

## OUR PUBLIC RESERVATIONS

### A LOOK FORWARD TO THEIR FULL DEVELOPMENT AND USE

How to Get the People to Them—Trolley Lines to the Blue Hills—The Seaside Parkways—The Mystic Valley—A Coherent Plan Possible for Reservations Well Chosen for Their Adaptation to the Purposes for Which They Were Intended

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With our great and unrivalled system of metropolitan open spaces secured forever for public use and enjoyment, and made accessible by a far-sighted and comprehensive scheme of approaches, the problem, appropriate for consideration at the beginning of a new year and a new era, is how to make these public reservations best fulfil the purpose for which they were created. It is a question that in its explicit bearings must be considered with reference to each particular instance. There are, however, certain principles that are of general application. When an area becomes public property the tendency is for the public to resort thither in vastly increased numbers, however celebrated its scenery may have been and however unrestricted its access under private ownership. In the case of the Blue Hills, for example, at the time when the primary Metropolitan Park Commission was engaged in this epoch-making investigation, it was thought that it would be sufficient to secure the land and defer its adaptation for public uses for another generation. Franklin Park, it may be remembered, lay untouched and comparatively little frequented for several years after it became public domain. Since that time, however, the metropolitan community has learned the real significance of a public park—something which it did not realize in those days.

In the first place, when the Blue Hills and other metropolitan park reservations were secured, it at once became necessary to take steps for the protection of the valuable properties which had come into the possession of the public—particularly against the destructive fires that had devastated large areas every year. To this end various provisional roads had to be built to give access to the different parts of the reservations. Then the fact that these regions had become public reservations advertised them widely, and the number of visitors at once increased to an enormous extent. So the provisional roads served the public after a fashion. To prevent fires, maintain order and assist the public in the use of these domains a force of guards had to be organized. The extent of use of the respective reservations has been governed by their location and their character.

The Blue Hills, being the most remote of the great reservations, has not been frequented by such multitudes as the Middlesex Fells, which lie within six miles of the State House in a direct line and surrounded by a large population. Nevertheless the Blue Hills Reservation has been remarkably popular, the mountain-like character of the scenery attracting visitors even from remote sections. The crossing of the reservation by a trolley line at Randolph avenue has, moreover, greatly promoted the accessibility of the reservation, bringing excursionists from as far away as Brockton and beyond as well as from metropolitan directions. Another trolley line by way of the great Blue Hills Parkway is also in prospect. In Middlesex Fells the provisional roads are, as a rule, already inadequate to the needs of pleasure traffic. Revere Beach, of course, is enormously popular, and the crowds there are one of the great sights of the summer months in the New England metropolis. In one week of its first year as a public reservation, when little had yet been done for its improvement, there were at least 200,000 visitors.

In one of the Metropolitan Park reports it is remarked that the development of the reservations will have to proceed much quicker than was originally intended. Since that was written the work of development has been entered upon in relation to certain properties and either far advanced or practically completed, in certain instances, and the public is receiving dividends in the shape of recreation that would otherwise be impossible—dividends that more than justify the work. Those reservations that have been thus developed are of a nature, it should be said, that they could not well have been utilized by the public without such treatment. Revere Beach has been thoroughly developed for about half its length under very complete designing, and Winthrop Shore has likewise been entirely constructed according to a less elaborate plan that, however, en-

roads built in the various reservations, and there has been some chopping and some clearing of woods. But neither the road construction nor the forestry work has been what it would have been had general plans been made. Much of this work to be sure has been necessary for the reasons above given. But it may be questioned if it has not gone further than it should have, and if the preparation of plans should not be undertaken for these reservations in a manner commensurate with those already executed. The lack of plan becomes all the more apparent in view of the admirable system of parkways now completed to the very gates of the reservations, where all evidence of planning suddenly ceases. It is something like inviting a company to a festival, with the stateliest preparations for the reception of the guests until the banquet hall, where nothing has been finished beyond the enclosing walls. This does not imply a demand for any scheme of elaborate development, or any immediate development whatever within the reservations; only that when any development work is demanded it may not have to proceed planlessly, and hence, in the truest sense, extravagantly, but with an artistic simplicity worthy of the landscape.

