

A History of Keney Park

Hartford, Connecticut

**Researched and Written by
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**Given Exclusively to the Hartford History Center,
Hartford Public Library**

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Preface

As a graduate student in the public history program at Central Connecticut State University, my final capstone project became the listing of Keney Park on the National Register of Historic Places. I was first introduced to this project through the Hartford Preservation Alliance (HPA), where I had previously interned and currently volunteer. The mission of HPA is the preservation of not only Hartford's historic structures and landscapes, but also the community fabric that is held together by such places. As of early 2011, only one portion of Keney Park (the West Open) had been included on the National Register, as it was added to the Upper Albany Historic District. Listing the remaining majority of the nearly 700-acre park is currently my task, with vital guidance and assistance provided by the HPA staff.

For a site or structure to be approved for listing on the National Register, which is essentially an honor roll of national heritage sites that does not necessarily guarantee future protection, historic significance of the place must be demonstrated. Keney Park no doubt has sufficient historic significance to warrant listing. To research that history I turned to a number of resources and depositories, the most helpful of which was the Hartford History Center in the Hartford Public Library.

From my inquiries, though, I realized that no single comprehensive history of Keney Park exists for use by researchers anywhere. Since the parks of Hartford are often a popular topic of study, and since Keney Park in particular is one of the city's most important parks, I felt it would be extremely helpful if I wrote a brief history of the park. On account of the immense help provided to me by the Hartford History Center, and considering the large parks collection they already hold, it seemed completely appropriate to give this work exclusively to that fine institution. It is hoped that this history will be of assistance to those seeking to learn more about one of the great urban parks in America. And thankfully for me, I now have a comprehensive history to consult when writing the National Register nomination for Keney Park.

Todd Jones
January 2011

Keney Park: Located in Hartford and Windsor, Connecticut

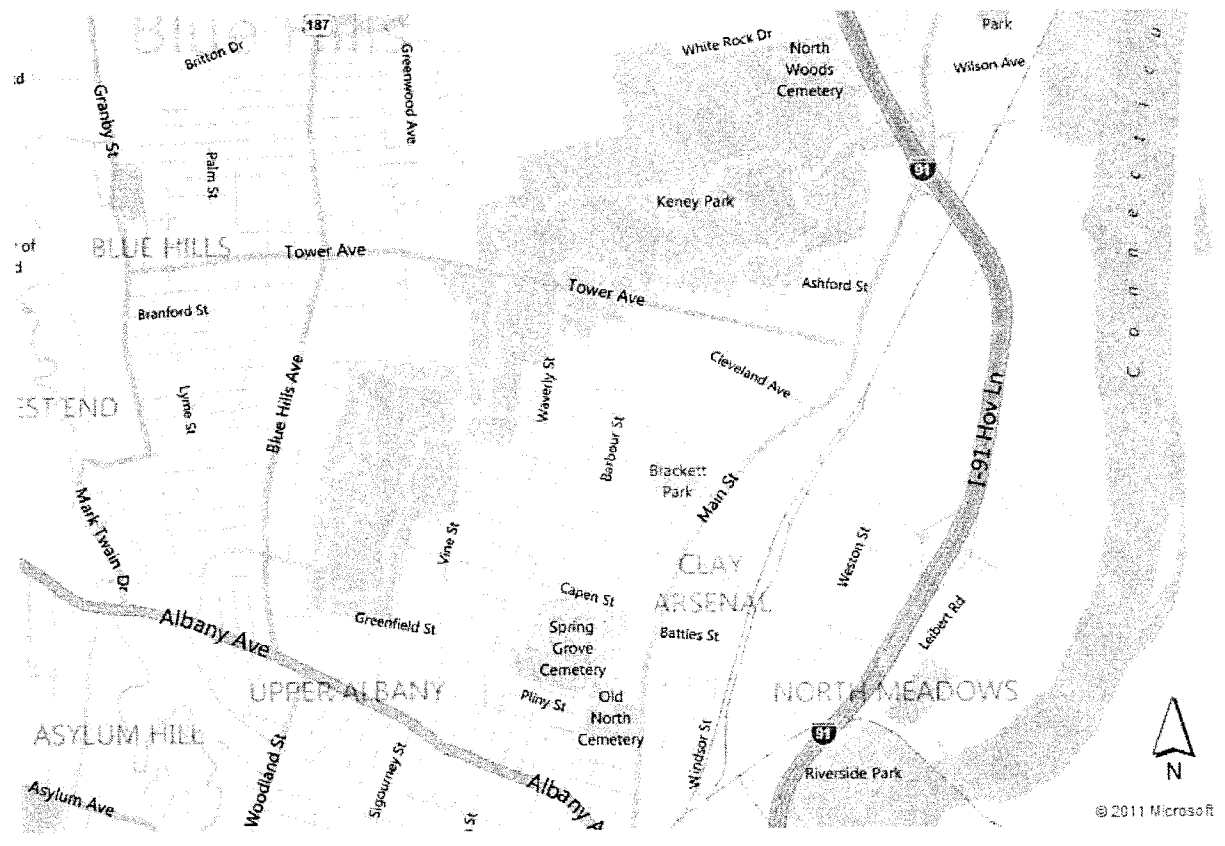


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Historic Context Timeline

- 1853-** Hartford's Bushnell Park is the first public park created in America
- 1856-** The Charter Oak falls in a windstorm
- 1861-** The Civil War begins
- 1874-** Mark Twain moves to Hartford
- 1879-** The new State Capitol building opens in Bushnell Park in Hartford
- 1894-** Henry Keney dies; his will provides for the creation of Keney Park in Hartford
- 1894-1895-** The "Rain of Parks" adds over 1000 acres of parkland for Hartford
- 1895-** The Keney Park Trustees are incorporated by the state of Connecticut
- 1896-** Keney Park opens and George A. Parker becomes its first superintendent
- 1917-** The United States enters World War I
- 1919-** The Travelers Tower in Hartford opens as the seventh tallest building in the world
- 1923-** The Reverend Francis Goodwin dies
- 1924-** Keney Park is officially turned over to the city of Hartford by the Keney Park Trustees
- 1925-** The Pond House at Keney Park is completed
- 1926-** George A. Parker dies
- 1927-** The first section of the Keney Park Golf Course is finished
- 1929-** The stock market crashes and the Great Depression begins
- 1934-** The golf clubhouse is built at Keney Park as a FERA project
- 1936-** Hartford experiences the worst flooding in its history
- 1938-** New England's worst hurricane brings more devastating floods to Hartford
- 1941-** Pearl Harbor is bombed and the United States enters World War II
- 1944-** The Hartford Circus fire kills 168 people
- 1947-** The Board of Park Commissioners is replaced with the Parks and Recreation Department
- 1953-** Interstate 91 is constructed through part of Keney Park
- 1957-** The pool and bath house are completed at Keney Park
- 1963-** Sherwood Forest, Hartford's first public zoo, opens at Keney Park
- 1968-** Riots erupt in Hartford and other cities after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 1972-** Plans are created, but not carried out, to develop a large amount of Keney Park land
- 1974-** Ella Grasso becomes the first woman elected governor in Connecticut and the nation
- 1976-** The Sherwood Forest zoo closes on account of low visitation and vandalism
- 1978-** The roof of the Hartford Civic Center collapses
- 1985-** Hartford creates a mounted police squad to patrol parks, with stables built at Keney Park
- 1984-** Thirman L. Milner is elected Hartford's first African American mayor
- 1988-** The Friends of Keney Park is founded
- 1996-** The Parks and Recreation Department is abolished
- 1997-** The Whalers leave Hartford
- 2000-** The Ebony Horsewomen occupy the former mounted police stables at Keney Park
- 2010-** The city has a "Week of Parks" celebration, and considers reinstating a Parks Department

A History of Keney Park

As an inquisitive boy, Frederick Law Olmsted, born in Hartford in 1822, often hiked in a remote area near Hartford's northern border known as the Ten Mile Woods.¹ Through the following decades, Olmsted's fascination with the natural world and his strong social consciousness allowed him to form America's premier landscape architectural firm, designing such noted public spaces as New York's Central Park. Appropriately, by the end of the nineteenth century, Hartford's Ten Mile Woods became integrated into the city's extensive park system, designed by Olmsted's firm. The Woods were specifically incorporated into Keney Park. As young Olmsted did, thousands of Hartford residents enjoyed that section's natural beauty and recreational opportunities through ensuing generations. In the twentieth century, Keney became a lynchpin for Jewish and African American communities which called the North End neighborhoods surrounding the park home. For over one hundred years, Keney Park has seen many successes, and an equal number of troubles; yet through it all, the park has survived and thrived.

Background (1853-1894)

According to landscape historian John Alexopoulos, the "American park movement began in 1853 with the creation of Bushnell Park in Hartford and Central Park in New York." Unlike previous communal cattle greens and parade grounds, these two parks were planned with the express purpose of enjoyment and personal refinement, which redirected American thought about the meaning of urban green space. A new standard was now born, by which public funds would pay professionals to design outdoor spaces.² Born primarily through the ideals and efforts of the Rev. Horace Bushnell, and appropriately taking his name, Hartford's park provided residents with a centrally-located "outdoor parlor," as described by Bushnell, which allowed all classes to mix, socialize, and generally become better citizens as a result.³

As one of America's great industrial cities, Hartford grew rapidly around Bushnell Park during the rest of the nineteenth century. Its population rose from just over 13,000 in 1850 to nearly 80,000 by 1900, with much of the growth coming from immigrants. Throughout the Victorian era, the city's foreign-born population held steady at around 30% of the population.⁴ Most people came to Hartford to find work in one of the many manufacturing companies which called the city home, including Colt's Patent Firearms, Pope Manufacturing, Pratt & Whitney

¹ John Alexopoulos, *The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford: A Legacy to the Nation* (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1983), 11 and 63.

² Alexopoulos, 8.

³ Peter C. Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 25.

⁴ Ellsworth Strong Grant and Marion Hepburn Grant, *The City of Hartford, 1784-1984: An Illustrated History* (Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1986), 178.

Machine Tools, and Underwood Typewriter. Between its burgeoning industrial, insurance, and financial institutions, Hartford employed thousands.

With this growth in population and industry came overcrowding and pollution. Parks provide citizens with a patch of peaceful rural greenery, though, and could partially alleviate the ills of urban life by serving as oases of fresh air and quiet in the bustling city.⁵ Yet for Hartford, centrally-located Bushnell Park was becoming too small and too far away to adequately serve all the city's residents. Hartford was fast outgrowing its relatively compact "walking city" footprint, traditionally centered on State House Square and the waterfront. New housing and factories were increasingly being constructed much farther out from the city center and Bushnell Park. In addition, an expanding trolley system allowed some people to live miles away.

Other cities across the country were experiencing similar changes, and new ideas involving parks were soon born to help solve the problems, with Hartford native Frederick Law Olmsted at the forefront of the new park movement. Olmsted, who as a child occasionally heard a sermon by Bushnell, viewed parks as essential green spaces in cities. In his view, their purpose went beyond simple recreation, helped provide the populace with nurturing elements of natural beauty, and helped make people more democratic citizens.⁶ Olmsted applied his ideas in many cities, designing not only single parks but also entire systems of interconnected public spaces. In Boston during the late nineteenth century, Olmsted planned a massive network of parks and parkways referred to as the "emerald necklace," which surrounded the city in a ring and provided equal geographic access for all residents.⁷ Cities could no longer have just a single central park.

In the 1870s, Olmsted called for the creation of a ring of parks and parkways around Hartford, similar to what would happen in Boston. Citing Hartford's expected future growth, Olmsted wrote in a letter to a wealthy Hartfordite: "The larger city will need, not only on account of its larger population, but because of the growth of a special demand in modern urban society, much ampler public grounds than it yet possesses."⁸ He indicated a few basic land areas which he thought the city should purchase for future conversion into park land, but the city took no action at that time.⁹ Citizens of Hartford wanted more parks, though, and even petitioned the city to construct more near their homes. Yet the city was generally slow to act, making only a few additional small parks until the 1890s.¹⁰ Not until the closing years of the nineteenth century would someone, with Bushnell-like energy and commitment, finally put into action a long overdue expansion of the city's increasingly inadequate park system.

⁵ Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: Harper Perennia, 1991), 235.

⁶ Alexopoulos, 11-12.

⁷ City of Boston, "Emerald Necklace," www.cityofboston.gov/parks/emerald/ [Accessed December 8, 2010].

⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted to Charles M. Pond, c. June 1871, "Report on Park Site for the City of Hartford Addressed to C.M. Pond, Esq.," in David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Volume VI: The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 446.

⁹ Olmsted to Pond, 448.

¹⁰ Baldwin, 120.

