



PLACE

Fall/Winter 2023

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance
is a non-profit membership organization
dedicated to the enhancement of open
space in Brookline by supporting citizens
in caring for their green spaces.

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Editor Marian Lazar

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Cover photo: Carlton Street Footbridge

The Importance of Friends Groups

One of the primary objectives of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is to foster and support volunteer groups who help care for, and advocate for, our parks. Park Friends groups' contribution to the quality of life in Brookline is invaluable. BGSA acts as an umbrella organization hosting gatherings to exchange ideas, serving as a fiscal sponsor, promoting group activities, holding informational meetings with the Parks and Open Space Director, and providing small grants for special projects.

This month we are highlighting two Park Friends groups in the Riverway section of the Emerald Necklace.

In 1998 The Friends of the Carlton Street Footbridge was formed to educate and advocate for the restoration of the Footbridge. In the 1890 Olmsted park plan a bridge was shown to act as an entrance to the park. The steel truss bridge crossed over train tracks that acted as a barrier to the park from Brookline. After serving as a pedestrian bridge making the park accessible to Brookline for over half a century the bridge had been closed due to 'delayed maintenance'. A 1990 Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan called for restoration and reopening of the bridge. The Friends formed as a coalition of Brookline neighbors and other citizens supporting preservation of Olmsted's Longwood link to the Emerald Necklace. Finally, in September 2023 the Friends participated in the celebration for the restoration and reopening of the bridge.

The Friends of the Muddy River, FMR, was also established in response to a neglected park system. FMR was founded in September 1980 by Isabella Callanan, a resident of Brookline, and became an official 501(c) tax deductible charitable organization the following year. It was formally incorporated August 1985. Concurrently, another organization with a similar mission, Restore Olmsted's Waterway or ROW, was established by Irene Gillis. Only the FMR has lasted and succeeded over the years even after Isabella's death in 2008.

As background, in the 1980s, the Muddy River was an abysmal waterway, polluted and prone to flooding, but still a central and unifying feature of Olmsted's Emerald Necklace. The River originated at Jamaica Pond and entered the Charles River at Charlesgate at the Bowker Overpass. Both the beginning and end of the Muddy River are in Boston, and while it is a central feature of Olmsted Park, the Riverway, and the Back Bay Fens, Brookline's official status with the river is along its western side, with the river being the boundary between the two municipalities as it flows through Ward's Pond, the Babbling Brook to Willow Pond and into Leverett Pond. It continues at the north end of the pond where it goes underground at the Curley overpass and enters the Riverway, the narrower part of the Necklace, and flows North until it meets the town-city line in the vicinity of the Back Bay Yard at Park Drive.

The Friends has been a strong organization holding activities to engage a community of park users and advocates. Over the years the FMR has published at least one newsletter per year, has been actively involved with both Boston and Brookline in the planting and maintenance of trees and shrubs, most recently at the Dukakis Dedication site at the Longwood T. Along Brookline Ave. they have helped maintain the renovated bus stop at Aspinwall Ave. and through the years, the classic Olmsted horse trough planter where the Muddy River crosses under Brookline Ave. for which they received a citation from the Mass. Horticultural Society. They have donated

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President's Message

On August 1, 2023, two dogwood trees were planted in Brookline's Olmsted Park. Both were in honor of Arlene Mattison, who has been an ardent advocate for parks and open space for decades and served as president of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance (BGSA) from 2002 until 2023 before stepping down this spring.

The first tree was donated by the BGSA. Arlene's BGSA colleagues felt that planting a native species in a park that Arlene loves to visit would be the perfect way to recognize her service to the organization.

To the surprise and delight of the BGSA, the Town of Brookline donated the second dogwood to further honor Arlene. Town staff, particularly those who have served in the Parks and Open Space Division, are well aware of Arlene's track record as a greenspace advocate and wanted to show their appreciation

At the early-morning tree-planting ceremony attended by Arlene, her husband Hugh, their children, and many friends and fellow greenspace proponents, speaker after speaker praised Arlene for her leadership of BGSA and thanked her for all she has done for the community.

