

REPORT ON THE PRELIMINARY MASTER PLAN

PRESCOTT PARK - Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Moriece & Gary, Landscape Architects, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 18, 1964

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## INTRODUCTION

Early in May of this year 1964 this firm (Moriece & Gary) was commissioned by the Trustees of Trust Funds to prepare a preliminary MASTER PLAN for PRESCOTT PARK , a plan having a distinct feeling of Colonial New England, a plan which could be fully developed possibly over the next five years. The overall design goal has been to create such a Park for the citizens and visitors to Portsmouth.

Saltonstall in the Ports of Piscataqua writes, "There is no area of inland tide-waters in New England more beautiful or more thoroughly steeped in maritime history and tradition than the Piscataqua River System". The Master Plan attempts to recreate some of this beauty and history for present and future generations to enjoy. The Park then in meeting the full recreational needs of the community is composed of historical and contemporary elements blended into a comprehensive plan.

The shipbuilding, mast trade, fishing, docking combined with a Colonial garden, an amphitheater and band shell and a large green or Commons, a burying ground and even a maritime play area for children form part of the park fabric. The overall design accommodates the casual visitor to the Park seeking a shady spot to rest or wanting a walk along the waterfront. Those wanting to experience and to study Colonial history may visit the old burying grounds, the Maritime Exhibit Area or the Colonial garden. Pleasure boats may find a temporary dock to stop and visit the Park and Portsmouth. A model of the Ranger and Gundalow are proposed to lend atmosphere and meaning to the Park. Wharfs in their original locations are restored to reflect the history, provide a docking for boats and give visitors a clear view up and down the Piscataqua.

The Park has been designed with the proposed Strawberry Banke project and the developments in the downtown area in mind. In a short walk from the Business Section shoppers, employees and visitors may visit and enjoy the Park. The Colonial flavor of the park and its overall design is in keeping with the Strawberry Bank development.

### Planting

There is an attempt to reinforce the existing planting to create tree groves. As observed by Martin Pring in 1603, "We beheld very goodly groves and woods replenished with tall Oaks, Beeches, Pine-trees, Fir-trees and Maples". The plants selected for the park are to be generally those used prior to 1813 and in the style so used. Combinations of tree clumps, groves and rows are employed to articulate the design.

### Parking

Precious waterfront park land should not be used for general parking. Should additional parking become necessary, locations can be found nearby. A minimum of off-street parking is provided near the Marina for visitors and space for cars in the Maritime Area for adult education courses. The broad walks will serve as service truck routes.

### Lighting

General lighting is provided by the installation of gas or electric lights placed on lamp posts in the Colonial style.

### Structures

Benches, fences, lamps, walks, shelters, walls, the Bandshell and other construction elements are to be in the Colonial style as is the selection of plants. Drinking fountains and comfort stations are recommended at convenient locations.

ENTRANCE MALL

Presently there exist along Marcy Street a formal layout consisting of parallel tree masses and a great amount of black top. As a formal entrance to the Park, a viewing balcony or overlook along with steps are proposed to replace the present ramp. A large panel of turf is to replace the vast area of black top. Lamp posts and benches grace the walks leading to the present docking area where hopefully a ship would be permanently docked. Such a ship would not only serve as a focal point and add meaning to this mall but would also block the prominent watertower of the Naval Yard. Brick is proposed to replace the existing asphalt walks.

PRESCOTT MARINA

In view of the increased recreational use of the Piscataqua by pleasure craft a marina area is proposed to accommodate Portsmouth boaters and visitors to Portsmouth and the Park. Director A. Dickson Smith of the New Hampshire State Port Authority in Portsmouth supports such facilities in these federal waters. The harbor master, Mr. Gerald Anageen concurs that a landing in this area would be most desirable. The U. S. Army Engineers Division of New England is currently engaged in deepening the main channel of the River across from the Park. According to Mr. Frank W. Fogarty, Chief of the River and Harbor Section, within the next three years work is to begin on improving the backwaters east of the Park. These improved waterways would attract even greater numbers of pleasure craft to the general area. A primary channel to these improved waterways is through the Pierce Island Bridge by Four Tree Island.

The tides in this area although not ideal for such a landing would not present a serious hazard for docking. The facilities provided would be intended for use mainly during the daylight hours for brief stops. Recent figures of the U. S. Engineers indicate 1300 recreational boats and 22 lobster boats berthed or registered in the back channel area. All indications are that the number of recreational boats will increase greatly in the next few years. The Portsmouth Pier and the proposed restored Long Wharf would provide a sheltered area for these boats. The depth of water are adequate and safe for small boating. Such a use for this Park seems in keeping with its traditional function - that of harboring Piscataqua sailors.

Additional moorings and landings are provided near the Pierce Island bridge along the waterfront of the Commons for small sailboats. These landings have been in operation for a number of years by Portsmouth. The Portsmouth Pier could serve as a landing for the excursion boats touring the river.

## COLONIAL GARDEN

No large New England Park would be complete without a Garden - an arrangement of flowers, sculpture, pools and walks. Placed parallel to Marcy Street between the Proposed Maritime Area and the Information Center is the Colonial Garden.

Northern colonial gardens were not as a general rule so complex and grandiose as southern gardens; perhaps due to the less favorable climate. The climate restricted the plant vocabulary and size of garden as long vistas invited the cold winter winds. Puritanical beliefs influenced early gardens as they were not so much for show or pleasure as for utilitarian purposes - an adjunct of the household economy.

Northern gardens were designed along the traditional English pattern of the time. Until the first half of the 18th century when Pope and Addison began to poke fun at the highly formal gardens of their country, English Gardens were strictly geometric in design and form. Kent, Brown and Repton changed all this as the naturalistic school of thought was established in England. In New England combinations of approaches - geometrical and naturalistic are evident.

