

FRIENDS OF ANDERSON PARK RECEIVES \$12,500 GRANT FOR 2008-09

The Friends of Anderson Park has been awarded a \$12,500 grant by the New Jersey Historical Commission to prepare a nomination of the park to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Once it is placed on the registers, this Olmsted-designed park will enjoy a special status and protection as it enters its second century.

"The park is only 14 acres, but it has a sprawling history, and we are delighted to be able to present its story to the public and preserve it for posterity," said Scott Kevelson, president of Friends of Anderson Park.

Maps, correspondence and photographs over a century old will lend rich detail to the story of this Essex County park, which originated as a donation of land by Charles W. Anderson, a New York insurance executive who lived in Montclair. Research will be done by Kathleen P. Galop of Preservation Possibilities, and Lianne Renner, the historian for Friends of Anderson Park. The photographer Scot Surbeck will document the park in all seasons.

"From the very beginning, the Friends of Anderson Park has partnered with us to restore the park to its original Olmsted design, working hand-in-hand with our county parks personnel to plant new trees and bushes according to the landscaping plans," said Joseph N. Di Vincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive. "I commend them for their proactive approach, and especially for the efforts they made to gain a grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission so that the park's history could be recognized. We look forward to another Essex County Park listing on the State and National Historic Registers."

The National Register nomination will detail how the park is historically significant both nationally and locally. It was designed by John Charles Olmsted, whose Olmsted Brothers firm succeeded the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Central Park in New York. Before creating Anderson Park, John Charles Olmsted had already helped design the U.S. Capitol grounds. Later in his career he developed park systems nationwide in cities like Seattle; Charleston, S.C.; Portland, Me.; and in Essex County, N.J. He was a guiding force in the design of Essex County's Branch Brook Park in Newark. The Essex County park system was the first county system in the nation when it began in 1895, and Anderson Park, opening a decade later, was an early element of that pioneering project.

"Anderson Park's history goes from the Ice Age, with its huge boulders, to the Space Age, with the childhood home of astronaut Buzz Aldrin right next door," Renner said. "It is a microcosm of social movements going on in the nation at the beginning of the 20th century, and the grant will help us show the bigger picture of this little park." Research will also provide a better understanding of the park's original design, making future rehabilitation more true to the historic landscape.

The park's local importance is due partly to the way it inspired the creation of a

townwide park system. When Anderson Park opened in 1905, the specter of urban squalor loomed from across the Hudson River and even in ramshackle parts of Montclair. The park's success prompted town leaders to call for more "beauty spots" and "breathing space," and as a result voters approved the purchase of land for four parks in 1906. Among these were Edgemont Memorial Park and Glenfield Park, both designed by the Olmsted Brothers.

Anderson Park was also instrumental in spurring development of the neighborhood just south of its borders, which now numbers about 80 homes. "Our research will explore how that early subdivision had a symbiotic relationship with the park," Renner explained. Research is expected to be well underway by early 2008 and completed within a year.

Friends of Anderson Park, a non-profit independent liaison to Essex County, is dedicated to the thoughtful stewardship of the park, at the corner of North Mountain and Bellevue Avenues in Upper Montclair. The conservancy strives to protect the spirit and integrity of the Olmsted design as it rehabilitates the landscape. It has planted 54 trees this year, Kevelson said, and all plantings follow the 1904 Olmsted plan.

The organization offers a historic walking tour of the park every May, and the state-funded research will allow it to improve that tour. More information about the park is at www.friendsofandersonpark.org.