Arlene has been an extraordinary leader who never wavered in her dedication to maintaining and improving Brookline's parks and open space. She has always brought a passionate intensity to the fight for parks, open space, and the environment. It is not hard to find her legacy: just stand near the two dogwoods and look around at Olmsted Park and Leverett Pond. All over Brookline, there is greenspace that Arlene helped to create or improve: Fisher Hill Reservoir Park, Olmsted Park, and John Street parklet are some examples.

Arlene recently told me the most important lessons and advice from her years as BGSA president. She reminded me to never forget that green space and trees are essential to a healthy quality of life and a sustainable future. Maintenance of parks and open space always has to be a priority. One of the most important things the BGSA does is to serve as an advocate for the Town's hard-working Parks and Open Space Division. Above all, parks need friends to thrive. I will do everything I can to follow this advice.

Arlene left a solid foundation for the GreenSpace Alliance to build on—and I intend to build on it. I realize that I have the proverbial “big shoes to fill,” but I look forward to leading BGSA as it calls for better parks and open spaces, hosts events and activities that encourage enjoyment and exploration of Brookline's green spaces, and assists the dozens of friends groups that serve as essential stewards of parks, playgrounds, and nature sanctuaries in every part of Brookline. I am very fortunate that Arlene remains on the BGSA board and generously provides ample advice and assistance, which I have needed many times in the past few months. I join so many others in thanking her for her service and for always being a strong voice for supporting, preserving, and improving greenspace and the environment.

Sean Lynn-Jones

Sean Lynn-Jones became president of BGSA in June 2023. He previously served as BGSA vice president. For many years, he has been active in the Friends of Monmouth Park and the Friends of the Carlton Street Footbridge.



Above: Hugh and Arlene Mattison and Sean Lynn-Jones.

Below: Planting dogwoods to honor Arlene Mattison

A Long History for a Short Bridge

Hugh Mattison



Alexis French, Brookline Town Engineer, designer of the Carlton Street Footbridge

A sunny Sunday, Sept. 17, marked the official re-opening celebration for the Carlton Street Footbridge (CSF). This 108' pony truss bridge links the Longwood residential neighborhood of Brookline with Riverway Park, one of the parks in Boston/Brookline's Emerald Necklace parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. This article tells some of the story leading up to this day.

In 1984, the Dukakis administration initiated the Mass. Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program to renovate a number of Massachusetts Olmsted parks. Personally, I first became aware of the CSF in about 1985, when, as a member of a committee making recommendations for specific tasks to implement an Emerald Necklace Master Plan, we included an element "Restore the Carlton Street pedestrian bridge over the MBTA tracks to re-establish pedestrian access to the park." Subsequently, the Brookline Select Board, along with the City of Boston, endorsed the Plan. But that was only the start of renewal for the CSF.

This steel Footbridge, designed in 1894 by Alexis French, Brookline Town Engineer and Olmsted collaborator in all phases of park construction, had deteriorated from "deferred" maintenance until it was closed in 1976. Since then until 2021 when it was dismantled for restoration it has been an eyesore and an unattractive nuisance for park users.



Frederick Law Olmsted



In 1998, neighbors and park advocates sought funding for restoration and formed Friends of the Carlton Street Footbridge. However, a small vocal group of neighbors opposed restoration, claiming the bridge was an "invitation to crime". At the same time, a police captain opined "increased pedestrian traffic in the neighborhood would put more eyes and ears in the neighborhood. I believe it will deter criminals." A member of WalkBoston commented that "the bridge is an important link to Riverway paths". (Boston Globe 4/9/2000).

In 2001-2002, historic reports found that the CSF was an element intended by Olmsted; transportation, accessibility, and public safety studies showed handicapped accessibility could possibly be granted a waiver, and that the area was generally low in crime. One report projected that "a reopened footbridge would serve about 40 people a day". (Globe 1/27/2002)



Carlton Street Footbridge 1976

While a few opponents charged there was a lack of "historicity" and Olmsted did not himself design the footbridge (Alexis French, Brookline's first Town Engineer, worked closely with Olmsted on designing the civil engineering of the Emerald Necklace infrastructure), Preservation Mass named the CSF one of the Ten Most Endangered Resources of 2002.

