

# A WALK IN SENECA PARK

Frederick Law Olmsted chose this site for a “wilderness” park because of its spectacular views of the Genesee River gorge. He designed paths and roads to make these natural features accessible and he added a spring-fed pond plus thousands of trees to re-vegetate previously farmed land. Today’s park visitors can escape the hubbub of urban life to enjoy the scenic views, picnic areas and spaces for outdoor recreation just as Olmsted planned over 100 years ago. He believed that designed landscapes such as Seneca Park would “refresh and delight the eye and through the eye, the mind and the spirit.” This tour is a little over a one mile loop with an option at stop 7 to extend the tour an additional ¾ mile.

**1** Drive in the lower park entrance (just west of the Seneca Park Zoo entrance) and take the Park Road all the way around Trout Pond until you come to Hawk and Eagle shelters, where you can park.

**2** Leaving the shelters behind, walk across the park road toward the river and turn right on the gorge path leading into the woods. The Genesee River gorge is glimpsed here through a screen of deciduous trees and hemlocks. The sound of church bells from the opposite side provides a reminder that the view is protected from development by the former St. Bernard’s Seminary and Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.



**3** Continue on the gorge path behind the rest rooms and you will eventually come out of the woods to the peaceful scene of Trout Pond. If you leave the gorge path and walk across the park road toward the pond, you can experience a clear demonstration of the elements Olmsted arranged for aesthetic effect. He used turf, trees, water, reflections, bridges, and slight differences in elevation, plus gently curving paths and roads to create a harmonious landscape - one that invites the visitor to explore further and enjoy the changing views. The area around the lake was restored to Olmsted’s design intent after the 1991 ice storm.



**4** Leave the pastoral experience of Trout Pond and return to the gorge path going north. Although it forks several times, all routes lead to a dramatic overlook of the river, furnished with benches and a table.

**5** Backtrack a bit and cross the little wooden bridge, which takes you away from the river. Here you will find yourself among a variety of native trees and shrubs including oak, hemlock, shag bark hickory, hornbeam, witch hazel, and basswood. These woody plants have botanical labels for visitors who wish to learn more about native flora. Olmsted specified native trees for Seneca Park as well as under-story plantings including ferns to enhance the wild effect.

**6** Turn left at the end of the bridge and continue along a ravine where a stream tumbles over rocks and down little waterfalls. Past the end of a second wooden bridge you have a choice:

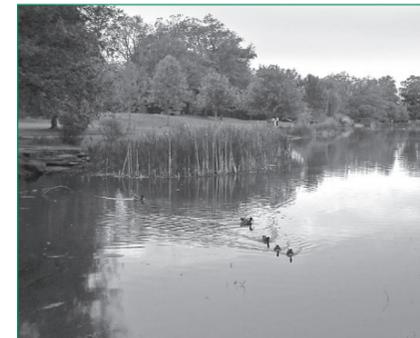
**7** On your right, a path leads up a bank to a wide meadow where you turn right and head back toward the pond, OR

**8** Continue straight ahead along the gorge path for an additional 10-minute walk. This walk continues across more wooden bridges and past more overlooks until you come to a dramatic waterfall cascading down the gorge wall to the river. If you want to explore even further, the gorge path continues until a fence marks the park boundary. Otherwise, turn around and retrace your steps to point #7.



**9** As you head back toward the pond, you will pass the Wegman Lodge on your right. The John F. Wegman Foundation replaced an original Boy Scout lodge and, more recently, the Foundation sponsored extensive remodeling. This is now a popular rental site as are all the Seneca Park shelters. Neighborhood rec centers are invited to use the Wegman Lodge free of charge. The children have the meadow as their playing field and the shady ridge on the far side as their picnic grove. Olmsted often noted the importance of parks for poor children who did not have easy access to nature.

**10** Continue across the park road and walk a little to the right for a lovely, lengthwise view of Trout Pond. Smoke stacks and a high-rise in the distance offer a reminder that this would be just another urban area except for the vision of the Parks Commission back in 1888.