Such wisdom has been shown in all the fundamental work of the metropolitan park system that careful planning to guide the development of these great wilderness reservations seems all the more a logical corollary. Unprecedented care and foresight has been shown in the selection of the lands and the arrangement of the boundaries. Nowhere else has a great system of public parks been so wisely located with reference to the needs of the community; nowhere else have the boundary lines been so thoughtfully studied. In relation to the interior of the reservations a continuance of the same policy may therefore reasonably be expected.

No undertaking, of any kind, in any art or industry whatever, either large or small, can be successfully consummated without thoughtful planning. In landscape architecture the question of plan is just as essential in the most natural as in the most formal work; in sites like the Blue Hills, Middlesex Fells or Revere Beach, just as much as in the grounds of the World's Fair at Chicago. The magnificent success of the World's Fair could not have been possible but for the thoughtful planning from which the whole grand project took shape. These metropolitan reservations will likewise never serve the public as they might unless developed under careful planning. The late Charles Eliot once said that the opening of roads which has been done in these reservations was like setting carpenters to work on the halls of a great building before study has been given to the plan of the whole; and to put wood-choppers at work on the modification of the vegetation is like setting fresco-painters at work on canvas for the decoration of a building before the plan has shown where the decorations may be placed.

In the report of the Metropolitan Park Commission issued in 1897, Mr. Eliot, representing the landscape architects, discussed very sensibly the reasons why no permanent work should be undertaken in advance of the study and official adoption of a comprehensive programme embracing both the means of saving and heightening the value of all the scenery in the reservations, and the means of making that scenery agreeably accessible. It was pointed out that a due regard for the high purpose of public reservations, as well as for the economical fulfilment of that purpose, prohibits piecemeal, unrelated and hand-to-mouth work in such domains, precisely as it prohibits planless and disconnected work for the

improving their grades, to build permanent roads without regard to any programme for developing the forest scenery, or to attempt woodmen's work without reference to any road plans, will be to fix, without consideration, permanent features which will only obstruct the people of the metropolitan district in obtaining from these reservations that measure of refreshing and uplifting enjoyment which alone can justify their great cost and their excision from the taxable area."

It should be constantly borne in mind that these metropolitan wilderness reservations can only fulfil their purpose by being made accessible and enjoyable to the largest possible proportion of the public that own them. Their best aspects can now be seen only by a comparatively few hardy persons used to rough tramping through woods and across country. But there are multitudes of impassioned lovers of natural beauty who cannot do this, and who will, therefore, be practically excluded from enjoyment of their own so long as their needs are not considered. Fortunately it is possible to meet these needs without any extravagant or excessive outlay. These great public woodlands are wild and rough and their character calls for no elaborate park-like treatment. Their wildness and roughness, their rugged beauty, their sylvan charms, are the things that need emphasis and development. But not to take the course advised by the landscape architects means, on the contrary, the taming and monotonizing of the scenery most deplorably.

For instance, the routes of the present temporary roads have no reference at all to the scenery of the reservations. All enjoyment that they afford in this regard is quite at haphazard. For the most part they traverse exclusively woods of sprout-growth, not in the least impressive. The woods make a pleasant shade in summer, but they mark the diversities of the landscape entirely, so that but for the violent and at times unsafe alternations of grade, they give no hint of the remarkably diversified rock-hill scenery about them, and one might as well be traversing the flat gravelly country of southeastern Massachusetts. On the other hand, it requires no exceptionally vivid imagination to discern how routes might easily be chosen that would take the visitor through a succession of varying scenes, quickening the soul and delighting the eye with fresh beauty at every step; leading now through pines, now maples, now hemlocks, now beeches, larches and oaks; the way here, running through some wild ravine bordered by towering cliffs, here skirting a slope that commands foliage-framed vistas over hill and dale, now penetrating the seclusion of a sylvan glen, with grassy glades bordered by bosky banks, again coursing along lake-shores and past quiet forest pools, then gradually winding up to slightly hilltops with prospects that survey all the wilderness roundabout and extend away to distant mountains and the ocean's expanse. Such a feast of beauty, of incomparable charm, is easily obtainable by the simplest means—but requiring merely the taking of thought by minds trained to that end by professional experience in the service of landscape art. Mr. Olmsted once said that the metropolitan parks of Boston were the first instance of a system where the sites were chosen solely with reference to their fitness for the purpose. Not to take the fullest advantage of this precious circumstance would be very much like building an art museum at great cost and then obscuring the galleries so that pictures could not be seen.