From 1620 to 1840 there were basically two types of gardens - the small cottage garden and the large manor house garden designed along formal lines but informally planted. The manor type garden usually consisted of a large enclosed garden plot connected to the house in the front or side. A central walk terminating in a vista or structure as a focal point formed the main design element. Secondary walks at right angles forming plant beds were used.

The Master Plan shows a garden designed after the manor-type. In form and selection of plants the proposed Garden is designed in the Colonial idiom. In the Center of the Garden is placed the statue-fountain(now next to the Post Office) surrounded by a reflecting pool. Two smaller pools grace the adjoining plant beds. The entire garden is sunken below the surrounding grades and enclosed by fence and planting. An arbor is placed at one end and steps lead from the opposite end to the Maritime Area. People walking along Marcy Street may stop for a rest under the sitting area and catch glimpses of the adjacent garden below.



AMPHITHEATER AND BAND SHELL

Between the Colonial Garden and the Piscataqua water front a large lawn is proposed sloping down to a small platform and Band Shell. The lawn would comfortably accommodate 2000 to 2500 people. Such a shell could also be used for simple dramatic productions and other civic events.

## MARITIME EXHIBIT AREA

Portsmouth was once one of the great shipbuilding centers of America as well as an important seaport. This proposed area along Marcy or Water Street as it was called is heavy with seaport history. The Piscataqua's most important single role in early maritime history was as a center of the mast trade (1650 to 1775). White pine up to 200 feet high were used for masts and spars. From 1770 to 1860 shipbuilding and commerce flourished along the Piscataqua. Schooners, sloops, packet ships and finally the famed American Clippers were built and launched here in Portsmouth. Near here the Ranger was fitted out for the U. S. Navy at Sheafe's warehouse on the River by Captain John Paul Jones.

Great wharves extended out from Marcy Street - Long, Shaws, Ayres, with large warehouses placed on them. A marine railway existed as well. To recapture this most significant phase of Portsmouth's history a Maritime Exhibit Area is proposed for the Park.

From the 1813 map of Portsmouth Shaws wharf and Ayres wharf are shown to exist. In the Master Plan Sheafe's warehouse is placed on Shaws wharf (now existing) and the lobster and fishing shacks with traps, nets, etc., are located to remind the visitor that Portsmouth or Strawberry Banke was once a fishing village. A portion of the area is paved with cobbles with old anchors, figureheads and other seaport relics placed on exhibit. Adjacent to this is a small terrace with tables and chairs on which to rest and perhaps obtain a soda and light refreshments. It is proposed that the future brick building on Marcy Street become a Maritime Museum. Also It is proposed that a ship similar to the Ranger be docked in this area. The maritime railway is to be reconditioned.

The Maritime area is to be so arranged to not require guides. Small well placed signs will provide adequate information for visitors. The two warehouses presently existing could be used by the arts and crafts groups and other adult education groups as well as an art gallery.

POINT OF GRAVES

According to Gurney in March, 1671 Captain John Pickery 2<sup>n</sup> agreed that the town should "have full liberty to enclose about half an acre upon the neck of land on which he lived, where the people have been want to be buried, which land shall be incorporated forever unto the use of a burial place." In the burying ground called Point of Graves are buried several prominent families of old Portsmouth - the Wentworths, Rogers, Neserves, Lears and Vaughans. The oldest legible stone is dated 1682.

This area is to be preserved and enhanced to create a proper setting for visitors to come and view the stones. On the east border are placed a row of large Firs and around the other borders, shade trees to enclose the yard. Evergreen shrubs are proposed along the repaired brick wall and small flowering trees are grouped about the area as was the custom in graveyards of New England. Visitors would enter this area through one wrought iron gate.

## THE COMMONS

Traditionally the New England towns were built around great greens or Commons. Here the first homes and church were constructed. Historically Portsmouth did not have many open spaces save the Point of Graves and the North Burying Grounds - which were scarcely recreation areas. There was apparently no attempt to deliberately incorporate any open spaces for public use according to the research of Hugo-Brunt.

Nevertheless the large oval green area or Commons is proposed in the Master Plan perhaps to correct the over due lack of such spaces and to remind people of the once open inlet to puddle-dock. A large circular brick walk is proposed with benches. (The center walk is to be removed.) According to the naturalistic style of Capability Brown of England and Downing of America clumps of trees are shown on a slightly rolling lawn.

The play area is to be incorporated with a comfort station and redesigned with a few old boats, some sand, swings and other relics of the seaport. The atmosphere in the Commons is intended to be a quiet one reflecting the early solitude of these banks.

FOUR TREE ISLAND

This historic island is to be treated as part of the overall Park plan. Four large trees should be planted to replace the two present poor specimens. A few large boulders and shrub masses would lend body to the island making it a more pleasant object to view. (There is a proposed plan by the U. S. Engineers to use the low land between Pierce Island and Four tree Island for the placement of material removed from the back channel project. in the next three years. Such efforts should be discouraged and in preliminary discussions with the Engineers they indicated other locations could be found for the disposal of the material.

MAINTENANCE AND SUPERVISION

As the various elements of the Master Plan are realized the need for maintenance and supervision of the Park will obviously increase. It may be desirable for the Trustees to employ a superintendent or caretaker to supervise and co-ordinate the care and protection of the Park. The information center could be used as a house for the caretaker in order that he may be on the park land at all times.

SOURCES OF INFORMATIONGeneral - Books, Pamphlets, Reports

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Note:

The consultants talked with many people in Portsmouth connected with the Park, River and adjacent areas. Also a large amount of written material and plans were studied at the Planning Office and the Public Library not here recorded.