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## Discover Chestnut Hill: Earth Day turns 50

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**By Alex Bartlett**  
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This week, the world celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day. Its origins were in response to a massive oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, on January 28, 1969. Exactly one year later, Environmental Rights Day was held in Santa Barbara, and plans for the first Earth Day were made. On April 22, 1970, Earth Day symposia were held in over 2,000 colleges and universities across the country, and demonstrations were held demanding environmental reform.

Closer to home, Earth Day activities in Chestnut Hill and the surrounding area were plentiful. Spring Garden College- then located at 102 East Mermaid Lane and long since closed- held a series of lectures addressing topics appropriate for the day. Guest speakers included J. R. Feldmeir, head of the Research Division at the Franklin Institute, and Dr. Arron Wasserman, a member of the Agricultural Research Service at the U.S.D.A research center in Wyndmoor. Spring Garden College faculty member and architect John



This photograph from the April 26, 1990, Chestnut Hill Local shows John Story Jenks School teachers and students celebrating the 20th anniversary of Earth Day by planting a flowering crabapple tree. In front row (left to right) are Melissa Burg, Rachel Daniel,

Clauser also spoke at the event. Lectures were also held at Chestnut Hill College and at the Schuylkill Valley Nature Center.

Those attending the events could then head down to the Belmont Plateau, where 100,000 people were

anticipated to hear landscape architect and Chestnut Hiller Dr. Ian McHarg, as well as Senator Edmund Muskie, urban planner Lewis Mumford, and poet Allen Ginsberg. According to the April 30, 1970 issue of the *Chestnut Hill Local*, attendance at the Belmont Plateau fell short, as only an estimated 25,000 showed.

Tiffany Dupree, Danny Greenberg, Stephen Mould and third grade classroom teacher Shirley Levine. In the back row are Mary Atterbury and Craig Stevenson. Photographs taken as part of the Local's coverage of the 1970 Earth Day do not survive. (Photo courtesy of Chestnut Hill Conservancy)

Many "grass roots" events were held in Chestnut Hill as well. Area eighth graders formed "Operation SCRAP" (Students of Chestnut Hill Revolt Against Pollution). One of their larger projects was to clean up trash throughout the Wissahickon Valley. This effort united students from Jenks, Chestnut Hill Academy, Springside, Our Mother of Consolation, and other schools in our area. Other projects included the planting of many trees in honor of the day, including those along Winston Road near Springfield and Willow Grove Avenues and at Highland station. Members of Boy Scout Troop 348 of Ambler helped with the latter effort.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Archives and Library of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy are closed. However, we have started a new page on the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's website, called "History at Home." If you have a case of "cabin fever," the content is sure to entertain you! Do visit the new content at <http://chconservancy.org/history-at-home> (about:blank). In the meantime, we will continue to monitor our email remotely. Please direct questions to the Archives and Library to Archivist Alex Bartlett at [alex@chconservancy.org](mailto:alex@chconservancy.org) (about:blank). Direct all other inquiries to [info@chconservancy.org](mailto:info@chconservancy.org) (about:blank).

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