"Inauguration"

JANUARY 17, 1901

### THE PARK TROLLEY DECISION

While the Metropolitan Park Commissioners have not in flat terms denied the petitions of the street railway companies for locations in the Blue Hills Reservation and in the approaching parkways, they have said enough to clearly indicate what their policy is to be in this matter. In brief, it is this: That the parkways were intended for use as avenues of approach to the woodland reservations and that under proper and necessary restrictions trolley cars may be admitted within their limits. That car locations across the reservations proper cannot be granted without first making a careful study of those sections through which it is desired by the petitioners to run their tracks, especially with a view to the probable future location of roadways.

This means, as clearly as though stated in so many words, that no tracks can be laid through the Marigold Valley, and it may further be regarded as a movement on the part of the commission to adopt, in part at least, the oft repeated recommendations of its landscape advisers that complete plans for the full and final development of the entire park system be prepared long in advance of their execution. But the intimation contained in the commission's letter to the Blue Hills Street Railway Company is that plans for future development will be made of those sections of the Blue Hills Reservation immediately affected by the present petition.

This does not appear to be a logical proposition. It is in fact in direct conflict with the advice of Charles Eliot, who undertook to warn especially against any such piecemeal and fragmentary work. The work of carefully studying and planning should extend over the entire Blue Hills Reservation, and should include not only the layout of roads which will adequately exhibit the scenery, but should also seek to improve the elements of the landscape. It should not stop at the Blue Hills, either, but should be extended to the Fells, at least, where this trolley problem is sure to arise in the immediate future. The cost of such a work would not be excessive since the commission is already equipped with the basis for

the studies in the topographical and forest maps.

The locations sought by the Brockton and Blue Hills companies over the Blue Hills Parkway are not denied by the commission, but they are to be held in abeyance for a brief space until the parkway can be completed. The same policy has been adopted with reference to the Blue Hills Company's petition for a route to Readville. Unless the Legislature will grant the funds for carrying out the making of these plans this year, no trolley connections are likely to be secured in these two directions for another year at least. It would seem reasonable to regard these two sections of parkway as unfinished work, the completion of which appears to be greatly demanded in the interest of public convenience.

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## PARK TROLLEYS TO WAIT

### Commissioners Reply to the Petitioners

#### Locations in Parkways Admittedly in Demand

#### All Routes Must Await Further Study

#### Text of the Letters from the Board to Railways

It is now something over a month since the Metropolitan Park Commission held its public hearing relative to the petitions for trolley car locations in the Blue Hills reservation and certain parkways leading thereto. Evidently the subject has received very careful consideration, and is likely to receive still further study by the board, judging by the letters just forwarded to the petitioners by the commission. The entire subject having so recently been before the public in considerable detail it is unnecessary to rehearse the facts here even in brief. The chief petition was from the Blue Hills Street Railway Company, and asked for several locations, all largely interdependent. The other petitioner was the Brockton road for a location over a short stretch of parkway.

In replying to the Blue Hills Company the commissioners remind the petitioners that this is the first time they have been called upon to act under the new law (chapter 413 of the acts of 1900), and they further call attention to the important expression of public opinion brought out at the hearing. Continuing, the commissioners say:

"Two classes of questions were raised by your petition, namely, those relating to locations in the parkways, and those relating to locations within the reservations themselves. It appears to be the general opinion that public convenience will be served by electric railways through the parkways to the borders of the reservations when they will make the reservations more accessible. As the parkways referred to in your petition are designed to accommodate electric railways the inquiry relating to this class of locations is reduced to the feasibility of granting locations in these parkways in their present condition and to the terms and conditions upon which they should be granted.