The Fall 2002 Town Meeting featured two competing warrant articles; one article requested \$30,000 for plans and costs “associated with the reconstruction, relocation or removal” of the CSF. The other requested unspecified funds for reconstruction. The \$30,000 article was approved leaving the question of which alternative (restoration or removal) unresolved.

During this Town Meeting, one Precinct 1 opponent boasted “The overwhelming majority of residents in Precinct 1 oppose bridge restoration. The odds strongly favor that we will be 15 in 2004.” At that time, thirteen of the fifteen Town Meeting Members living closest to the bridge favored removal. But that situation was soon to change.

During the time of discussion about the bridge, a 100 year storm occurred in the Boston area. Complicating decisions about the future of the CSF was a proposed (completed in 2023) \$91 million flood control and environmental improvements project under the control of the Army Corps of Engineers to deal with extensive Muddy River flooding in 1996 and 1998. In 2002, as a condition in a Draft Environmental Improvements Report, the Mass. Secretary of Environmental Affairs issued a finding that the CSF is “historically significant and is an integral part of the Olmsted Park System.”(2002 DEIR Certificate). Failure to comply with this stipulation suggested that state funding for the Muddy River Restoration Project would be denied.

Over the next three years, Brookline DPW prepared an application for 90% funding through Mass DOT Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funded by federal and state gasoline tax revenue.

In late 2005, one Selectman (supported by CSF opponents) charged that the DPW Commissioner had made false statements on the application and was allegedly guilty of fraud. “Lying in a federal grant application is a very serious matter and one that has compromised the Town’s reputation.” A raucous 2-hour debate attended by at least 150 crowded into the 6th floor Selectmen’s hearing room. In the end, the other four Selectmen voted to take no further action, and the one opposing Selectman chose not to run for re-election. (Brookline TAB 12/9/2005).



By 2009, the agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers for the Muddy River flood control and environmental improvements project was ready to be signed. “A decade-long donnybrook...flared



Above: First step in restoration: The bridge is disassembled and loaded on a truck for restoration at the Aetna facility in Rhode Island.

Below and at left: Welding, re-enforcing, sandblasting, priming and painting of the main span.



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Carlton Street Footbridge (continued)



up again.” (Boston Globe 3/8/2009). In the end, Town Meeting voted in a roll call 194-24 for \$1.4 million for the restoration and rehabilitation of the bridge, but with the provision that if the Town did not receive grants that would pay for at least 60% of the cost, the project would have to wait until the contracts for Phase 2 of the Muddy River Restoration Project were executed. This condition did not prevent the Town from moving forward with the bridge project. Brookline received a grant to restore the bridge, and the Muddy River Project also moved forward.



The glacial movement through the governmental process for restoration was underway, with Gov. Dukakis testifying in 2010 before the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee (part of MA DOT) “The Carlton Street bridge has been a monument of civic neglect... this is a very important project.” However, some opposition continued, “It was a dangerous and menacing hangout for druggies, drinkers and loiterers. Everyone in the neighborhood knew this and avoided it.” (TAB 1/27/2010)



Despite delays, by 2015, the project had risen in the MassDOT queue where letters of support were needed. Neighborhood groups, MASCO (now the Longwood Collective), Livable Streets, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, along with the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance and others wrote letters of support. Gov. Dukakis again wrote “Why it has taken us so long to do something we should have done at the time the footbridge was declared unsafe is beyond me. In fact, our failure to do so has been a monument to civic neglect and is really not worthy of this community.” (10/26/2015).



In January, 2020 MassDOT received a bid of \$5.8 million, 76% higher than their estimate. So the specs were refined and clarified, and it was re-bid. Aetna Bridge Co. of Warwick, RI successfully bid about \$4 million for the construction contract. In

June 2021, Aetna dismantled the bridge and trucked it down to its facility (really just a small parking lot and painting shed) in Coventry, RI for extensive welding, reinforcing, sandblasting, priming and painting. The last step before transport back to Brookline was to “dry-fit” all the pieces to ensure a smooth assembly in Brookline.



Long term advocates for bridge restoration at the soft opening in August. Left to right: John VanScoyoc, Cathleen Cavell, Patricia Schram, Sean Lynn-Jones, and Robert Schram.