The Rain of Parks (1894-1895)

Born to one of the city's founding families in 1839, Francis Goodwin would die in 1923 as one of Hartford's most beloved citizens, with the *Hartford Courant* noting that "it is largely as a result of his interest and endeavors that Hartford received its reputation as a city of beautiful parks."¹¹ On account of the Goodwin family's vast financial holdings, especially from real-estate, Francis was able to direct his energy toward more philanthropic efforts in life. He gained a particular interest in both building and landscape architecture, and after viewing the grand public estates of Europe and Boston's emerald necklace, Goodwin soon wanted to emulate in his home city the beauty he had witnessed. With a seat on the Board of Park Commissioners (the Park Board) beginning in 1880, he would, over the course of the following thirty years, help make Hartford's park system one of the best in the nation.¹²

Goodwin's greatest and quickest success for the parks came during what was later referred to as the "Rain of Parks," a time from 1894 to 1895 when the city gained the land for most of its large parks (it was said that parks "rained" on the city). It helped that Francis, as a Goodwin, was either friend or direct relative with many of Hartford's powerful elite (he was even a first cousin of J.P. Morgan). He convinced Charles M. Pond, who had no children, to donate his large West End estate, which was named Elizabeth Park in honor of Pond's wife. Wealthy industrialist Albert Pope also believed in Goodwin's task, and donated land near his factories in the southwest section of the city for what would become Pope Park. Similarly, Elizabeth Colt, widow of Samuel Colt, also wanted to help Goodwin and the city by agreeing to bequeath the land in the South End which now encompasses Colt Park. Goodwin also convinced the Park Board to purchase land for Riverside Park in the north meadows, and a park in the South End originally called South Park but named after Goodwin himself in 1901.¹³

Out of the over one thousand acres of land which Goodwin had acquired for the city during the Rain of Parks, the largest portion came from Henry Keney, who donated land and money for future acquisitions which would eventually result in a park of over six hundred acres in the North End.¹⁴ Since 1830, Henry and his brother Walter Keney had operated a prosperous grocery store, H. & W. Keney, near the corner of Main Street and Albany Avenue. The store had been first opened by the brothers' father, Joseph, who came to Hartford around 1800 from East Hartford, where the Keney (also spelled Keeney) family had lived since the days of the

¹¹ "Death of Rev. Dr. Goodwin Unexpectedly Takes City's Venerable Leading Citizen," *Hartford Courant*, October 6, 1923, 1.

¹² Alexopoulos, 24; Grant and Grant, 132-134. Former Parks Superintendent George Hollister coined the phrase "Rain of Parks."

¹³ Grant and Grant, 134-135. To deal with the new land donations, the city appointed a special committee in charge of forming a parks system, with the following three members: Francis Goodwin, Charles E. Gross, and Henry C. Robinson. See: "New Park System," *Hartford Courant*, December 11, 1894, 4.

¹⁴ Grant and Grant, 134-135.

Puritans. Walter died in 1889, married but without children. Henry never married, so when he prepared his will, he turned to his cousin-by-marriage: Francis Goodwin.¹⁵

Goodwin told his relative: "You have no children to carry on your name. But if you give Hartford a beautiful park, your name will be spoken by someone every day of the year." Henry, who had become the final patriarch of the Keney family, had also made quite a name for himself as director of the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank, and other local institutions. He decided to use his wealth in the philanthropic way suggested by Goodwin, allowing the family farm to become the basis for Keney Park. On the site of the old grocery store, Henry provided for the erection of the Keney Memorial Tower. Henry Keney died in 1894.¹⁶

The Park Under the Keney Park Trustees (1895-1924)

Henry Keney's will, though, did not immediately bestow Keney Park on the city of Hartford, but provided a trust of money and land to a group of four trustees, with Ebenezer Roberts, the Rev. Francis Goodwin, John H. White, and Henry H. Goodwin (brother of Francis) being the originally appointed members. According to Henry's will, the Keney Park Trustees were to buy additional land not already owned by the Keney family in Hartford's North End, "for a public park, beautifying and adorning said park according to their taste and judgment, and, when completed, to convey the same...to the City of Hartford; and said park is forever to be known and designated as the 'Keney Park,' to be used and enjoyed by the citizens of Hartford." For the next thirty years, the Trustees, led by the vision of Francis Goodwin, attempted to fulfill Henry's wishes.¹⁷

In order to decide what plots to purchase for the park, the Trustees turned to Frederick Law Olmsted. During 1895, the respected Olmsted walked the same ground he had wandered as a boy, and made a number of suggestions for lands to be acquired using money from Henry Keney's trust fund. The official plans and maps were later prepared by other members of the family firm, then known as Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot. Through the following several months, Francis Goodwin proceeded to buy the necessary parcels, which were purchased from thirty-five separate landowners. Goodwin himself donated 110 acres of his own land in neighboring

¹⁵ Edward Foote, "Memorial Tower Brings Gothic Touch to City," *Hartford Courant*, May 8, 1977, 2H; Constance Neyer, "100 Years of Hartford's Parks: A Century Ago, Parks Were Suddenly in Bloom," *Hartford Courant*, November 6, 1994, H1.

¹⁶ Constance Neyer, "100 Years of Hartford's Parks: A Century Ago, Parks Were Suddenly in Bloom," *Hartford Courant*, November 6, 1994, H1; Marion Hepburn Grant, *In and About Hartford: Tours and Tales* (Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1978), 221-222.

¹⁷ Henry Keney, *Will of Henry Keney*, printed pamphlet, folder: Keney, Henry "Will of Henry Keney," Hartford Parks Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, 7-8. (Hartford History Center hereafter referred to as HHC). The Keney Park Trustees were officially incorporated by the state of Connecticut in 1895. As the four original appointments died, they were replaced so as to always have a total number of four trustees. Ebenezer Roberts died in 1896 and was replaced by George E. Taintor, who died in 1909 and was replaced by F. Spencer Goodwin. John H. White died in 1912 and was replaced by William Tucker. Francis Goodwin died in 1923 and was replaced with Francis Goodwin II.

Windsor for the park, which the state of Connecticut later officially reincorporated into Hartford. The city of Hartford also leased a parcel of property it owned, known as the “Town Farm,” to the Trustees for incorporation of the park, knowing the land would eventually be turned back to the city.¹⁸

In addition to working with the Trustees, the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot was also helping the city integrate all the newly-acquired parks into a planned system. The firm sought to create a ring of parks like that of Boston with a series of connecting parkways and greenways, most of which were never actually finished. By 1895, the firm, based in Brookline, Massachusetts, was largely led by John Charles Olmsted, the nephew and stepson of Frederick Sr. The other Olmsted represented in the firm at that time was Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., son of the organization’s semi-retired founder. Charles Eliot began as an apprentice for Olmsted in the 1880s, and helped design many parks in Boston and elsewhere, but died unexpectedly in 1897 while projects in Hartford were still in their early stages. Eliot had played a role in assisting with land purchase suggestions for Keney Park in 1895. He was also responsible for designating and naming the park’s four sections, and was the firm’s principal designer for Keney Park until his death. After Eliot’s death, the name of the firm changed simply to Olmsted Brothers.¹⁹

In addition to planning the entire system, the Olmsted Brothers were also primarily responsible for the designs of each of the individual parks, including Keney. According to their plans, each park was to have a distinct purpose and form, based on the existing natural landscape where the park was located. For example, Elizabeth Park would be for the wealthy West End residents, and be characterized as a country estate and garden. Meadows, typically found along the banks of the Connecticut River, would define Riverside Park. Both Keney and Goodwin Parks would be country or rural parks in design, with minimal structures built within, and with a limited amount of obvious landscaping and gardening performed. Keney Park would be characterized, according to landscape historian John Alexopoulos, by “rolling wild pasture land and the traditional forests of the New England landscape.” It was intended that it appear as a

¹⁸ George Hollister, “Keney Park, Hartford,” *Parks and Recreation* 1, no 4 (July 1918): 9; Alexopoulos, 26-27; City of Hartford, *1925 Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners*, IIIIC, 7-8; Grant, 221; Keney Park Trustees, *Keney Park Trustees Record Book, 1895-1950*, HHC, 3-7 and 20. (This volume contains details on most of the thirty-five different land purchases); Henry L. McDermott, Federal Writers’ Project, “Keney Park,” folder: Hartford Parks- Keney Park, Box: 181, RG 33, Works Progress Administration, Connecticut, 1935-44, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut, 1-3 (hereafter referred to as WPA Project); “Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, January 28, 1896, 1; “Windsor: Land For Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, February 10, 1897, 10; “Windsor Cedes the Land,” *Hartford Courant*, May 24, 1897, 5; “For Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, November 28, 1894, 5. Only the lands acquired from Windsor during and before 1896 were given to Hartford. Land purchased after that date has not, and continues to be part of Windsor today (such as most of the golf course).

¹⁹ Alexopoulos, 26-27 and 63; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 130-131; City of Hartford, *1925 Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners*, HHC, 12. The section called the Ten Mile Woods had been referred to by that name for decades before, so Eliot simply kept it. The West Open is occasionally called the West Meadow, and the East Open is sometimes called the East Meadow.

completely natural space, and so, unlike the other parks, at Keney visitors were encouraged to walk on the grass.²⁰

In its final form, Keney Park, as designed by the Olmsted Brothers, eventually encompassed 694 acres, and was thus the largest park within the city limits of Hartford and one of the largest municipal parks in New England. Its shape generally took on the appearance of a crescent, being more than three and a half miles in total length, but hardly measuring more than a mile in width at any one place. Three initial main entrances to the park were located along Woodland Street (intended to connect by parkway to nearby Albany Avenue), Windsor Avenue, and Barbour Street, with a number of other entrances added later. The park was divided into four sections, generally delineated by the two streets which then crossed the park: Tower Avenue and Vine Street. The West Open section (167 acres) featured the Woodland Street entrance and pond. It was separated by the next section, known as Bushland (68 acres), by Vine Street. Tower Avenue then divided Bushland from the next two interconnected sections: Ten Mile Woods (181 acres) and East Open (105 acres), where the Windsor Street entrance was located.²¹

It was the job of the superintendent of Keney Park to make the Olmsted Brothers' designs a reality, yet while under the very watchful and influential eye of Francis Goodwin. In 1896, the Trustees hired George Amos Parker as Keney Park's first superintendent, with a starting salary of \$1800 a year and free rent at a home purchased by the Trustees near the park along Blue Hills Avenue.²² Born in 1853 in New Hampshire, Parker attended the Massachusetts Agricultural College in the 1870s. He married Jannie W. Richmond in 1876, and they had four children. Before moving to Hartford to work for the Trustees, Parker had various jobs in both New York and Massachusetts related to landscape design and horticulture. Parker, who had the unusual hobby of collecting annual reports from various municipalities and institutions across the country, was a relatively quiet man, deeply religious and very hardworking. Through the ensuing decades, Parker would play a major role in shaping not only Keney Park, but the entire Hartford parks system.²³

Regarding construction, Parker later noted that even though Keney Park appears natural in appearance, "it is the most man-made park in the city, costing nearly double to construct than all the other parks of Hartford... There is hardly a foot of ground that has not been graded, all due to the thoughtfulness and loving kindness of Dr. Goodwin," who "put his soul into Keney

²⁰ Alexopoulos, 27 and 30; "City's Park System," *Hartford Courant*, July 10, 1901, 8; The Olmsted Brothers did not take a leading role in the planning of Elizabeth Park, which was done mostly by Hartford park superintendent Theodore Wirth.

²¹ Alexopoulos, 63. By acreage, Batterson Park is the largest park in the Hartford system, though it is actually located in the town of Farmington, and was originally purchased as a source of city drinking water. It should be noted also that the Bushland section was mistakenly referred to as the Bushnell section on occasion.

²² Grant, 221; Keney Park Trustees, 6. The home Parker used was formerly owned by John Robertson, and was then located at 12 Blue Hills Ave.

²³ The Hartford Post, *Hartford in 1912: The Story of the Capital City, Present and Prospective* (Hartford: The Hartford Post, 1912), 43; "George A. Parker Dead," *New York Times*, September 14, 1926, 29; Baldwin, 135; George A. Parker to John M. Parker, May 8, 1909, folder: Parker, George A. Correspondence 1909, Box 22, Parks Collection, HHC. In 1904, Parker would be one of the founding members of the Municipal Art Society in Hartford.

Park.”²⁴ Thirty-foot-high hills were created, while sixteen-foot-high hills were flattened. Over fifty miles of water drains were made; over one million yard’s worth of soil was moved; over a million trees and shrubs, all native species, were planted; nine miles of red sandstone roads and walks were laid, none of which had any straight-aways. Fences were constructed around almost the entire perimeter of the park, and a fire line was created along the northern border to help protect the precious woodlands from forest fires.²⁵

According to Parker, to properly implement the plans as proposed by the Olmsted Brothers, “the entire territory was laid out into one hundred foot squares, about the size of an ordinary house lot; where every bit of it could be seen at once. These squares were grouped together to form a single feature and the feature grouped into the whole.” Following this method of mathematically slicing the park up into smaller, easily manageable squares, it was possible to pinpoint the exact location of every proposed tree, shrub, road, or other feature. The Olmsted Brothers regularly sent maps and letters to Parker, inquiring about how construction was progressing, and offering minor revisions. By numbering each of the divided squares, the firm could easily identify specific areas of the park, and thus direct operations from their offices in Brookline.²⁶

As was common for many other urban parks, the Olmsted Brothers often advised Parker to try to use excess earth to build mounds along well-traveled roads, or in front of neighboring structures so as to hide them from the view of visitors. In particular, a view along one of the park roads in the Bushland section, where visitors could see Hartford’s unsightly almshouse and farm along Holcomb Street, caused some frustration. The Olmsted Brothers asked Parker to use the material dug up for the creation of the roadway to build mounds “on each side of the road where it would be very beneficial in attaining an immediate effect of seclusion, as it would at once hide the adjoining cheap homes to the southeast and the almshouse on the other side.”²⁷

One rather interesting incident that occurred during park construction involved the grave of an infant. Before grading began, a distraught mother living on Love Lane had buried her deceased baby in the West Open section of the park. When workmen approached the grave, the mother approached Francis Goodwin seeking the protection of the sacred plot. The minister comforted the mother, and supposedly said: “Madam, where a baby is laid is most precious to its

²⁴ City of Hartford, *1923 Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners*, HHC, 74.