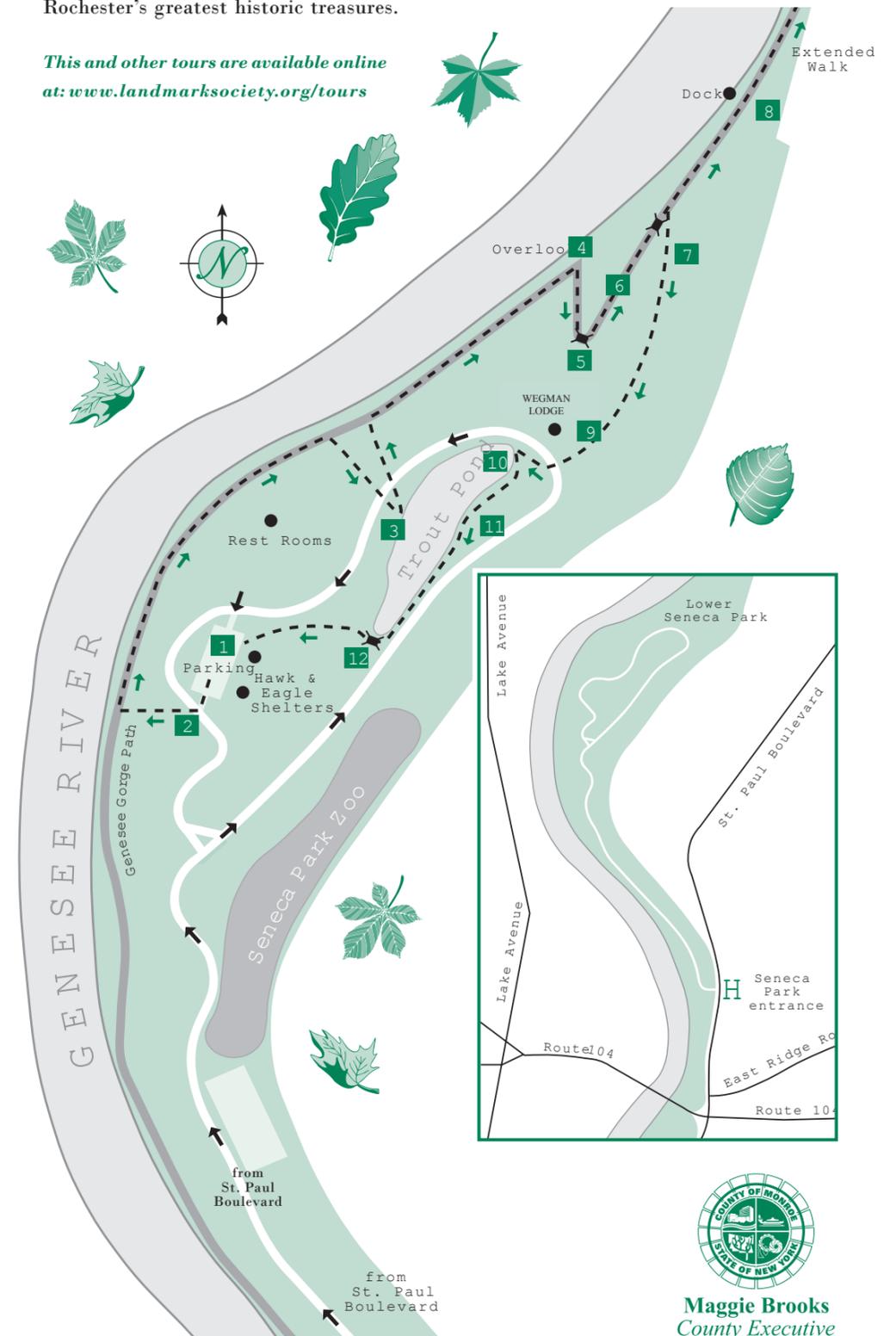
**11** Walk on the grass along the pond’s east side under the massive trees. Some of the trees have botanical labels; one honors Civil War veterans. Along the pond’s edge grow many kinds of willows, sedges, wild iris, and other native wetland plants that were installed when the park was restored after the 1991 ice storm.

**12** When you get to the foot of the pond, follow the path to the right across another wooden bridge and back toward the river. On your left stretches an area of turf and trees with grills, tables and benches that Olmsted particularly labeled a picnic grove in his plan. If you turn and look back at the ridge on the other side of the park road, you can see the thick buffer of trees that were planted to screen out the city and contain the view - another important element of Olmsted’s design.



