

Walk Thru History in Forest Park, Springfield, Massachusetts

By Linda Morzillo and Ann Plichta

According to Wikipedia, there are 41 places in the United States called Springfield and 21 are cities! The Walk 'n Mass Volkssport Club wants you to come specifically to the Springfield in Massachusetts for the third pre-walk preceding the AVA Convention in Albany during June, 2019.

The walk is planned to take place in beautiful Forest Park, designed in 1893 by Frederick Law Olmsted. (Another Forest Park designed by Olmsted is located in Queens, New York.) A native of New England, Olmsted was born in nearby Hartford, Connecticut on April 26, 1822. Forest Park is one of 355 projects (parks, civic and campus designs), attributed to Olmsted, some with his senior partner, Calvert Vaux, and/or his sons, Frederick Jr. and John.

Forest Park began when Orick Greenleaf offered 65 acres to Springfield for a park in 1884. The park grew to 735 acres when wealthy philanthropist Everett Hosmer Barney donated 178 additional acres and others were convinced to donate the rest. The result is that Springfield, which is 12% parkland and was nicknamed "The City in the Forest" during the 1920's, is home to one of the largest urban municipal parks in the United States. Besides a zoo, Olmsted's design originally included an open amphitheater, playgrounds, baseball diamonds, gardens, walking and hiking paths, an ice rink and the first municipal (public), wading pool.

Barney built an elaborate Victorian mansion in 1890 overlooking the Connecticut River and downtown Springfield. During the 1950's, the mansion was razed to make way for the construction of I-91. However, the carriage house still stands and serves as a restaurant and banquet hall. Nearby is a mausoleum to Barney's son.

A few steps beyond the mausoleum is an overlook that gives an excellent view of the Connecticut River, a part of the Springfield skyline and I-91. The Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts is known colloquially as the Pioneer Valley and is generally comprised of Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties. The river is historically important because it was the gateway for settlement in 1614-1636 by both the Dutch and four separate groups of Puritans. Besides farming in the fertile valley, Puritan groups founded the cities of Hartford (1635), and Springfield (1636).

Walkers will see a statue by Peter Wolf Toth representing Omiskanoagwiak, the Wolf-People Medicine Man. This statue is a part of the Trail of Whispering Giants, a world-wide collection of Toth sculptures. The walk route will pass by many other points of interest in Forest Park using paths that wind around ponds, cross creeks, pass gardens, go through a covered bridge, pass by the Environmental Center and the Senior Drop-in Center. A part of the walk route is on easily navigated wooded paths. Lucky walkers will see and hear birds common to the northeast as well as other wildlife.

Nearby Walks – More to Do During This Convention Pre-walk Day!

Springfield is only about 27 miles from Hartford, Connecticut!! The Connecticut Valley Volkssport Club presently sponsors eleven scenic, historic and/or cultural events, several of which are a *very short* drive from Springfield. In addition, The Empire State Capital

Volkssporters sponsors walks in Williamstown, Massachusetts and Bennington, Vermont, both of which can be included as Volkssporters make their way to Albany.

To learn more about the Connecticut River (Pioneer) Valley history and Frederick Law Olmsted, here is a short list of books you may enjoy! Many more may be found on the internet or in your local public library.

Connecticut River Valley: *The Connecticut River and the Valley of the Connecticut: Three Hundred Fifty Miles from Mountain to Sea. (Historical and Descriptive)* written by Edwin M Bacon, *Tobacco Shed: Vanishing Treasures in the Connecticut River Valley* written by Dale Cahill and Darcy Cahill, *History of the Connecticut River* written by Wick Griswold and *Directory for Research on the Pioneer Valley, Massachusetts* edited by Wendy Sibbison.

Frederick Law Olmsted: *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the 19th Century* written by Witold Rybczynski, *Civilizing American Cities* written by Frederick Law Olmsted, *Parks, Politics and Patronage, 1874-1882* written by Frederick Law Olmsted and *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape* written by Charles Beveridge and Paul Rockeleau (photographer).