²⁵ City of Hartford, *1925 Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners*, HHC, 8; Hollister, 9; American Book Exchange, *The Picturesque Parks of Hartford* (Hartford: The American Book Exchange, 1900), 35; Gregory E. Andrews and David F. Ransom, *Structures and Styles: Guided Tours of Hartford Architecture* (Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1988), 118.

²⁶ George A. Parker, “Child Life In Hartford,” folder: Parker, George A. “Child Life In Hartford,” 1912 and 1913, George A. Parker Manuscripts and Papers, HHC, 3; Olmsted Brothers, “General Plan for Keney Park,” 1898, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC. (Map has squares superimposed); See Boxes 18 and 19 of the Parks Collection, HHC for specific correspondence between the Olmsted Brothers and George A. Parker regarding construction projects, particularly for 1897-1898.

²⁷ Olmsted Brothers to George A. Parker, June 8, 1898, folder: Keney Park Correspondence, 1898 April-June, Box: 19, Parks Collection, HHC; Olmsted Brothers, “Keney Park, Hartford, Conn., Sketch for a Scheme of Grading Near Junction of Gully Brook Road with Bushland Road, Arranged to Partially Conceal the Alms House,” Uncatalogued Maps, HHC.

mother. The grave will not be disturbed.” And it wasn’t. The land all around it was, but the grave remained untouched. The names of both the mother and baby involved in this possibly mythical story have been lost to history. The tale does, however, demonstrate the influence and power which Goodwin wielded during the design and construction phases of Keney Park, and also displays the minister’s kindness and compassion.²⁸

Superintendent Parker had a number of men to help during construction, including a probable average of at least eighty workmen. Regarding labor, one source noted that “Mr. Parker judges a man by his walk which is an indication of his physical energy,” and that he “keeps time by 1/10 hours, thus eliminating fractions in accounts and payrolls.” H.G. Clark was the primary engineer in charge at Keney, and oversaw grading and paving projects. Hans J. Koehler, a horticulturalist described as a “plant wizard,” determined what plant life to use, and scoured the Hartford region to find every possible native species that could be used at the Park, since the Olmsted Brothers wanted to use only indigenous plants. He was assisted in this task by J.T. Withers, who also operated the park’s nursery located on Westland Street.²⁹ Plans were very specific as to what types of trees were to be planted where. For example, the Olmsted Brothers mailed Parker a map of the “Ten Mile Woods, upon which we have colored in green the areas proposed to be planted with coniferous and broad-leaved evergreens.”³⁰

In addition, Parker also had help from two of his sons, Robert and Andrew. Robert became supervisor of construction at Keney, and Andrew helped work at the park from 1896 until 1906, with only a brief interlude during which he served in the Spanish-American War. In later years, both sons followed in their father’s footsteps, with Andrew becoming Connecticut’s first superintendent of state parks in 1919.³¹ The records, though, are full of the names of many other workmen during those early years who, with their own hands and sweat, made Keney Park the beautiful jewel it became. For historians, many of these people remain known by name only, with hardly a footnote regarding their actions left. People like Alan Aronson and John Lawrence. Their stories may never be known, but their legacy continues.³²

The story of Jeremiah C. Fowler is known, though. A middle-aged Fowler started working at Keney as a workman around the turn-of-the-century, and continued to work at the park for almost forty years. “Chief,” as he was often referred to, was most remembered as the first caretaker of Keney’s tennis courts, which consumed most of his decades-long service at the

²⁸ James F. Linnane, Federal Writers’ Project, “Keney Park,” folder: Hartford Parks- Keney Park, WPA Project, 21-22.

²⁹ Olmsted Brothers to George A. Parker, October 30, 1897, folder: Keney Park Correspondence, 1897 October, Box: 18, Parks Collection, HCC. (In this letter, the Olmsted Brothers asked Parker if he could put his “gang of eighty men to work” on a certain project); City of Hartford, *1925 Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners*, HHC, 12; American Book Exchange, 39; Linnane, 14. Plant and tree species found in a roughly 20-mile radius of Hartford were sought.

³⁰ Olmsted Brothers to George A. Parker, June 26, 1900, folder: Keney Park Correspondence, 1900-1909, Box: 19, Parks Collection, HHC; “Keney Park,” folder: Manning, Warren H, “Information Secured from Mr. G.A. Parker...,” Box: 19, Parks Collection, HHC, 10.

³¹ “Park Experts Back from Big Meeting: Superintendent Parker and Son Return from Newburgh,” *Hartford Courant*, August 30, 1914, 12; “First State Park Head Dies at 77,” *Hartford Courant*, November 24, 1955, 4A.

³² “Keney Park Payroll,” folder: Keney Park Trustees- Payroll Records, 1910, Parks Collection, HHC.

park. Regarding Fowler, the *Hartford Courant* noted that he “walked alone and sat alone, except for his pipe, without which he was rarely seen. He talked with a chuckle, had a contented air. But to his many friends the greatest thing about the man was his memory. ‘He never forgets,’ was all a youthful player would say to describe it.” Fowler was “white-haired,” “stoical,” and watched countless tennis games. He also loved the outdoors, and credited the fresh air for allowing him such a long life. He died in 1939 at the age of eighty-nine, and ironically never actually learned to play tennis himself.³³

While construction at Keney was still going on, a local teacher later fondly remembered how Goodwin and Parker allowed some school children a behind-the-scenes peek, when “ponds were drained...so the children could study water-life, hills were leveled, valleys were filled.” Once the park roads and walkways were completed by 1898, though, total visitor access for everyone was finally made easier (though the park had been open since 1896). By 1900, the *Hartford Courant* noted that Keney Park’s roads, which the Olmsted Brothers had deliberately designed with no straight lines, were “the finest park drives in New England,” and they quickly became popular with local gentlemen and their carriages. Yet the planting process continued into the twentieth century, by which time the valuable involvement of the Olmsted Brothers had finally come to an end. However, though it was technically a public space, Keney Park was still under the control of the private Trustees, and thus visitors had to follow rules created by them when enjoying the recreational area.³⁴

On August 4, 1900, the Trustees decided to ban automobiles from the park, reasoning that there “are many inexperienced drivers who cannot control a terrified horse. The drives are narrow and very circuitous, and for a nervous horse to come suddenly upon a horseless carriage is a danger to which those who drive in the park ought not to be subjected.” They allowed bicycles, but were steadfast on preventing automobiles, and even turned away a group of Civil War veterans who wanted to tour the park via car in 1904! By 1907, many motorists wanted to drive through Keney Park, but when interviewed about the subject, Francis Goodwin took the side of pedestrians, and noted that “the automobile is destructive to the roads, raises a great dust and leaves behind it a bad smell.” Not until 1912 did the Trustees finally start allowing limited automobile access. In addition, the Trustees also regulated park hours and security measures, which included adding a patrolman in 1910.³⁵

Also during the first decade of the twentieth century, the Trustees undertook some additional construction projects. By 1905, an ornate gateway costing almost \$13,000 was completed at the Woodland Street entrance. It had double granite pillars and a total length of

³³ “Keney Park Payroll,” HHC; “J.C. Fowler, Keney Park Figure, Dies,” *Hartford Courant*, September 26, 1939, 4.

³⁴ Francesca Henke, “Letters From the People: Francis Goodwin,” *Hartford Courant*, October 11, 1923; “Lovely Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, August 19, 1898; Hollister, 9; “Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, October 24, 1900, 4; Olmsted Brothers to George A. Parker, October 1, 1897, folder: Keney Park Correspondence, 1897 October, Box: 18, Parks Collection, HHC.

³⁵ Keney Park Trustees, 36, 87, and 96; “No Automobiles,” *Hartford Courant*, August 2, 1900, 14; “Decorations Waving,” *Hartford Courant*, May 13, 1904, 13; “Why Autos Are Kept Out of Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, August 12, 1907, 4; “Automobiles May Use Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, May 14, 1912, 5. According to the Trustees in 1910, Keney Park was open from 6:00 AM to 9:30 PM only, with hours strictly enforced.

250 feet when including its cast iron fence. Bronze plaques were eventually added which noted the park was a gift of Henry Keney. New York architect Benjamin W. Morris designed the structure. Morris had also designed a similarly grand gateway for the Windsor Street entrance in 1902, which featured four granite pavilions arranged in a semi-circle, and also designed rustic-appearing alterations to a shelter at the Barbour Street entrance which had previously suffered fire damage.³⁶

The shelter adjacent the Barbour Street entrance was occasionally referred to as the clubhouse, and was used for assorted indoor entertainment functions. The building, also used by the caretaker, no longer stands today. With the Woodland Street and Windsor Avenue entrances designed by Morris, Goodwin and the Trustees wanted a formal gateway constructed at the Barbour Street entrance. This gate would require passage of three park roads and two foot paths, and the Trustees were having trouble determining a proper design. One night around 1902, Parker had a dream that his head engineer, Clark, had built the perfect gateway while the superintendent was out of town. Upon waking up the next day, Parker quickly sketched this wonderful plan of his dreams and showed it to Goodwin and the other Trustees. Lo and behold, it was exactly what they wanted, and the plans were supposedly approved on the spot. As a result, the finished Barbour Street entrance was referred to as the “dream gate.”³⁷

In addition, by 1907 the Trustees decided to build the park’s first permanent sheepfold in the West Open, with a barn, shepherd, dogs, and a capacity for up to 200 sheep. For decades, sheep were used as a cheaper and more appropriately-natural alternative to mowing the open fields and pastures of the park. The famous and long-time shepherd of Keney Park was Hugh F. Chisholm. Born in Scotland in 1867, Chisholm first arrived in America when he was only a young man. In 1902 he found work at Keney Park, and served as the shepherd until the sheepfold closed in 1929. He was also a founding member of the Keney Park Lawn Bowling Club, and until his death in 1935, much of Chisholm’s life in America revolved around Keney Park. Besides having both sheep and shepherd to promote the intended pastoral setting, the Trustees also erected a model barn and miniature farm featuring cows on the Little Folks Lawn in the West Open. There urban children could have a taste of the rural life.³⁸

During these episodes in the park’s early history, Superintendent Parker was heavily involved, and proved very capable. He proved so capable in fact, that the city of Hartford also

³⁶ B.W. Morris, “Woodland Street Entrance to Keney Park,” blueprint, FOLIO NO: KNY PK 14, Maps Collection, HHC; Benjamin W. Morris, “Alterations and Additions, Public Shelter, Keney Park,” blueprint, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC; B.W. Morris, “Keney Park: Details of Windsor Avenue Entrance, Drawing No. 5,” FOLIO NO: KNY PK 7, Maps Collection, HHC; “Keney Park Gateway,” *Hartford Courant*, July 28, 1905, 3; Keney Park Trustees, 47 and 57; “Keney Park Contracts,” *Hartford Courant*, February 10, 1902, 4; “Keney Park Plans,” *Hartford Courant*, January 28, 1902, 5; “Keney Park Gateway: Plans for the Entrance at Windsor Avenue,” *Hartford Courant*, April 28, 1902, 8. A.L. Hills was the builder for the Windsor Street entrance. The Barbour Street structure caught fire in 1904, and had first been constructed in 1901, during which time it was only intended to be “temporary.” See: Keney Park Trustees, 40.

³⁷ “Preparing the Parks for Winter,” *Hartford Courant*, October 30, 1908, 2; “Many Take Walk in Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, December 14, 1913, 6.

³⁸ Keney Park Trustees, 71; Hollister, 9-10; Alexopoulos, 65; Linnane, 22; “H.F. Chisholm, 68, Veteran Park Employee, Dies,” *Hartford Courant*, December 2, 1935, 4.

wanted to share his expertise, and beginning in 1904 Parker's sole association with the Trustees began to change. The city's Park Board decided to hire Parker as superintendent of all Hartford parks, to replace the outgoing Theodore Wirth who had been hired to head the park system of Minneapolis. Parker happily accepted this position; yet the Trustees did not want to lose his leadership, and so an agreement was reached by which Keney Park would be included with the other Hartford parks under Parker's umbrella of control. The Trustees still retained overall power over the park, but for the next eight years George A. Parker would simultaneously be superintendent of both Keney Park and the city system as a whole.³⁹

By this time in his career, Parker had a fully-developed and morally-based philosophy of the purpose of parks, and he firmly believed that "the creation of a park is a step forward into a better organized city life." He did not view parks as only Sunday walking places for the wealthy, but as places for all city residents of all classes to use and enjoy in whatever way fit them. As active recreational activities such as sports became more popular in the twentieth century, Parker was a firm supporter of creating things such as baseball fields in the parks. Nevertheless, he tried to keep these activities separate from the more traditional passive forms of recreation, like strolling through gardens and contemplating nature, which was still popular with the upper classes.⁴⁰

Historian Peter Baldwin refers to this idea of separating forms of recreation as "segregating the parks," and he notes that Parker also divided space in the parks according to age. Parker realized that a small child, a teenager, and an adult all had different ideas and needs in regard to recreation: "I believe in a segregation of play activities by sex and age periods with suitable and separate provisions for each, with other provisions made for those to whom recreation means rest for tired muscles and brains." He identified the social and health problems resulting from the rise of the industrial city, including overcrowding in both the home and neighborhood. He found it "deplorable" that for urban children "the streets take the place of the open field;" that a child loses essential contact with its father who must toil all day in a factory, that a child is no longer "experiencing that home life all generations before the present one knew."⁴¹

Parker noted that "a remedy for all this is recreation, and only through recreation do I see an adequate relief from present city conditions under which about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people [of Hartford] live." Small playgrounds could help the young child, while for teenagers "provisions will be made adequate for their social gatherings, under wholesome and decent surroundings." For adults and the elderly, parks could provide a peaceful escape from the problems of everyday life. As with the kitchen, bedroom, and parlor in the home, these activities of different ages and genders were kept segregated in the parks, thereby making the parks akin to an extension of the traditional home life which, in Parker's eyes, no longer existed for urban tenement families. He

³⁹ Keney Park Trustees, 64; "Park Superintendent," *Hartford Courant*, September 18, 1905, 11.

