton Community Council on Edmands Park, Dr. Richard J. Lennihan reported: "A student group from the High School has proposed a work day to initiate the Edmands Park clean up. Some 50-75 honor students, as members of the National Honorary Society, have volunteered their services as a civic project. Saturday, June 3, is the day. Another group of high school students will work with the park during the summer as part of a special Study-Work Seminar conducted by the Newton High School and Tufts University. The students will consider various community problems using Edmands Park as one example. They will try to define the best role for the park for Newton of today and tomorrow. They will also undertake certain specific work projects within the park. Mr. A. Donn Kesselheim, teacher at Newton High School, is responsible for these student activities."

On September 28, 1961, the recently formed Newton Conservators, Inc. appointed Richard J. Lennihan (a member of its board of directors) as liason for the Conservators with other agencies concerned with Edmands Park. He had contacted the schools, via Mrs. Melvin I. Darack, Dr. Bernard Everett, the Science Department head and faculty members; the Boy and Girl Scouts, via an appropriate representative; the City, via the Recreation Department, the Forestry Division in the Street

Department and the Planning Board. He felt the main problem here is to work out a single authority to determine the uses, development and control of Edmands Park in terms of the city's governmental structure.

The activities of the Work-Study Seminar during the summer of 1961 have been recorded on tape and further documented by colored slides which are available for presentation to groups through arrangement with Dr. Franklin Patterson of the Lincoln Filene Civic Education Center of Tufts University. Phone PR6-2100 Ext. 293. Home telephone PA9-1424.

Mr. Peter Kastner, a senior at Newton South High School, was chosen by the seminar group to follow through on plans for work at Edmands Park for next summer, 1962. Mr. Richard Tompkins is a faculty adviser to the group.

Mr. Kastner reports briefly that 22 students and 3 teachers worked at various times on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during a six-week period. For two days they concentrated on trash removal with the aid of city trucks. Five hundred yards of trails were cleared and other fallen trees removed. The picnic area was cleaned up and erosion control initiated.

On the last day of the seminar Mr. Kastner was elected as the follow-through chairman and a class project was proposed for presentation to the sophomore and junior classes at both high schools. Students from both classes would participate in maintenance of Edmands Park on Saturdays throughout the year, weather permitting. Mr. Evan Johnson, director of the Recreation Department, has given the students permission to request funds from his department to aid this project. Mr. Kastner thinks it almost certain that the two classes will accept this proposed class project. Since the compilation of this report, the project has indeed been accepted. The Recreation Department has promised financial aid if the students prove that work is actually in process.

The seminar group arrived at some conclusions about the future use of the park. It is felt that there is no need for a recreation area at Edmands since Newton already has a total of 42 playgrounds, an average of three for every village. Two of these are in the vicinity of Edmands Park. They believe that the park should be nurtured and preserved as a natural area with picnicing limited to a definitely designated area or site.

Immediate objectives are a water fountain, flooding the pond for ice skating, development of the picnic area, a few benches strategically located along the trails, possible replacement of oaks vulnerable to the prevalent oak blight, police surveillance. Mr. Kastner says that Boy and Girl Scouts have already been of help at picking up litter.

The seminar group also wants to investigate the chance of receiving funds for the park if it can qualify as a watershed area.