**13** Hawk and Eagle shelters up ahead were part of the 1991 restoration. Built in harmony with their wooded setting, they provide a perfect spot where families can enjoy Seneca Park, this “jewel on the Genesee,” one of Rochester’s greatest historic treasures.

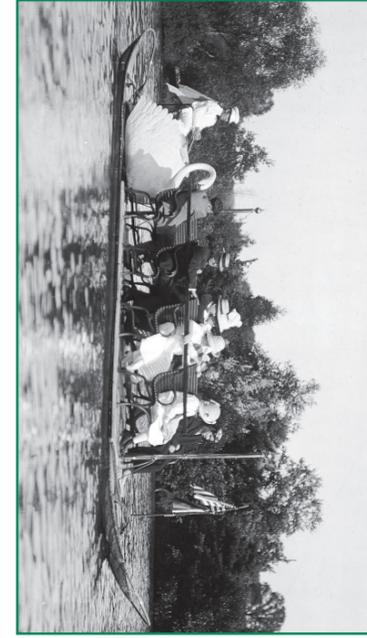
This and other tours are available online at: [www.landmarksociety.org/tours](http://www.landmarksociety.org/tours)



Produced with the cooperation of Friends and Neighbors of Seneca Park, The Landmark Society of Western NY and the Monroe County Parks Department and through a grant from the Rochester Area Community Foundation. Tour Text: Ann Baker, Photos: Stephan Ganze, Original Design: Coleman Graphics, 2009 revisions by Monroe County Department of Parks.



Maggie Brooks  
County Executive

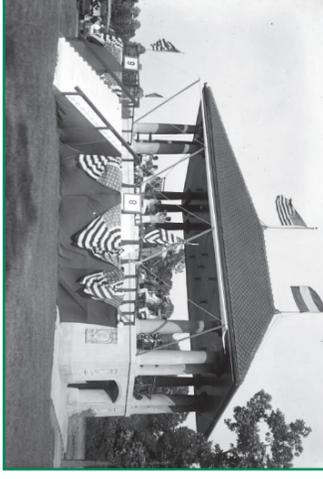


*Photos, clockwise from upper left:*

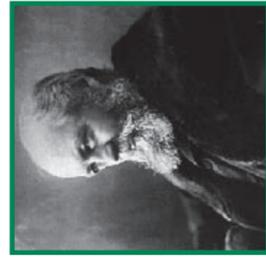
- 1912:** Bandstand with strollers
- 1908:** Anna Maypole Dance
- 1918:** Two girls by tree
- 1912:** Judges for swimming and toy yacht races riding in Swan Boat
- 1912:** Annual Music Fest at bandstand.
- 1918:** Opening ceremonies, tree dedication to WWI heroes, School #26 chorus



Images from the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY. To see more Albert R. Stone photographs, go to the RMSCC Library and Collections catalog <http://libcat.rmscc.org> and search by subject.



## HISTORIC SENECA PARK



## FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822 - 1903) is best known for his design (in collaboration with Calvert Vaux) of Central Park in New York City. He has been widely credited with establishing the concept of the public park as a common green space to be preserved and enhanced for everyone to enjoy. He was instrumental in the late-nineteenth century transformation of "landscape gardening," which primarily meant the design of flower gardens for wealthy landowners, into a broader profession of landscape architecture in which the practitioners were akin to traditional architects.

Olmsted made major contributions to other fields besides landscape architecture. He was a reporter for the *New York Times*, traveling throughout the south before the Civil War to argue against slavery on economic as well as humanitarian grounds. During the Civil War, he was Secretary General of the United States Sanitary Commission, responsible for field hospitals, dispensaries and hospital ships. In 1865 he co-founded *The Nation* magazine, still in existence. He tried landscape architecture to social reform, believing that designed green space improved the mental and physical well-being of city dwellers and mitigated the suffering of the poor.