⁴⁰ George Parker, "To Have Parks or Not to Have Parks..." folder: Parker, George A. "To Have Parks, or Not to Have Parks..." Box: 21, Parks Collection, HHC; Baldwin, 137.

⁴¹ Baldwin, 137-138; George Parker, "Child Life in Hartford," folder: Parker, George A. "Child Life in Hartford" 1912 & 1913, George Parker Manuscripts and Papers, HHC.

also believed parks harkened back to America's rural roots, helping to "introduce the influence of the country into city conditions, and that this country influence is essential to the development of children into healthy men and women of normal physical, mental and moral strength, and to uphold adult people in a healthy condition." As superintendent, Parker applied these progressive ideas to Keney Park and to the entire city parks system.⁴²

Thus, between being treated as an extension of a no-longer-existent home life, and by being designed in the image of a no-longer-existent image of rural Hartford, equipped even with a model barn and grazing sheep, Keney Park in its early years seemed to have been created to remind urban dwellers of bygone times, of an America and a Hartford which no longer existed, if it ever did. It was a nostalgic and conservative dream, based on Jeffersonian traditions and the Protestant work ethic, essentially the "American dream" in a not-yet-fully-realized form. According to historian Richard Hofstadter, these ideas formed the "age of reform," created essentially as a defense by the middle class to which Parker belonged. It was a response to the fundamental transformation in which Hartford and American then found itself, when new immigrants were pouring in, deadly labor strikes were occurring, factory pollution was rampant, and automobiles, airplanes, and electricity were making their remarkable debut. "Traditional" America as it had existed for decades was now seen by many as endangered and in need of being saved. Progressive reforms became the national answer, and Keney Park and George Parker represent the strategy as it was adopted in Hartford.⁴³

Parker also noted that, "People make the parks as well as parks the people. There is no land, no matter how beautiful, that is a park unless the people visit." In the case of Keney Park, many people visited it in the early years. For example, on a spring day in 1900, the Hartford Cricket Club utilized the park to play a game against the rival New Britain Cricket Club, in which the home team lost. Hans Koehler gave a botany tour of the park to all who were interested in June 1900. In May 1914, well over 2000 students from various Hartford schools participated in May Day events at Keney Park, an annual occurrence which included folk dances and the singing of patriotic songs. In 1919, almost every Boy Scout in Hartford came to Keney to plant the Roosevelt Memorial Grove in the East Open. The plantings were in honor of former President Theodore Roosevelt, an early conservationist, who had died earlier in the year. Filled with a variety of tree types, the new grove replaced an area formerly populated by chestnut trees which had to be removed as a result of the blight.⁴⁴

⁴² Parker, "Child Life in Hartford," HHC; George Parker, "Memoranda for a Park Syllabus," folder: Parker, George A. "Memoranda for a Park Syllabus" 1906, George Parker Manuscripts and Papers, HHC.

⁴³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 5-12; Schlereth, xiv.

⁴⁴ George Parker, "Article on Parks," folder: Parker, George A. "Article on Parks," George A. Parker Manuscripts and Papers, HHC; "Studying Botany in Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1900, 8; "Hartford Lost at Cricket," May 31, 1900, 4; "2,400 Children in May Day Excercises," *Hartford Courant*, May 10, 1914, 3; "Boy Scouts Pay Their Tributes to Col. Roosevelt," *Hartford Courant*, April 27, 1919, A1; "Hartford...Once Upon a Time," *Hartford News*, October 7-14, 2010, 1. The devastating Chestnut blight which was first noticed in the early twentieth century greatly impacted Keney Park's woodlots, as George Hollister noted in 1918: "The chestnut blight has played havoc in some of these sections and necessitated the cutting of a great number of trees. Cutting will be carried on until there are no mature trees of this species in the park, unless something unforeseen puts a check to the disease. A great many of the trees were sold for telephone and electric light purposes, and a great deal of wood sold. Many of the

Meanwhile, whereas the North End of Hartford had previously been characterized primarily by rolling farmland, residential development increased greatly following the opening of Keney Park as well as due to the simultaneous extension of new trolley lines along Albany Avenue and Blue Hills Avenue. Keney had a tremendous impact on the future of the two neighborhoods located in its immediate vicinity, known as “Upper Albany” and “Blue Hills;” and the neighborhoods in turn would greatly impact the park as well. In less than ten years, over twenty-one new streets appeared in the area around the park, such as Vineland Terrace and Edgewood, West Raymond, Mansfield, and Winchester Streets: all created in the relatively compact “streetcar suburb” pattern common to neighborhoods of the period. Homes were built mostly in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles, or in variations of the two. The most prestigious houses were built along the streets which immediately bordered Keney Park, and which enjoyed the most beautiful views. Many more people thus began to have easy access to the park.⁴⁵

In 1912, Parker’s dual superintendency came to an end, for the most part at least. The Trustees named George H. Hollister as Keney Park Superintendent, succeeding Parker who still remained superintendent of all Hartford parks. Yet the Trustees also created the new position of “Director of Keney Park” especially for Parker, so that he could still retain at least an advisory role at Keney. A protégé of Parker, Hollister was himself a very capable and knowledgeable park administrator. He first arrived at Keney Park as a forester in 1909, having recently graduated from the University of Connecticut, then known as the Connecticut Agricultural College. The twenty-six year old Hollister would devote the next forty-five years of his life to the parks of Hartford.⁴⁶

In 1915, eighty-six acres of land just north of Keney Park was purchased with the intent of creating a cemetery on it. It was planned to eventually add a portion of that land to Keney Park as well. The result was Northwood Cemetery, officially in the Wilson section of the town of Windsor. Francis Goodwin, George Parker, and George Hollister all contributed to the planning of this new cemetery, as did a local American Legion post. A large part of the cemetery, referred to as Soldiers Field, was laid out specifically for veterans. With the United States’ entry into the First World War only two years away, the Soldiers Field was about to see a large influx of new burials resulting from that war. In the late 1920s, there was even talk of creating a World War I memorial in Keney Park.⁴⁷

remaining blighted trees will be sawed into lumber, and kept for park uses.” See: George Hollister, “Keney Park, Hartford,” *Parks and Recreation* 1, no 4 (July 1918): 9.

⁴⁵ Hartford Architecture Conservancy, *Hartford Architecture, Volume Three: North and West Neighborhoods* (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1980), 49, 79-80, and 108. Even the Keney Park Trustees themselves had a part in the residential building boom, selling a number of lots near the park to be used for the construction of preferably single-family homes. The lots sold were not part of Keney Park, but the proceeds from such sales benefited the Keney trust. See: Keney Park Trustees, 101 and 105.

⁴⁶ Keney Park Trustees, 108-109; “New Superintendent for Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, December 4, 1912, 5; “George Hollister Dies; Directed City’s Parks,” *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 1971, 4A.

⁴⁷ “City Gets Land for Cemetery,” *Hartford Courant*, July 2, 1915, 9; “Board Considers New Playhouse,” *Hartford Courant*, March 2, 1926, 17; “World War Monument: Veteran Thinks Keney Park Site Preferable to Day Triangle,” *Hartford Courant*, March 11, 1928, A2. A WWI memorial was never built at Keney Park, but an Honor Roll

The Trustees continued to administer Keney Park into the 1920s, but in 1923 they lost their patriarch and most essential member. On October 5, 1923, the Rev. Francis Goodwin succumbed to bronchitis at the age of eighty-five. Regarding Goodwin, the Trustees noted that “the citizens of Hartford do not realize how much they are indebted to him, and will be, during the coming years, for the unselfish devotion he has given all these years, in the development of Keney Park.” Shortly after this, the Trustees decided that it was finally time to turn the park over to the city of Hartford. The Trustees officially voted in May 1924 to turn over both Keney Park and the Keney Memorial Tower to the city, and the Common Council accepted the offer in August. A large public ceremony occurred in November at Keney, during which the park was formally handed over to the Mayor, and the life of Henry Keney was celebrated. It was noted that the Trustees had spent \$1,500,000 on the park during their tenure.⁴⁸

Keney Park Under the City Park Board (1924-1947)

The Keney Park which the Trustees turned over to the city certainly would have made Henry Keney proud. The West Open section featured open pasture, as well as the park’s only pond (which was created by damming a brook), known variously as Turtle Pond, Waltermere (after Walter Keney), and simply The Pond. The highest point in the park, the 160 foot Overlook Hill (originally intended as Goodwin Hill), was also located in this section. Adjacent the Woodland Street entrance stood the caretaker’s house, built in a rustic English style. Pleasure drives circled near the perimeter, and led across Vine Street into Bushland. Gully Brook trickled through that section, which had relatively poor soil. It was suitable mainly for small shrubs and bushes (as the name “Bushland” implies), and was the only section of the park allowed to grow in a fully untamed manner.

Across Tower Avenue was the next section, Ten Mile Woods, which itself featured smaller divisions named for the trees found within: Beech Grove, Hollywood, The Dell, Hazelwood, Fernwood, Chestnut, Sylvan Court, and others. There was also Eliotdale, named for Charles Eliot of the Olmsted firm, who died before the park’s completion, but had played a major role in designing this particular section just days before his untimely death. The Ten Mile Woods merged directly into Keney’s fourth and final section, the East Open. Like Bushland, this section had a brook, Midvale Stream, running through its center. And like the West Open, it was characterized by a large open space, slightly depressed topographically, known as Vista Valley.

monument for veterans was built just outside the Woodland Street entrance in 1944, in a patch of green between Greenfield and Ridgefield Streets. See: “Site at Keney Park Chosen for Honor Roll,” *Hartford Courant*, March 4, 1944, 2.

⁴⁸ “Death of Rev. Dr. Goodwin Unexpectedly Takes City’s Venerable Leading Citizen,” *Hartford Courant*, October 6, 1923, 1; Keney Park Trustees, 158 and 161; “Keney Park Added to City Property,” *Hartford Courant*, August 19, 1924, 13; “City to Receive Keney Park Today,” *Hartford Courant*, November 15, 1924, 7; “Keney Park Lands Formally Become Property of City,” *Hartford Courant*, November 16, 1924, 1. The Keney Park Trustees continued a mission of philanthropy even after handing over Keney Park and the Memorial Tower. They had their last meeting on September 7, 1950, after having given many large monetary donations to various local non-profits. See: Keney Park Trustees, 204.

Just inside the Windsor Street entrance was the Gorge, a very popular formation of sandstone and shale created from 180 million years worth of stream erosion. Throughout the park, visitors would also find a number of small foot bridges and boardwalks, built exclusively rustic in appearance so as to fit the park's overall rural theme.⁴⁹

During the 1920s, in accord with the policy of George Parker, a number of active recreational facilities, such as tennis courts, baseball diamonds, handball courts, bowling greens, and playgrounds were built in Keney Park and primarily segregated to places near the entrances. In addition, on account of the popularity of ice skating on the Pond in the West Open, a Pond House was constructed during the winter of 1924-1925, designed by architect Russell F. Barker, who later planned the rustic Pavilion at Rocky Neck State Park in Niantic, Connecticut. The Keney structure was not finished in as rustic an appearance as was originally intended, but it still served as a warm social spot on cold days. By 1926 the building was modified to allow dancing inside all year round. All of these local developments occurred during a time when, on a national scale, parks were increasingly enjoying a rise in the popularity of active over passive recreation. Many other rural and country parks, such as Keney, were now seeing the introduction of sporting fields.⁵⁰

On September 13, 1926, George Parker died in Hartford at the age of seventy three. Regarding the Superintendent, the *Courant* noted proudly the next day: "Wherever Hartford is known-- and we like to think that is wherever there is civilization-- its parks are known and praised for their practical benefits, as well as their beauty. In the development of the system which has added much to the reputation of the capital of Connecticut, the man who died yesterday had played a leading part." The newspaper added that, "Mr. Parker loved his fellow man and he loved Hartford." An era had come to an end. Parker was succeeded appropriately enough by George Hollister, who had already previously been promoted to assistant superintendent of parks.⁵¹

Hollister was also very capable, and continued to improve and expand the Hartford parks system, including Keney Park. During the early twentieth century, public golf courses became popular nation-wide, and Hollister and the Park Board decided to build the city's second one at Keney Park, having already constructed one at Goodwin Park in the South End in 1906. The idea had first been approved in 1924, and the first nine holes were finished in 1927, with the last nine finished in 1930. The entire course, planned by famous golf course architect Devereaux Emmet, proved very popular. It sat in the Ten Mile Woods section, on park land located almost completely in the town of Windsor. By the 1930s, all that remained necessary was a golf

⁴⁹ McDermott, 1-3; Alexopoulos, 65-68; American Book Exchange, 37 and 39; "City's Park System," *Hartford Courant*, July 10, 1901, 8; Thomas A. Cook, "How Keney Park Gorge Was Formed," *Hartford Courant*, July 23, 1933, D4.