"The hearing, however, made it clear that the questions relating to the granting of locations within the reservations themselves were much more difficult to decide as they involve a consideration of the purposes for which the reservations were acquired and the effect which the granting of locations would have upon these purposes. The arguments presented on both sides were able and shed much light upon the matter. Nevertheless the board feels it cannot decide intelligently upon the questions raised until it has made a careful study of the portion of the Blue Hills Reservation within which the locations are asked for, especially with a view to the probable future location of roads in and around the reservation. That is to say, a decision as to the future development of the reservation itself is a necessary preliminary to an understanding of how far the public necessities may overbalance the evident disadvantage of introducing so discordant an element as an electric railway into a reservation. If called upon to reach an immediate conclusion on the portion of your petition which relates to the Blue Hills reservation itself, the board will, therefore, feel obliged to refuse the locations asked for.

"The board feels that it would be unwise to act upon the remaining portions of your petition at the present time, for the following reasons: The locations asked for are intended to provide a railway line from Mattapan to the Blue Hills Reservation by the Blue Hills parkway, and to provide a location from Readville to the Blue Hills Reservation and along the edge of the reservation to form a connection with your road at Washington street, Canton.

"So far as the first route is concerned it would require a location upon the bridge across the Neponset River at Mattapan, of which only one-half is now under the control of this board, and upon the other half of which a location has already been granted by the city of Boston to the West Roxbury and Roslindale Street Railway Company. It would also call for a location over a portion of the parkway between Canton avenue and the reservation which is not yet constructed, and for which the board, prior to your petition, had not felt called upon to prepare detailed plans of construction. The Legislature of 1900, however, authorized the board to acquire the bridge at Mattapan and build a new one. The plans for the new bridge are nearly completed, and it is hoped that construction will begin in the spring. In consequence of your petition the board has ordered construction plans to be prepared for the unfinished portion of Blue Hills parkway to the reservation, although it has no present funds with which to construct the same. Until these plans are prepared and approved and the bridge has been acquired it will be impossible to properly determine upon and grant the location which you desire. The board will, however, suspend action upon your petition, if you so desire, until these matters are definitely settled.

"So far as relates to a location from Readville to the Blue Hills Reservation, your petition necessarily assumes that all the land for a parkway between the lands about Paul's Bridge over the Neponset River and the Blue Hills Reservation has been acquired by this board. Such is not the case. Moreover, the funds at the disposal of this board will not permit the acquirement of land for this parkway, and it is uncertain whether the Legisla-

ture will in the near future provide the necessary funds. Of course it is impossible to grant a location upon land not already acquired, and it seems unwise to grant only a portion of the location asked for upon lands already acquired. For these reasons the board cannot grant this portion of your petition, but in view of the fact that the Legislature is now in session, it will suspend action if you so desire until it be definitely ascertained whether provisions for acquiring the land will be made during the coming year."

No decision has been reached in the petition of the Brockton road, and the letter of the commissioners is merely a preliminary statement of the facts as they appear to the board. The letter states that the commission is inclined to look favorably on the petition, but that owing to certain facts it seems wise to postpone action in the premises. In explanation of their position, the commissioners write as follows:

"Although the parkway itself is constructed with a central grass space to provide for a railway location, it narrows in its approach to the bridge, and the bridge itself is old, very narrow and inadequate for even present uses. The Legislature of 1900 authorized the board to remove the present bridge and to build a new one. Plans providing for a new bridge eighty feet in width are nearly completed and it is hoped that construction will begin in the spring. Until matters relating to this improvement are fully determined upon, it does not seem wise to grant any company a railway location either upon the present bridge or upon the parkway to the edge of the present bridge. The board, however, has no present reason to doubt that when these matters are all arranged it will be in a position to take up and consider definitely the granting upon proper terms of a location substantially as asked by you between Brook road and Mattapan Square."