

Discovering Chestnut Hill: Preserving an Olmsted Brothers Designed Landscape

by Angelina R. Jones,
Conservation and Easements
Manager, Chestnut Hill
Conservancy

Chestnut Hill is distinct from other parts of Philadelphia in its planned and protected marriage of the built environment and natural resources. I am thrilled that in my position as the new Conservation and Easements Manager at the Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Historical Society (CH Conservancy), I am tasked with managing the stewardship of over 130 acres of open space and 13 facades that contribute to the preservation of Chestnut Hill's character.

Established in 1990, our Conservation and Easements Program protects our natural resources, such as the Wissahickon watershed and the incredible diversity of architectural resources that have led to Chestnut Hill being recognized as a National Register Historic District.

Our most recently acquired easement demonstrates this intersection of architecture and natural resources that so perfectly embodies the character of Chestnut Hill and the mission of CH Conservancy's easement program. Nestled between a busy city intersection and Fairmount Park, the Historic Jenks House is a significant resource in the National Register nomination for Chestnut Hill and constitutes more than 2.5 acres of open space in the Wissahickon watershed. The Colonial Revival



One of the historic walls that anchor the design of this early 20th century Olmsted Brothers landscape. (Photo by Emily T. Cooperman)

residence was designed by the Philadelphia firm Zantzinger and Borie and was built between 1908 and 1909 for John S. Jenks, Jr., a prominent Philadelphia businessman.

Not only does the Jenks House survive from the turn of the 20th century, but so does much of the designed landscape of the property, which is a less common occurrence. This landscape, designed between 1908 and 1913 by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm, incorporated mature trees, plantings and stone walls to seamlessly transition between the

Jenks House into the designed garden and beyond to the border of Fairmount Park. As noted by architectural historian Emily T. Cooperman in her research on this property, it is rare to find surviving examples of Olmsted Brothers work in the Philadelphia area.

The Olmsted Brothers was the preeminent landscape architectural firm in the United States when Jenks contracted them to design this property. John Charles Olmsted and his half-brother Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. were the heirs to the renowned legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s visionary land-

scape architectural practice. They began working as principals at the

firm in 1884 and 1897, respectively, and, in 1898, the firm's name was officially changed to Olmsted Brothers.

During the first decades of the 20th century, the Olmsted Brothers greatly increased the number and breadth of projects that were carried out by the firm from the time when the practice was run by Olmsted Sr. Residential and private estate design was one area where the brothers expanded the practice throughout the east coast, including many designs along the spine of the Wissahickon Valley, with a concentration centered around Chestnut Hill. Locations of projects designed by the Olmsted Brothers in the area can be viewed by visiting the National Association for Olmsted Parks' online interactive map at www.olmstedonline.org.

To learn more about the impact of easements in protecting our precious architectural, cultural, and natural resources, contact me at angelina@chconservancy.org.

Pastorius Park pond draw-down set for end of month

The drawdown date for Pastorius Park's pond by Parks & Rec (PPR) will be Thursday, March 30. Over the following three days, March 31, April 1 & 2, already-designated Friends of Pastorius Park volunteers will assist a pond specialist in moving the pond wildlife from approximately 6 inches of remaining water. These dates for the pond work will be dependent on weather conditions and may be rescheduled.

FoPP asks that the public respect the temporary fencing and signage around the moat area of the park, and not disturb the animals (mostly turtles) that will be temporarily sequestered there prior to returning them to the pond after it is cleaned and refilled by PPR.

It is especially important that dogs be kept away from the moat and its bridges. No additional volunteers are needed beyond the ones already organized for helping move fish and turtles. In general, the public should avoid the pond

work areas for safety's sake, and to allow the work to be done efficiently.

April 3 is scheduled for PPR's removal of 17 years' accumulation of sediment and organic matter from the pond. After the emptied pond structure is inspected by a City mason, and any necessary repairs are made, the pond will be refilled, and the animals returned to their home. This is excepting the non-native koi, goldfish and carp, which will be relocated to a private, natural pond. These fish will not survive the copper-based algal treatments (it is safe for the pond's other animals) this Spring. The community should understand that abandoning their pet fish in Pastorius pond will not give them a second life-- it will result in these animals' death, and create a public health problem.

Additionally, PPR will install bathroom stall doors in Pastorius Park's hut this Spring.



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