⁵⁰ McDermott, 1-3; "Large Pond House To Be Ready Soon," *Hartford Courant*, December 27, 1924, 5; Russell F. Barker, "Skating House and Shelter for Keney Park," blueprint, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC; Newspaper clipping, March 9, 1926, *Hartford Scrapbook Volume 1*, HHC, 183; Schlereth, 236-237.

⁵¹ "George A. Parker Dead," *New York Times*, September 14, 1926, 29; "George A. Parker," *Hartford Courant*, September 14, 1926, 16.

clubhouse, and even the Great Depression did not prevent it, in fact it actually helped with construction.⁵²

The Keney Park golf clubhouse was constructed in 1934 as a project of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which was the precursor to the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The structure was designed by architects H. Hilliard Smith and Roy D. Bassette in a rustic Tudor style. Appropriate for the time, much of the building material was recycled, with the stone coming from the recently-demolished Post Office which sat adjacent the Old State House downtown, and with the brick coming from an old orphan asylum on Putnam Street. The one-story structure measured 147 feet long, 25 feet wide, and cost about \$55,000 (though the city actually had to pay only \$750). It had lockers and showers in the basement, and a kitchen, office, dining room, and lounge on the main floor. The lounge featured a large fireplace and fine woodwork. During the summer of 1934, six brick and wood structures, measuring twelve feet square, were built at various places around the course to protect golfers from the weather. By 1938, a wooden barn had been built nearby for maintenance use.⁵³

Another FERA project in 1935 yielded a new concrete handball court wall near the Woodland Street entrance.⁵⁴ The city also conducted a few additional projects at Keney Park during the Great Depression. In 1932, a tool shed was built for maintenance purposes near an existing dwelling near the corner of Tower Avenue and Barbour Street in the Ten Mile Woods.⁵⁵ Also in the Ten Mile Woods, an archery range was constructed near the golf course, and the Hartford Archery Club used it for many years for annual tournaments. Such improvements all helped improve the park, and in 1938 alone it was estimated that over 350,000 people used Keney Park's many recreational facilities.⁵⁶ This expansion continued into the 1940s on a smaller scale, with new proposals for a pool presented in 1945, and a music shell built in 1947.⁵⁷

Yet, according to landscape historians David Schuyler and Patricia M. O'Donnell, the "changing nature of park usage," and the resulting "demands of active recreation" started to take a toll on the historic integrity of many urban parks at this time. Nineteenth-century planners such as Olmsted never intended to see pools and music shells in their natural urban oases, but modern park users most certainly did. Many of the new active recreational facilities, though,

⁵² "Mecca of the Nation's Flower Lovers During Rose Week, Hartford Has a Chain of 27 Beautiful Parks Encircling It," *Hartford Courant*, June 23, 1935, D1; McDermott, 1-3; "Large Pond House to Be Ready Soon," *Hartford Courant*, December 27, 1924, 5; "Hartford's Second Municipal Golf Course, Keney Park, Opens Today," *Hartford Courant*, October 13, 1927, 19; Linnane, 7; David Fink, "A Good Course Avoided," *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1998, B3.

⁵³ McDermott, 4; "Mecca of the Nation's Flower Lovers During Rose Week, Hartford Has a Chain of 27 Beautiful Parks Encircling It," *Hartford Courant*, June 23, 1935, D1; Newspaper clipping, April 16, 1934, *Hartford Scrapbook Volume 1*, HHC, 192; Building Permit, May 12, 1938, Keney Park, Uncatalogued Permits, Hartford City Hall; "Salvage Returns Hartford a Profit of 580 Per Cent," *Hartford Courant*, June 23, 1935, D5.

⁵⁴ Building Permit, April 18, 1935, Keney Park, Uncatalogued Permits, Hartford City Hall.

⁵⁵ Building Permit, October 15, 1932, Keney Park, Uncatalogued Permits. Hartford City Hall.

⁵⁶ McDermott, 5.

⁵⁷ Robert J. Ross, "Plans and Details for Music Shell at Keney Park, June 10, 1947, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC; "City Building Projects Are Made Public," *Hartford Courant*, May 15, 1945, 16.

were built on the park periphery, as had been the segregation preference of George Parker. For example, at Elizabeth Park tennis courts were built along the main street, away from the rose garden. Relatively noisy recreational activities were kept away from more quiet, contemplative forms of passive recreation. This tendency was primarily true for Keney as well.⁵⁸

Also during this period, and ever since the start of the twentieth century, residential development had essentially surrounded Keney Park on its Hartford side. Thousands lived on the streets nearby, which were very diverse demographically. Overall, though, the North End neighborhoods had a very large and cohesive Jewish population, for which Keney Park served a significant social and cultural role. It was more than just a purely recreational space. Historians David G. Dalin and Jonathan Rosenbaum noted that Weaver High School, which had the largest Jewish population of any Hartford public secondary school, sat directly adjacent the park along Ridgefield Street, and as a result “Keney Park...served as a constant gathering place for Jewish young people from the 1920s to the 1960s.”⁵⁹

Marvin H. T. Grody enjoyed his childhood in the North End during the 1920s and 1930s, and according to an oral history interview conducted by Joan Walden in the early twenty-first century, he remembered how “sandlot sports, mostly centered in fabulous Keney Park, involved the bulk of our after-school activities. Except for school teams, there were no organized community sports programs. We owned bicycles which propelled us all over our beloved Keney Park.”⁶⁰ In the 1940s, Rosalyn Guberman Katz fondly recalled: “We used to go ice skating in the winter and then we would go to the Pond House for hot chocolate.”⁶¹ Vivian Sless Marks grew up on Woodland Street, and noted that “There were many children in the neighborhood and I had many friends. None of us had yards, so Keney Park at the corner was our playground. We went there to play every day...”⁶²

While World War II raged, Burton Miller remembered a quiet home front: “Keney Park was really nice and had so many things going-- it was incredible. I remember feeding the ducks on the duck pond, and in the winter we skated on it. There was a beautiful baseball diamond, and a water pump where we would take a cup, hold it under the nozzle, and pump to get a whole glass of water. Kids would fly model airplanes up on Lookout Hill. There was a pavilion for playing the board game, Camelot Chess. There were enough things to keep someone busy the whole day.”⁶³ Sylvia Francus noted that without her parents’ knowledge, she “did a lot of ‘first’ things, like smoking” at the park.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ David Schuyler and Patricia M. O’Donnell, “The History and Preservation of Urban Parks and Cemeteries,” in Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 80-81; Baldwin, 37.

⁵⁹ David G. Dalin and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Making a Life, Building a Community: A History of the Jews of Hartford* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997). 202.

⁶⁰ Joan Walden, ed., *Remembering the Old Neighborhood: Stories from Hartford’s North End* (Hartford: The Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford, 2009), 39-40.

⁶¹ Walden, 74.

⁶² Walden, 81.

⁶³ Walden, 85.

⁶⁴ Walden, 116.

Alan Schwartz also grew up there in the 1940s, and observed: “In speaking with my friend Jack London, we agreed that the dominant factor of growing up in the North End was Keney Park,” adding that “On Sundays, in warm weather, kids would gather on the great lawn near the tennis courts and socialize. West Hartford kids met Hartford kids and romances were kindled, leading to some long-term marriages.”⁶⁵ Ed Goldberg echoed these feelings: “When I think about growing up in the North End, my thoughts invariably turn to Keney Park.”⁶⁶ For a child especially, Susanne Greenberg Pearlson said “Keney Park was a safe haven.”⁶⁷ For Edna Guberman Shainfarber, the allure of the park may have actually saved her life, as her parents decided on July 6, 1944 to skip the nearby circus on such a hot day and instead stroll around Keney.⁶⁸ In one of the city’s worst disasters, 168 people would die that day when the circus tent burst into flames.

Historians Dalin and Rosenbaum, though, say that probably the best “illustration of [Keney Park’s] role as a social nexus was the annual gathering on the High Holy Days.”⁶⁹ Joseph D. Hurwitz noted in an interview by Walden that, “My strongest memory of living off Blue Hills Avenue [during the mid-twentieth century] was Keney Park. The park became crucial to how I viewed the world...On Yom Kippur, we fasted all day and most congregations would break mid-afternoon, creating an influx of people from synagogues surrounding Keney Park.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Bernard G. Epstein recalled: “When holiday services were over at the Emanuel and Agudas Achim synagogues on Greenfield Street across from Keney Park, hundreds of people would meet in the park. It was a great time to schmooze with friends who we had not seen since the previous year.”⁷¹ During the same period, Seymour S. Lappen reminisced that, “We always had a great time during Lag B’Omer as it was picnic time with the Taslitts [Hebrew School]. We were given Jewish and American flags and marched down...to Keney Park. At the park, we had a picnic with food, photos and a lot of Jewish games.”⁷²

For the North End’s large Jewish population, Keney Park was clearly a lynchpin of the neighborhood, arguably central and essential for the children and teenagers who came of age there. George Parker no doubt would have been proud. In fact, the park was playing exactly the role it was intended to play by all those who created it. Henry Keney would have been pleased to see his name remembered and used with such happiness in mind. Goodwin would have been pleased to see so many thousands of residents enjoying the park land he worked so hard to secure. Keney Park is a “living” park, in that it changes and adapts through the years so as to stay useful and relevant. It had rural walking paths when that type of recreation was in vogue, and added recreational facilities as they became wanted by the community. This evolution

⁶⁵ Walden, 98-99.

⁶⁶ Walden, 119.

⁶⁷ Walden, 127.

⁶⁸ Walden, 101.

⁶⁹ Dalin and Rosenbaum, 202.

⁷⁰ Walden, 41.

⁷¹ Walden, 36.

⁷² Walden, 43.

would continue into the future, though the park would soon be hit with a number of unforeseen struggles as the city at large began to enter an uncertain post-industrial age.

The Era of the Parks and Recreation Department (1947-1996)

In 1947, the bureaucratic structure of the parks system fundamentally changed. For reasons of efficiency, the city of Hartford in 1947 decided to adopt a new charter which featured a city manager, a relatively common occurrence at that time for local governments. The old Park Board, known officially since the nineteenth century as the Board of Park Commissioners, was abolished, even after the body's eight members protested the change. In its stead, a new Parks and Recreation Department was formed. Unlike the Park Board, which enjoyed much more independence, the new Parks and Recreation Department had to report directly to the city manager and city council. As a result, everyday politics would have a much larger influence on the future development and maintenance of the parks. The city now had absolute control over the parks, with no outside body or buffer to prevent unwise decisions or projects. The parks of Hartford had lost their greatest watchdog. Francis Goodwin no doubt would have disagreed with this change. George Hollister, though, remained in the position of superintendent of parks.⁷³

In the late 1940s, just after World War II, Hartford reached its peak level of population. Over 177,000 people lived within the city's seventeen square miles, and massive defense industries and insurance companies employed thousands. The city at this time was not aware, however, that over the course of the next sixty years it would lose over 50,000 residents to neighboring suburbs, and see countless millions of dollars in tax revenue and urban investments go with them. Darker days were certainly ahead for not only the parks system, but for the city as a whole, including race riots, economic recession, and blight. One of the major causes of the urban problems which would soon impact this post-industrial city was the construction of highways. The Connecticut State Highway Department had big plans for Hartford, and even though it did not build everything originally sought, enough was constructed to give people easy access out of the city. Worse for residents, many of the highways were built directly through existing urban neighborhoods. Sadly, Keney Park became a victim of one of these interstates.

In the mid-twentieth century, construction of expressways in the city would claim the gorgeous old Hartford High School and almost take Bushnell Park as well, so obviously when it came to the path of a highway nothing was immune, nothing sacred. Ever since the early days when the Trustees banned automobiles for over a decade, Keney Park never exactly had a perfect relationship with the car. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the automobile had its revenge as Interstate 91 (then referred to as Rt. 5) was planned to go through Keney Park on its way to Springfield, Massachusetts. The East Open became the unfortunate section which fell victim to

⁷³ The Trust for Public Land, *The Park System of Hartford, Connecticut: Renewing a Historic Legacy* (New Haven: The Trust for Public Land, 2007), 13; "Park Board Elimination Is Protested," *Hartford Courant*, August 1, 1946, 1; "Overwhelming Support of New City Charter Bill Given at Public Hearing," *Hartford Courant*, February 18, 1947, 1.

the highway, which would run in a north-south direction, crossing Windsor Avenue south of the park and continuing into the open fields of Windsor.