Having established his reputation with the design of Central Park, Olmsted went on to work on many other types of sites nationwide. The designs and theories he developed for urban parks, residential communities, institutional campuses, national parks (including Yosemite and the Niagara Reservation) and private estates were important, both for their influence on the new field of landscape architecture and for their impact on the development of the communities in which they were implemented. His designs for Highland, Seneca/Maplewood and Genesee Valley Parks in Rochester were artistic masterpieces that built on the city's strong horticultural legacy and provided city neighborhoods with open spaces that became increasingly important as the city grew.

Copy courtesy of the Landmark Society of Western NY  
[www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)

## ROCHESTER'S OLMSTED PARKS

Rochester is one of just four cities nationwide that boasts an entire park system designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of the landscape architecture profession. Olmsted designed Highland, Genesee Valley and Seneca Parks for Rochester and are now operated as part of the Monroe County Park System. Olmsted and the firm that continued his work after his retirement also designed several parkways and small neighborhood parks.

In 1888, Rochester's Board of Park Commissioners selected Frederick Law Olmsted to design a network of parks and parkways for the city. The commissioners envisioned a system that would begin with the development of elegant, park-like boulevards, but Olmsted encouraged them to concentrate instead on setting aside generous amounts of open space as the city's first major public parks. He proposed a system focused on the city's great natural asset—the dramatic Genesee River in all its glorious variety.

Olmsted's three major parks in Rochester each represented different landscape styles. Highland Park was created on land donated to the city by horticulturists George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry; in recognition of their gift, the design called for an arboretum of various plants and shrubs that would preserve the dazzling views from the top of the hill. Genesee Valley Park, designed in Olmsted's classic "pastoral" style, features gently rolling terrain along the river south of downtown. Seneca Park, meanwhile, is an excellent example of Olmsted's "picturesque" style, with rugged terrain meant to inspire wonder and awe.

When Olmsted suggested setting aside the land for Highland, Genesee Valley and Seneca Parks, some thought it unnecessary to set aside so much land so far from the center of the city, in relatively undeveloped areas where open land was plentiful. As Olmsted expected, the parks were not on the fringes for very long, as the city quickly grew to surround them. Today, Rochester's three large Olmsted parks provide tranquility and beauty right in the city, while smaller parks and parkways are focal points of their neighborhoods.

Copy courtesy of the Landmark Society of Western NY  
[www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)

### Seneca Park Hours and Regulations

Seneca Park is open daily 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. during the summer.

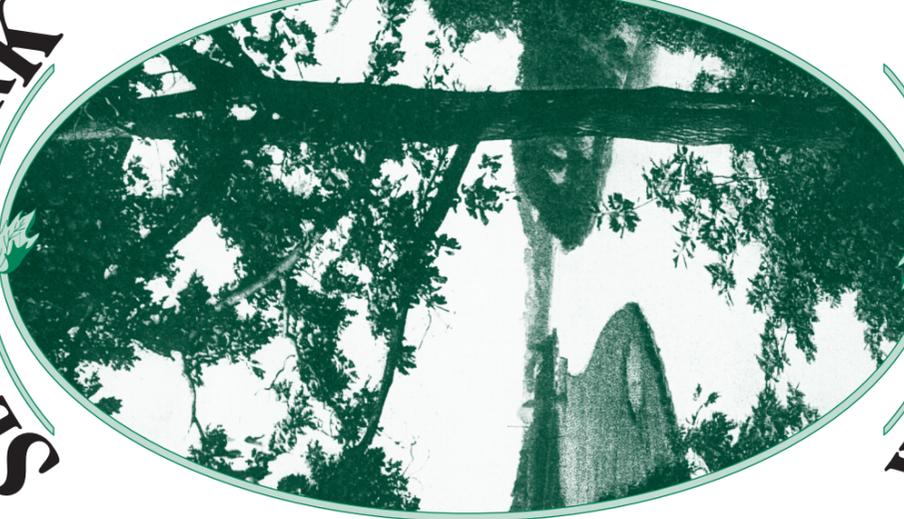
The lower park is closed at dusk from October 15 through May 15.

Seneca Park has a Carry In/Carry Out rule, which means you must

take all your garbage with you for disposal after leaving the park.

Glass is not allowed. All pets must be leashed and you are responsible for cleaning up after them. No amplified sound allowed.

## SENECA PARK



## WALKING TOUR