

**Research topic:** What is the history of the Murphy-Trainor Memorial Park (dedicated 1994) and the J.T. Owens Park? How and why were they created?

**Findings:** After searching for information about the history of the two parks in State Archive, City Archive, Providence Athenaeum, Rhode Island Historical Society, John Carter Brown Library, Rockefeller Library, online, and by calling Rhode Island Department of Environmental management and Providence Parks and Recreation Department, my findings can be summarized as the following:

**Murphy-Trainor Park**, 4.6 acres of woods on the southwest side of the Mashapaug pond, was purchased by the city and developed into a passive recreation area in June 1994 under a five-year fight by the Mashapaug Pond Action Committee, which was a sub-branch of the Reservoir Triangle Neighborhood Association, to save the woodland from being developed into townhouses.

The space of today's park originally belonged to a Jewish temple. Because the land has high water table, making it impossible for burials, the temple decided to sell the land. The city was reluctant to spend money on this land and the land fell into a private developer's hands. The developer's plan of turning the area into townhouses encountered local people's opposition. Under the pressure of local people's protest, the city bought the land with half a million dollars—a much more amount of money than it could have spent.

It is also said that the money the city paid for buying the land came from a grant the city applied for in 1990 under the 1987 Open Space and Recreational Areas Bond Issue. And the money was 75 percent state, 25 percent city.

The intention of designing the park was to build a path for people to walk along the pond.

Murphy- Trainor Park is named after Joseph Trainor, who was the Chief of Staff in House Finance Committee and was once a very influential person in late 1980s, and Jeremiah P. Murphy, Democrat, born on July 19, 1930, served in Special Legislation and Veterans Committee and Veterans of Foreign Wars, and was elected Representative in 1988. He died in office on August 29, 1992.

Murphy-Trainor Park doesn't appear on Rhode Island Almanac until the year of 1996.

**J.T. Owens Park** was built by the state in 1950s and was taken over by the Parks Department in 1994. The park is dedicated to John T. Owens who was a famous baseball player in amateur local baseball team in Providence. People used to call him "Happy Owens". Owens became a serviceman and was killed in WWII. In *Providence City Directory*, John T. Owens's name disappeared after 1956.

Now the park is a Providence City Park with three baseball fields used by the

Elmwood Little League (since 1951), 2 tennis courts and a small playground. It doesn't appear on Rhode Island Almanac until 1996.

**Research experience:**

Trying to find out the history of these two parks is not easy. It had been very frustrating. Little information could I found after nights of searching information from different resources online and days in libraries and archives. The librarians and archivists I met were all very nice and willing to help. We tried every possible means to discover the history about the parks. Apart from books about history of Providence and reports of Park Commission, I read through Index of Death in Providence from 1851 to 1963 and many of Providence City Directory, trying to find hints about the parks or the people the parks named after. But the discovery was little. Until the archivist in City Archive made a phone call for me to his friend Bob McMahon, the director of the Providence Parks Department, I got to know that Murphy Trainor is actually names of two persons instead of just one. Then I tracked the clue that Murphy was a legislator and I found Jeremiah P. Murphy's information in State Archive.

In the most hopeless moment (when I couldn't find any relevant information after visiting 4 libraries; lost clue online too, for instance, there was even no information about the once existed for 5-year Mashapaug Pond Action Committee; and couldn't go to the parks in person for the bus 21 didn't work during weekends and holidays), I shot an email to David Talan, who was said to

be “instrumental in the development of Murphy-Trainor Park” in an article of Providence Journal, “grew up in the Triangle, moving here with his family when he was 5 years old,” and who was the former president of Reservoir Triangle Neighborhood Association as well as a former member of the Board of Park Commissioners. I sent him an email to the address that I could only find from a website of about 5 years ago when Dave tried to run for mayor of Providence. Surprisingly he replied saying he’d like to talk about the two parks. But he was engaged with many meetings today and thus wasn’t available. I will give him a call again tomorrow.

I think I did my best in digging out the history of the two parks. I enjoyed the process though it was once frustrating. I met many very nice people and felt like I worked as a historian and an investigative journalist which was exciting.

Chang

**Reference:**

- 1.“Construction of 4 parks to begin in June, Supt. Nancy Derrig outlined the department's upcoming projects, including four new parks and improvements at two others”. *Providence Journal*, May 25, 1994, p. D-01
- 2.“NEIGHBORHOODS Pride runs deep in Reservoir Triangle Providence neighborhood offers residents a suburban quality of life”, *Providence Journal*, Apr. 30, 1994, p. D-04

3. "City to swell fresh waterfront \*The Parks Department plans to buy a 1.87-acre site adjoining Murphy-Trainor Park on Mashapaug Pond." *Providence Journal*, Apr 10, 1996. p. C.01

4. "If you build it, they will come \*The city purchases nearly two acres to add to its parkland around Mashapaug Pond", *Providence Journal*, Feb 21, 1997. p. C.01

5. "The Triangle shapes up - Mashapaug Pond area offers city living with natural beauty and strong community " , *Providence Journal*, Dec. 19, 1999, p. G 01