The Connecticut Highway Department in 1947 designed a massive stone-arched bridge (similar in appearance to the Bulkeley Bridge) that would traverse Keney Park. On top of the bridge would pass the highway, below would pass a brook, The Gorge, and the park road that led to the Windsor Street entrance. The highway and its accompanying bridge would thus pass through the small extension of the East Open which connected to Windsor Ave, and would immediately become the first noticeable park feature to visitors entering from that historic gateway, including most of the people who used the golf course.⁷⁴

By 1953 the state did not actually build the stone bridge as planned, but instead constructed a more traditional highway bridge of concrete and steel. The *Hartford Courant* claimed that “the bridge has been designed to harmonize with the park surroundings.” The Olmsted Brothers probably would have disagreed that concrete was in harmony with anything at Keney. The completed bridge, built by the Brunalli Construction Company, measured 285 feet in length, though it was widened and expanded in subsequent decades.⁷⁵

The city, including both the Mayor and Superintendent Hollister, supported this plan and granted the state the 70-foot wide right-of-way it had requested. Hollister felt that if a beautiful bridge were to be constructed, it would visually improve the park, but he could not have foreseen what was eventually built.⁷⁶ At least one prominent Hartford woman, though, did not like what was going on. Ruth C. Bulkeley, whose grandfather-in-law had been a governor and namesake of the Bulkeley Bridge, wrote to the *Hartford Courant* in 1953: “I am concerned about the way our generation is giving away, or cutting down the size of our city parks...In my opinion it is time to call a halt on giving an inch of parks-- over, under or upon park land.” She identified the highway through Keney, a factory parking lot in Pope Park, and the widening of a street adjacent to Bushnell Park as her biggest concerns.⁷⁷

When, only a few years later, it was proposed to build a state medical school in a section of Keney Park, Bulkeley again wrote the newspaper: “I deplore the tendency of committees looking for building sites in Hartford to regard our parks as empty building lots...If Mr. Keney had wished to leave his land to the medical profession, he would have done so. Instead he chose to leave it to the citizens of Hartford as Keney Park. In accepting it we assumed the obligation of preserving it as a park.”⁷⁸ There were also many other similar proposals for other city parks

⁷⁴ Connecticut State Highway Department, “Proposed Route 5 Overpass Thru Keney Park, Hartford, CT,” May 8, 1947, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC.

⁷⁵ “Expressway Nears Start; Landscape Changes Due,” *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1953, A6; “DOT To Air Proposed Designs To Widen Area Stretch of I-91,” *Hartford Courant*, June 7, 1977, 20C. An additional 2.4 acres of Keney Park was taken for widening the highway in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

⁷⁶ “State Wants Slice of Park for Proposed Expressway,” *Hartford Courant*, August 5, 1952, 15; “Council Airs Bottle Club Legislation,” *Hartford Courant*, September 9, 1952, 17; “Hill Expects To Advertise Expressway Bids in Spring,” *Hartford Courant*, December 4, 1952, 26. In addition to constructing the bridge, some low-lying areas of the park were filled-in along the highway’s path.

⁷⁷ Ruth C. Bulkeley, “Stop Cutting the Size of Hartford’s Parks,” *Hartford Courant*, June 4, 1953, 14; “Ruth C. Bulkeley Left Estate Worth \$2,226,393,” *Hartford Courant*, October 4, 1974, 4.

⁷⁸ Ruth C. Bulkeley, “Parks Not Intended As Building Sites,” *Hartford Courant*, February 6, 1957.

during the 1950s, such as a large children's museum for Elizabeth Park and a new Hartford High School in Pope Park. Bulkeley quickly realized why and how the city wanted to build on park land: "We no longer have the Park [Board] to ward off encroachments on park property. Who has inherited this responsibility? Is it the Council, the City Manager, the Citizens? Let us unite to keep faith with the donors of these beautiful parks."⁷⁹

Evidently, the correct answer to Bulkeley's question was the citizens. Very quickly after her call, a citizen's group rose up, and demanded an end to the city's grand building plans on park land, including the medical school at Keney. One hundred acres of the park, off Tower Avenue and near the already existing McCook and Mt. Sinai Hospitals, had been sought by the state for the school; and it was planned to add an additional 100 acres to the park in Windsor to offset this project. In a letter to the *Hartford Courant*, Lillian Van de Vere exclaimed: "Thou Shalt Not Covet. Thou Shalt Not Trespass. Thou Shalt Not Steal any part of Keney Park nor divert any part of it for any use or reason other than the original terms of the will which left this parcel of land to be used for the benefit and recreation of the public in Hartford." Between citizens' protests and a load of legal issues, though, it was finally decided in the early 1960s to relocate the medical school site to Farmington, where it currently exists today as the University of Connecticut School of Medicine.⁸⁰

Keney Park did enjoy a number of beneficial recreational construction projects during this period, as was the case nationally at the time. Yet many of the projects were done without Superintendent George Hollister, who retired in 1954. By 1957, the long-awaited pool and bathhouse were built in the West Open, designed by architect Frederick C. Teich.⁸¹ In addition, in August 1963, the city opened a zoo at Keney Park, known as Sherwood Forest, located in the Ten Mile Woods just off Barbour Street. It featured assorted animals, such as sheep, which had not been seen in the park since the sheepfold closed in 1929, as well as a Himalayan bear named Robin who escaped from her cage on opening day, but was caught after a short chase which resulted in no injuries. There was also a black bear named Smokey, and eventually a sea lion pool was constructed at the zoo.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ruth C. Bulkeley, "Avoid Encroaching on Public Parks," *Hartford Courant*, October 3, 1956, 14.

⁸⁰ "Park Group's Standing Defended By Chairman," *Hartford Courant*, March 27, 1957, 8; "Study of Secondary Sites for Medical School," *Hartford Courant*, March 21, 1962, 15; "Keney Park Potentially Priceless," *Hartford Courant*, January 14, 1972, 20; "Chamber Changes Views on Medical School Site," *Hartford Courant*, June 9, 1962, 20; "Friends of Hartford Criticizes Plan to Use Park Land for Med School," *Hartford Courant*, April 27, 1962, 20A; "The Law and the Medical School," *Hartford Courant*, May 2, 1962, 18; Lillian Van de Vere, "Keep Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, May 4, 1962, 18; "Keney Park Ruled Out as Medical School Site," *Hartford Courant*, May 8, 1962, 2.

⁸¹ Building Permit, May 23, 1956, Keney Park, Uncatalogued Permits, Hartford City Hall; "Sharpe Says Pool Completion Due Next Month," *Hartford Courant*, July 20, 1956, 6; "Hartford Area Reflects Nation's Recreation Surge," *Hartford Courant*, March 11, 1957, 6; "George Hollister Dies; Directed City's Parks," *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 1971, 4A.

⁸² McDermott, 4; Tyler Smith, "Thousands Visit New City Zoo," *Hartford Courant*, August 20, 1963, 1; "Sea Lion Pool for Sherwood Forest," April 1967, Uncatalogued Maps, HHC. In 1960, private founder Howard Farnsworth opened a go-kart track adjacent Keney Park in Windsor, on land that eventually became Matianuck State Park. See: "'Go-Kart' Track to Open Despite Police Opposition," *Hartford Courant*, June 17, 1960, 5.

Also, during the 1950s and 1960s, the neighborhoods surrounding Keney Park began to change demographically, although they continued to be very diverse. Since the 1920s, the North End's African American population had steadily increased, but the area still retained its large Jewish population into the 1950s. At that time, though, like so many other Hartford residents, the majority of the North End's Jewish population began to leave for neighboring suburbs, particularly West Hartford and Bloomfield, in search of the American dream.⁸³ Sadly, as was the case in so many other American cities of the time, the African American population was left behind, with racist real-estate and government policies denying them equal access to that same American dream. Unlike Keney Park's early years, when Hartford was arguably the wealthiest city in America, the African American population would have to enjoy a Keney Park that now sat in what was fast becoming one of nation's poorest cities.

According to sociologist Juliet Saltman, by the 1970s Keney Park had become "unkempt and quite deserted" in appearance. Its condition, and that of the entire city, continued to decline as Hartford entered an uncertain post-industrial age. In 1976, Sherwood Forest was closed on account of low visitation and rampant vandalism. In a 1982 article entitled "A Park's Faded Glory," *Hartford Courant* reporter Howard Sherman described the desolate condition of Keney Park, which was now "infrequently cared for by a City Parks and Recreation Department with limited resources." When the intricate wrought iron gates of the Woodland Street entrance were in need of repair, all the Parks Department could afford to do was scrap them and hang chains in their place. The old archery range, known as John Snavely Field, near the golf course was abandoned. Sherman noted that "some community residents are afraid to enter the park," on account of a perception of high crime and vandalism. Ironically, what had once made the park great, its Olmsted-intended natural seclusion and isolation, had now made the park a scary place for visitors. The struggling city simply no longer had the monetary resources it once took for granted, especially for the parks which suffered accordingly.⁸⁴

Thrown into this unsettling mix, though, came another development idea for Keney Park, with the hope of rejuvenating the neighborhood. In 1972, a private redevelopment organization wanted to remake all of Hartford, and part of their plans consisted of the most dramatic and potentially-catastrophic project ever suggested for Keney Park. According to the *Hartford Courant*, the goal was a "City in the Park." The organization, Greater Hartford Process, Inc., outlined their grand plans in a report which claimed that Keney Park was underutilized by the community. Believing it knew the park better than its own neighbors, the group wanted to construct up to 1500 residential units, in the form of townhouses and apartments, throughout the park. The West Open would remain parkland, but the Pond would be expanded and a stadium would be built. A thirty-acre lake, along with what was called a "recreation palace," was slated for Bushland. The golf course and zoo were to expand exponentially in the Ten Mile Woods,

⁸³ Walden, 9.

⁸⁴ Juliet Saltman, "Neighborhood Stabilization: A Fragile Movement," *The Sociological Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 540; Howard Sherman, "A Park's Faded Glory," *Hartford Courant*, February 22, 1982, B3D; "Old Gates Down, Park 'Chained,'" *Hartford Courant*, August 26, 1967, 13; "Negative Image Afflicts Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, September 14, 1979, W29.

with inclusion of both a driving range and museum. Similar plans for other areas of the North End were also created.⁸⁵

For North End resident Maryann Dowaliby, who wrote to the *Hartford Courant*, the overall neighborhood proposals “represented a note of optimism,” however “the projected plans for Keney Park...are a source of alarm.” She then described how much her family used and enjoyed this supposedly underused space, and how much natural beauty existed within its boundaries. She ended with a heartfelt plea: “Keney Park is a precious resource in a shrinking representation of man’s environment as it should be. Replace the concrete, the asphalt, and the old bricks for the sake of the residents of my neighborhood, but leave the park alone for the sake of Greater Hartford and its future residents.”⁸⁶ This latest scheme never materialized, but there was still much more work to be done to save Keney Park.

By the 1970s, Keney Park had earned an undeserved negative reputation, and was increasingly seen as a place to avoid. Thankfully, the community rose to the task and attempted to save and reclaim their park. In 1977, a new group called the Concerned Citizens for Keney Park, partnered with the Blue Hills Civic Association and the Parks and Recreation Department to sponsor a community clean-up for the park. They also sponsored a park walk not long after. In later years, citizens, businesses, and officials banded together to form the Keney Park Task Force. The group’s coordinator, James D. Jackson, told the *Hartford Courant* in 1982: “Keney Park is going to have to crawl before it walks again because of the bad image bestowed upon us.” The goal was to find extra security via the city, sponsor community clean-ups, and generally try to better maintain the park and restore it to its former magnificence.⁸⁷

To answer the call for additional security, the city created a new mounted police patrol in 1985. Eight officers were chosen to patrol Hartford’s major parks on horseback, an idea which had seen great success in cities such as Boston, Providence, and New Haven. The *Hartford Courant* reported that, “Police officials hope the patrols will encourage more people to use Hartford’s parks,” and that “studies show mounted patrols are the most effective way of ensuring park security. They also improve the public’s awareness of police and eliminate the perception that parks are crime-ridden and dangerous.” The stables for the city’s new horses were built in Keney Park, at approximately the same location as the old sheepfold along Vine Street in the West Open. Patrols started in 1986, after the stables were completed.⁸⁸

Horses have actually played quite a large role in Keney Park’s recent history. From 1947 to 1963, Ambrose “Pops” Norman had operated a riding school, known as Laredo Ranch, in the

⁸⁵ “New Look for City Taken Calmly,” *Hartford Courant*, March 19, 1972, 1B; “North End Plan Proposed Here,” *Hartford Courant*, January 16, 1972, 1B; “Hartford Process Proposes Townhouses by Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, March 12, 1972, 4B. The “City in the Park” idea may have been inspired by the designs of utopian urbanist Le Corbusier.

⁸⁶ Maryann Dowaliby, “Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, March 27, 1972, 24.

⁸⁷ Howard Sherman, “A Park’s Faded Glory,” *Hartford Courant*, February 22, 1982, B3D; “Cleanup Planned for Keney Park,” *Hartford Courant*, June 3, 1977, 26; Antoinette Martin, “Image of Park Targeted,” *Hartford Courant*, September 5, 1977, 32.

⁸⁸ Doug Gass, “City’s Mounted Patrols Get Kickoff as Ground Broken for Horse Stables,” *Hartford Courant*, April 12, 1985, B3; Tatiana Pina, “Vehicle Dealer Puts Hartford Horses on Wheels,” *Hartford Courant*, December 19, 1985, E1.