The return of the footbridge: From 5 AM to 8 AM, the entire main span was lifted over the trees and placed on the vertical steel columns

Meanwhile in Brookline, footings and foundations were poured for stairs and extensive ramps, high voltage power lines over the MBTA tracks were shielded, and historic red oaks were pruned and protected. On October 16, 2022, the restored main span and stairways were transported back to Brookline. From 5 AM to 8 AM, the entire main span was lifted over the trees and placed on the vertical steel columns. Everything fit together. In 2023, many tasks were performed: custom cutting stair and decking treads, installation of lighting both in the park and on the bridge, construction and attachment of the accessible ramps (about 210'), painting (work above the MBTA tracks had to be performed at night or when not operating), grading and landscaping using Olmsted-appropriate plantings, and paving paths on both park and street sides.



The celebration was a joyful and congratulatory event. Many advocates joined with Brookline officials, Aetna workers, and Gov. Dukakis in the ribbon-cutting. Most of these small historic bridges are being demolished; this one will last another hundred years! As a speaker at the event, I remarked “Utopians build bridges where rivers don’t exist. And today, many of you should consider yourselves Utopians.”



The bridge now fully accessible and a wonderful place to view the trains.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

For over 20 years, I was an active proponent of restoring and reopening the Carlton Street footbridge, but I never thought about what it would be like to walk over the bridge. I focused on other questions. Would Precinct I elect Town Meeting members who supported restoring the bridge? Would Town Meeting vote to appropriate funds to restore the bridge? Would Brookline get a grant to help pay for restoring the bridge? When would MassDOT allow the project to move forward? When would the contract for bridge restoration go out to bid? Would contractors submit acceptable bids? When would the project start? When would restoration of the bridge be completed?

When the bridge finally reopened in August 2023, I was surprised and delighted by the sheer pleasure of the experience of walking across the bridge. As I approached the bridge, the gentle gradient of granite steps made it easy to ascend to the main span. When I stepped onto the bridge, the noise from vehicles on Colchester and Carlton Streets quickly faded and serenity prevailed. Apart from when an MBTA train rumbled by, I enjoyed peace and quiet, because only pedestrians and cyclists can use the bridge. As I walked on the main span, high above the Green Line tracks, I found myself enveloped in the green leafy shade of the trees that were now at eye level. The height of the bridge also gave me a new perspective on Riverway Park as I looked down at the contours of the Muddy River’s islands and banks. Through the open metalwork and mesh of the bridge’s trusses, I—and many fascinated children—could see the passing trolleys below. The bridge’s familiar surroundings all looked different and better when viewed from the restored and reopened span.

Sometimes getting what you wish for is even more than you had hoped.

Sean Lynn-Jones



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Get Involved

Have an idea for a park project? Opportunities exist to improve your neighborhood park. Do you have the approval of the Director of the Parks and Open Space Division? Apply for a small grant from the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance.
www.brooklinegreenspace.org.

Or apply for a grant from the CPA (Community Preservation Act)
www.brooklinema.gov/3541/Community-Preservation-Act-Funding.

Make A Difference!
Join the Alliance

The Importance of Friends Groups (continued)

generously to other like organizations including the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and the Friends of Fairsted lecture series. More recently, donations have gone to the artists group that organizes the yearly “Studios Without Walls,” a sculptural exhibit in the vicinity of the Longwood T stop. One of their unaccomplished goals is to organize an appropriate memorial to Isabella Callanan.

The FMR is looking for new members to join forces on behalf of Riverway Park and the Muddy River and revitalize the activities and activism that a Friends group can provide.

Are you interested in helping build community around this Emerald Neck-lace park? Please email carroll.m.williamson@gmail.com to join the Friends or for more information.

In many ways the original mission of the organization has been accom-plished by the improved stewardship by Boston Parks and Recreation, Brookline Parks and Open Space, and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. There are, however, opportunities to look to the future and improvements to the path systems, the condition of stone bridges, and the health of new plantings and restoration of the River itself. FMR is also looking for new people to provide invigorated leadership and serve on the FMR Board.

For more information about Park Friends groups see the BGSA website,



www.brookline-greenspace.org, or write info@brooklinegreenspace.org

or call 617-277-4777 on Brookline Avenue, maintained by the Friends of the Muddy River.