Ten Mile Woods. In 1968, after those stables had closed, a group of African American men from the North End who used to enjoy renting Pop's horses started the Ebony Horsemen. They quickly became a North End sensation and a symbol of hope for inner city youth, as they spread the word about black history. Keney Park became the epitome of their activity, and they conducted horse shows there for the community, though the horses themselves were kept elsewhere in neighboring towns. In the late 1970s, they proposed a deal to the city by which the group would build stables at Keney and patrol the park in return, but the offer was declined.⁸⁹ In a way, Keney Park's newfound fascination with the equine species echoed the original intentions of the Olmsted Brothers and George Parker. Horses symbolized America's rural past and lifestyle, and people like the Ebony Horsemen were using Keney Park as a place to restore those ideals to a new generation of urban youth

In 1996, there was even a movement to create a large, \$25 million equestrian center in the Ten Mile Woods, equipped with a 5,000-seat indoor arena. It was not built, but the idea would hardly disappear. By 2000, the city had disbanded the mounted patrol (though it would return in 2008), and a group known as the Ebony Horsewomen, successors of the Ebony Horsemen, were allowed to occupy the old Vine Street stables. The Ebony Horsewomen is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 by African American women horse riders with a mission similar to their male counterparts. The organization's goal is to improve the lives of inner city youth, and instill in them improved ideals of discipline, self-confidence, and responsibility. Horses are used to accomplish this, through riding, care, and companionship. By 2002, the group started construction on a 6,000 square-foot indoor arena adjacent to the stables, to allow their work to continue during poor weather.⁹⁰

Another group that has played a major role in the park's recent history is the Friends of Keney Park, first founded in 1988, and dedicated to both the park and the Keney Memorial Tower. In the early 1990s they hosted their first two-day long Family Day Festival at the park. It featured sidewalk chalk art, pony rides, a clown, ethnic food, Reggae and R&B music, African clothing, and much more. As with the Jewish High Holy Days of earlier generations, the community used Keney Park as a place to manifest their cultural and religious beliefs. The Rev. John Ike of Windsor's Archer Memorial AME Zion Church told the *Hartford Courant* that the festival, "shows the great diversity and richness in the Hartford community." The highly successful festival would be repeated for many years to come.⁹¹

⁸⁹ "Ambrose Norman Dies; Had Ranch at Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, January 24, 1968, 4; Mary-June Day, "Ebony Horsemen Stress Black History," *Hartford Courant*, November 13, 1977, 6H; "Horse Show Planned for Park by Group," *Hartford Courant*, July 8, 1978, 22; Carol Giacomo, "City Horseback Riding Club Offers to Patrol Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, September 17, 1978, 40A.

⁹⁰ Ebony Horsewomen, <http://ebonyhorsewomen.org> [Accessed January 8, 2011]; Susan Kania, "Learning Horse Sense, City Youths Are Taught Riding, Responsibility," *Hartford Courant*, November 9, 2000, B1; Stan Simpson, "Plan to Build Horse Center Worth a Ride," *Hartford Courant*, August 12, 1996, A3; Nicole Neroulis, "Horsewomen Begin Work on Indoor Arena; A Groundbreaking Ceremony Was Held Friday on a Facility To Bring the Activities of the Ebony Horsewomen Indoors During Bad Weather," *Hartford Courant*, June 15, 2002, B3.

⁹¹ Fran Silverman, "Family Festival Brings Out the Best in Hartford," *Hartford Courant*, August 23, 1992, C1.

By 1994, the Friends had opened a headquarters building on Windsor Avenue near the park. They helped create a new cricket field, and soon made plans for more park improvements, such as paths and playscapes. If the city could not afford to properly maintain and improve the park, then the Friends would, and they also offered assistance to other city parks. They sponsored community-watch programs, by which visitors were encouraged to report crime or problems to the police. In 1999, the group co-hosted BioBlitz, which helped teach area children about the amazing biodiversity found at Keney: 1,369 plant and animal species found in the park were analyzed. The Friends helped with numerous other programs and projects, and they continue to do so in the present.⁹²

Another important event for the park occurred in the late 1980s, when a portion of the North End was included in the Upper Albany Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. The West Open was included within this District, though the other three sections were not. Placement on the National Register does not necessarily guarantee protection of the West Open, but it is an acknowledgment of Keney Park's contribution to the history of the Upper Albany neighborhood. Compared to the other sections of the park, the West Open has always been in closer geographic proximity to a larger number of North End residents, which likely explains why that section was the only one placed in the District.⁹³

In the mid-1990s, the Windsor Street gateway enjoyed a fitting restoration. The condition of the golf course also improved after the city leased management of it to a private company in 1989. In addition, the park continued to be used as a central community gathering place. In 1999, Keney Park was one of many sites across the state which hosted events to honor African American history. African dancing and music, among other exercises, occurred at the park for "Freedom Trail Month," which celebrated the path of Connecticut's African American population from slavery to freedom to civil rights. It was events like this, coupled with improvements conducted by the Friends and others, which created a Keney Park renaissance.⁹⁴

Yet, just when things were improving for all of Hartford's parks, the city made another bureaucratic change which put the parks at an even worse disadvantage than in 1947. In 1996, the city unbelievably decided to abolish the Parks and Recreation Department, for what the Trust for Public Land said "was due more to personality issues than to structural imperatives, but the result was not positive." The Department's former duties were split between two other city departments. The Department of Public Works took on park maintenance, while the Department

⁹² "More Friends for Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, July 4, 1994, D8; Marie K. Shanahan, "City Residents Band Together to Take Back Their Neighborhood Park," *Hartford Courant*, November 10, 1995, B4; Stephen L. Purdy, "24 Hours of Bugs, Snakes, Frogs and More," *New York Times*, June 20, 1999, CT15; Susan Campbell, "Kids Gather Samples for Day of Science BioBlitz," *Hartford Courant*, June 13, 1999, B1.

⁹³ National Register of Historic Places, Upper Albany Historic District, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Register #86003383. Starting in 2010, and continuing into 2011, the Hartford Preservation Alliance has been working on listing the three remaining sections of Keney Park on the National Register. This history was researched and written during and for that process.

⁹⁴ Stan Simpson, "Designs Intended to Revamp Wilson," *Hartford Courant*, September 27, 1994, B1; Alberta Eiseman, "Retracing the Steps to Freedom," *New York Times*, September 7, 1997, CN6; David Fink, "A Good Course Avoided," *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1998, B3. The company American Golf Corp. was placed in charge of both of Hartford's municipal golf courses, at Keney and Goodwin Parks.

of Health and Human Services, Division of Recreation and Youth Programs took on recreational activities.

According to the Trust for Public Land, a non-profit park advocacy group, “cities which have fragmented bureaucratic structures have park systems which do not get the full attention of the mayor, the city council and the public at large.” The parks become of secondary importance for the new host department, which often has much larger tasks and issues to deal with. The budget and number of employees for the parks thus suffers greatly, especially in difficult economic times. In addition, according to the Trust, “there are frequently coordination problems between the people who manage sports players and the people who prepare the fields for their use.” Even after the Rain of Parks had passed its centennial, the city of Hartford created a new cumbersome park structure which likely caused Francis Goodwin to once again roll over in his grave.⁹⁵

The Park Today

Thankfully, the ongoing theme of prosperity and improvement continued for Keney Park into the twenty-first century. The Friends of Keney Park expanded their mission, and neighborhood groups in the Upper Albany and Blue Hills neighborhoods increasingly included the park in their rehabilitation efforts, which have paid great dividends. In 2003, the park received a massive \$4 million grant, from both the federal and city governments, as well as the Hartford Parks Trust Fund. According to the Friends, this kicked off a “Renaissance” for Keney which included many important improvements: dredging of the Pond, construction of fishing piers, a gazebo, a band platform, the cleaning of park trails, and renovation of the pool. The park’s first and only outdoor sculpture was also placed near the Pond. It represents the theme of family unity, showing a mother, father, and child in loving embrace.⁹⁶

Events did occur in 2009, though, that no doubt would have sent Ruth C. Bulkeley into action had she still been alive. Led by the good intentions of the Ebony Horsewomen, a number of people once again pushed for an equestrian center to be built in Keney Park. This latest reincarnation of the idea, though, which had been constantly discussed for years, was massive: \$65 million, a 37,000 square-foot building and museum, new stables, a 1,500 car-capacity parking lot, a polo field, a rodeo arena, and more. It would create a large number of jobs at a time when jobs are scarce, and it is considered world-class; yet it requires at least 200 acres of

⁹⁵ The Trust for Public Land, 13. It should also be noted that in 1995, 240 acres of land in Windsor, directly adjacent Keney Park’s northern boundary, was set aside by the state of Connecticut as Matianuck State Park. The town of Windsor subsequently made small additions to this open space throughout the following years.

⁹⁶ Tom Condon, “An Elegant Renewal,” *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 2005, C4; Melissa Pionzio, “New Look For Keney; Grant to Pay For Park Projects,” *Hartford Courant*, January 12, 2002, B3; Arielle Levin Becker, “Friends of Keney Park Applaud Repairs; Makeover Project Begins at Keney,” *Hartford Courant*, July 31, 2003, B7. The reason why Keney Park never had outdoor sculpture before was because such outdoor art did not fit with the intended rural design. The Olmsted Brothers felt the city should primarily concentrate art in Bushnell Park, which it largely did.

Keney Park land in order to come into fruition. Will it? Many city leaders hope so, while many neighbors are unsure. Either way, approval and construction has not yet occurred.⁹⁷

These latest events show, however, that the history of Keney Park is never done. It is a living park that changes with the times. The city, including Keney Park and the North End specifically, have come a long way since the tough days of the 1970s and 1980s, although sadly many suburbanites are still unaware of this. No doubt, Hartford still faces many financial problems and struggles, which the parks will not escape; but Keney Park has a great history and an equally promising future. It has a strong community, terrific recreational benefits, and dedicated Friends.

Conclusions

The history of Keney Park is a history of paradoxes. It is completely man-made, but was designed to look natural. As a result, people have too often viewed the rolling pastures and dense woodlots as unused space, ripe for development. It was also designed to be secluded and isolated: a rural escape from the busy urban world. Yet, Keney eventually acquired a reputation for urban crime within its boundaries; and instead of serving as a place to escape to, many viewed it as a dangerously secluded place to escape from. For the Olmsted Brothers it was supposed to represent traditional American rural values; for today's suburbanites the park often epitomizes the ills of urban America.

For much of the first half of its history, the park enjoyed a strong level of continuity in leadership and mission. The partnership of George Parker and Francis Goodwin directed the park's first thirty years, while the able George Hollister managed the next thirty. Goodwin was a member of both the Board of Park Commissioners (Park Board) and the Keney Park Trustees: the two dedicated bodies that oversaw the park during the first half of its history. The Trustees, the Park Board, Goodwin, and Parker all had extensive personal relations with the Olmsted Brothers and Charles Eliot. They knew and understood the original designs and intentions. They dealt personally with the Olmsted firm. Most importantly of all, they were guided by very strong ideals on the nature of parks and city life. Thus, for the first half of its history, Keney Park was led by a relatively small group of highly-dedicated professionals with a unified purpose. In addition, the city as a whole enjoyed a steady rise in population and wealth.

But then came a mid-century turning point. In 1947 the Park Board was abolished, and beginning in the 1950s, the city's population and treasury began to decrease as Hartford entered an uncertain era of suburban sprawl and industrial decline. The vibrant North End neighborhoods surrounding Keney Park became impoverished and blighted. In those desperate times, when the parks were weaker without the watchful and dedicated Park Board, the city often tried to take advantage of "open" space in the parks. For purposes of urban redevelopment,

⁹⁷ Jeffrey B. Cohen, "Equestrian Complex Proposed; Keney Park," *Hartford Courant*, January 17, 2009, A2; Garnet Consulting Services, *Connecticut Equestrian and Exhibition Center, Feasibility Study Update Phase I, Prepared for the Ebony Horsewomen, Inc.* (Pleasant Valley, CT: Garnet Consulting Services, Inc, 2008).

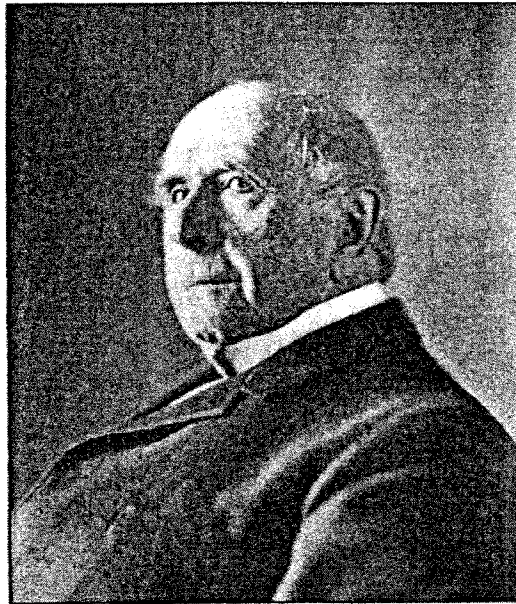
Keney Park soon saw proposals for a medical school, a recreational and housing complex, and an equestrian center. The park suffered from the construction, and subsequent widening, of a major interstate highway through one of its most beautiful natural features.

In the 1990s, the city further fragmented and weakened the park system by splitting up its maintenance and recreational programs. The city which had historically been renowned for its parks, now had no official city commission or department solely dedicated to the care of those precious resources. Whereas the first half of Keney Park's history was characterized by a unified, dedicated, confident, and independent leadership, the second half featured the opposite. Park governance was fragmented, politicalized, secondary, and weak.

When public leadership was lacking, though, private neighborhood forces took the lead. One constant aspect of Keney's history, thankfully, has been community engagement and dedication. The park has always been the social and cultural lynchpin of the North End neighborhoods, from its role in the Jewish High Holidays to its hosting of African festivals. It is a place for recreation, for relationships, for bonding, for family, and for lovers. For the second half of Keney's history, groups such as the Concerned Citizens, the Friends, and the Ebony Horsemen and Horsewomen have taken over where the Olmsted Brothers, Goodwin, and Parker left off.

Each generation views Keney Park in its own way, based on its own contemporary beliefs and ideals. Ever since the beginning, though, Keney has often been perceived as being something it wasn't. Early visitors marveled at what they thought was natural beauty, yet it was man-made. Parker saw it as a representation of some long-lost high American ideals of the farm and home. Many people of the late twentieth century and the present view it as a haven for crime and vandalism, yet it is one of Hartford's most used parks, and a community beacon for festivals and family days. Yet, through all the successes and all the troubles, the park has survived and thrived. It has evolved with the times, and will continue to do so in the future. Hence is the ongoing story of Keney Park: Hartford's most underrated crown jewel.

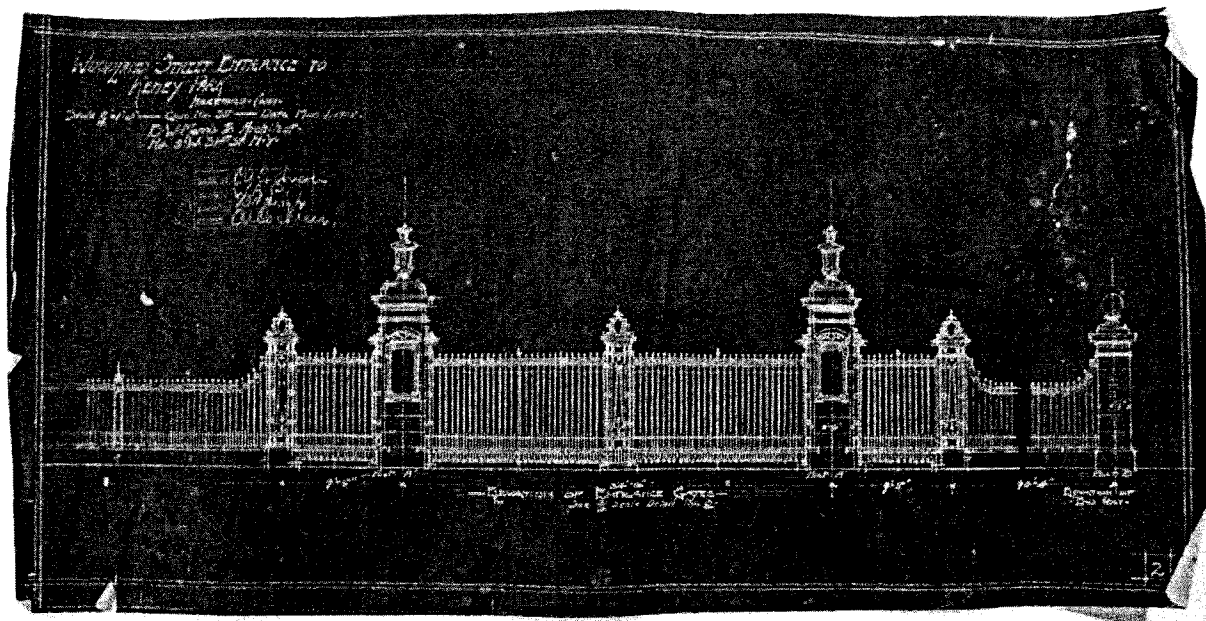
Images and Maps

Henry Keney⁹⁸Reverend Francis Goodwin⁹⁹George A. Parker¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ American Book Exchange, 29.

⁹⁹ American Book Exchange, 21.

¹⁰⁰ American Book Exchange, 45.



Blueprint by B.W. Morris for the Woodland Street Gateway, 1902¹⁰¹



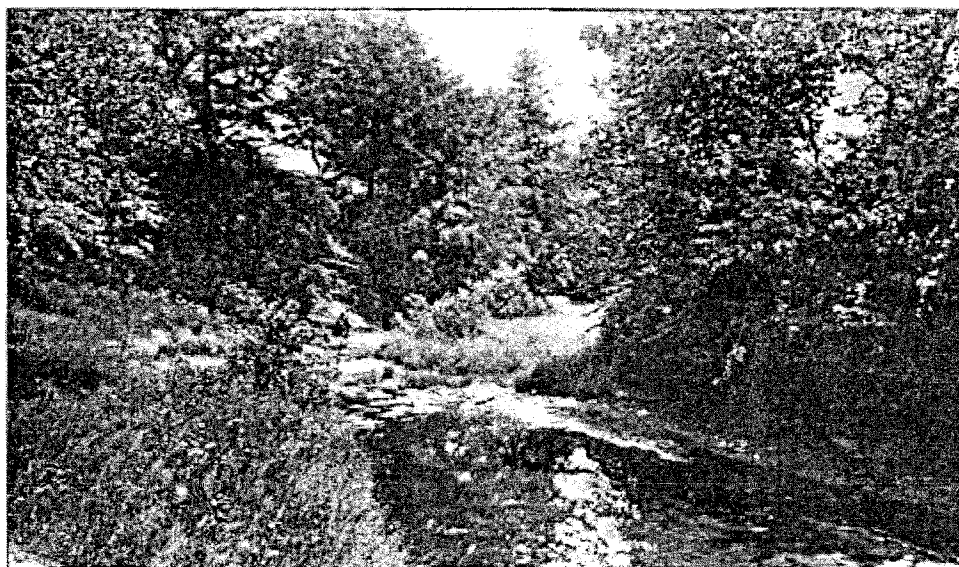
The Ten Mile Woods, c. 1900¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ B.W. Morris, "Woodland Street Entrance to Keney Park," blueprint, FOLIO NO: KNY PK 14, Maps Collection, HHC.

¹⁰² American Book Exchange, 99.



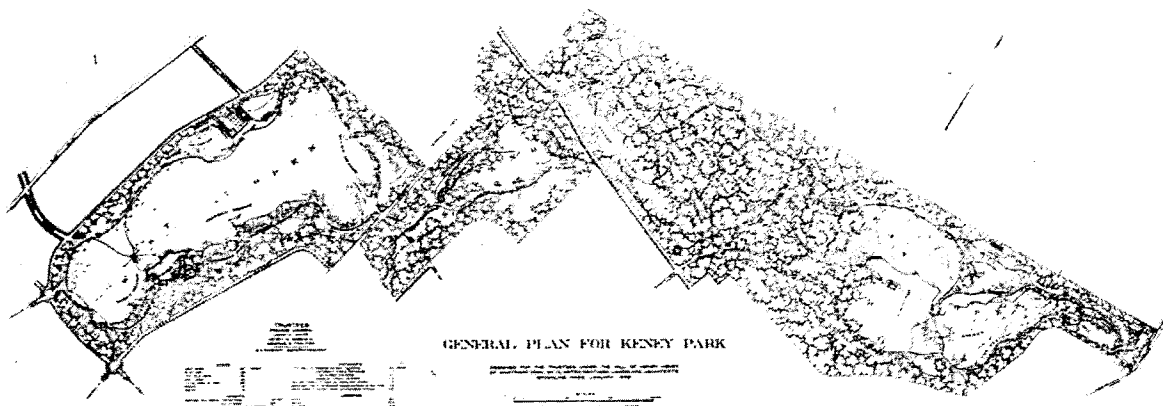
Vista Valley, East Open, c. 1900¹⁰³



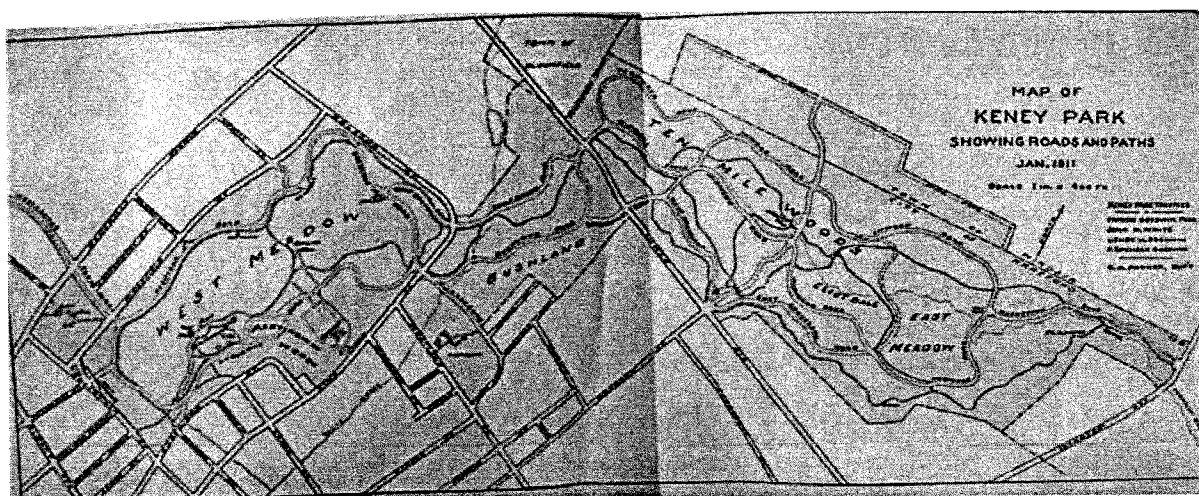
The Gorge, East Open, c. 1900¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ American Book Exchange, 105.

¹⁰⁴ American Book Exchange, 107.



General Plan of Keney Park, by the Olmsted Brothers, 1895¹⁰⁵

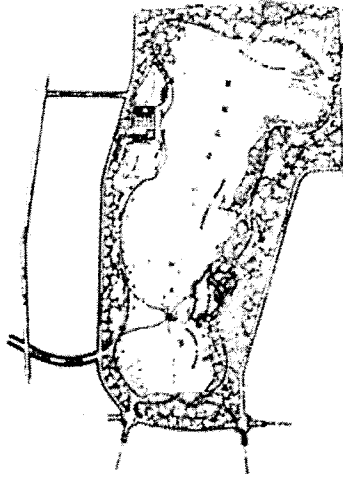


Map of Keney Park, 1911¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Olmsted Brothers, "Keney Park Plan," 1895, American Memory Database, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/mhsalad.080054> [Accessed January 17, 2011].

¹⁰⁶ "Map of Keney Park, Showing Roads and Paths, January 1911," Uncatalogued Maps, HHC.

West Open, Keney Park



1895 Olmsted Plan

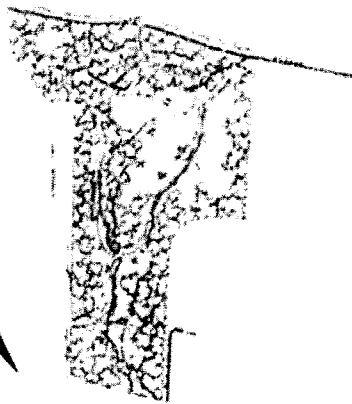


1934 Aerial View



Modern Aerial View

Bushland, Keney Park



1895 Olmsted Plan



1934 Aerial View



Modern Aerial View

Ten Mile Wood and East Open, Keney Park



1895
Olmsted Plan



1934
Aerial View



Modern
Aerial View

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¹⁰⁷ 1934 Connecticut Fairchild Aerial Photography Mash-Up, Map and Geographic Information Center, University Libraries, University of Connecticut, http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934.html [Accessed January 17, 2011]. This website allows users to match and overlap the 1934 views with modern Google earth images.

For Further Information

For those who seek more information regarding Keney Park, the best resource by far is the Hartford History Center, located within the main branch of the Hartford Public Library. The Center (referred to as HHC in the footnotes above), contains a large Parks Collection with numerous materials relating specifically to Keney Park. As of 2010, it also had a large collection of both catalogued and uncatalogued maps and diagrams of Keney Park (including some that outline past property owners of Keney Park land). It also contains a substantial collection of papers and correspondence written by George A. Parker, and a massive collection of images of all Hartford's parks. *The Keney Park Trustees Record Book* is also a wonderful source on the park's early years.

The curator, staff, and volunteers of the Hartford History Center are exceptionally knowledgeable and helpful. In addition to the above mentioned resources, the Center also has an array of basic and general sources on Hartford history. It also allows free access to the Historical *Hartford Courant* Database. This amazing resource provides the ability to word-search nearly every issue of that historic newspaper from its founding to modern times.

The Connecticut State Library, located in Hartford, also contains many volumes related to the general history of parks in America and in Connecticut. Most helpful, though, are the histories of the Hartford parks system researched and written in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project, of the Works Progress Administration. Located in RG 33 of the State Archives division, a number of detailed histories of Keney Park are included.

For more information specifically regarding Keney Park, and the entire city park system from the perspective of a landscape historian, see John Alexopoulos, *The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford: A Legacy to the Nation* (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1983). For more information on the urban reform movement in Hartford, and how the parks and George Parker fit into it, see Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

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