

Parks, Playgrounds, and Conservation Areas - Mark S. Allsup

I. Purpose of Parks, Playgrounds, and Conservation Areas

- A. Public parks, playgrounds, and conservation areas are vital components to life today
- B. Public parks, playgrounds, and conservation areas nurture an association with nature
- C. Open spaces for recreation have been in existence through the ages from ancient times
- D. Traditional open spaces included market, agora, plaza, common, town square, and park
- E. Open spaces enjoyed by the wealthy were not intended for public recreation
- F. Commoners gained admittance to private open space occasionally for festivals and fairs
- H. Festivals and fairs were rare, celebratory events, and not a part of daily common life

II. Origin of the Public Park

- A. The creation of Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, England, in 1847, is the first recorded instance of a public urban open space acquired, developed, and opened to all
- B. Birkenhead Park came about in response to urban congestion
- C. Birkenhead Park provided the public an escape from urban congestion
- D. The convenient location made Birkenhead Park accessible to almost everyone
- E. Nineteenth century parks were pastoral retreats for contemplation, sitting, and strolling
- F. Recreation may be either passive or active
- G. The natural style in park design provided open space suitable for passive recreation
- H. Separate active parks for sports reduced disturbance of passive uses

III. Public Parks in North America

- A. News of Birkenhead Park created for public use spread to American cities
- B. American cities experienced industrial growth and congestion as in England
- C. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. came away inspired from visiting Birkenhead Park in 1850
- D. Olmsted and Calvert Vaux won the competition to design the New York City Central Park
- E. New York City Central Park created a large rural expanse within the city
- F. The popularity of Central Park launched the urban public park movement in America
- G. Common features of pastoral parks include sweeping lawns and naturalized plantings
- H. Early pastoral parks rarely included sports fields or playgrounds for active recreation
- I. Pastoral parks preserve, create, and restore natural areas for healthful passive recreation
- J. Passive parks and active parks remained separated until the mid-twentieth century

IV. Changing Roles of Parks

- A. Growing public expectations have demanded more options and greater convenience in every aspect of life, including recreation
- B. Current expectation demands both active and passive activities to occur simultaneously without diminishing the quality of either experience
- C. The original emphasis in urban parks expanded into suburban and rural areas
- D. Opportunities for recreation in open spaces consumed by development are lost
- E. Landscape architects help to raise awareness of current and future recreational needs
- F. Landscape architects make studies to identify open space and natural areas for recreation

V. Community Park Systems

- A. A typical community park system will include parkways, water, trails, and playgrounds
- B. Landscape architects design park systems to community needs without costly duplication
- C. A park system provides a hierarchy of opportunities for the youngest to the oldest user
- D. Landscape architects design linear corridors that link open spaces into a park system

VI. Playgrounds

- A. Playgrounds are one of the most traditional and popular elements of a community park
- B. Play should be an adventure full of unexpected discovery and rewards
- C. Understanding play for differing age groups often requires the input of professionals
- D. Standardized metal play equipment is not an inspiring play environment
- E. Raw materials and tools used by the children themselves is preferred
- F. Challenges appropriate to the age of the user make for appropriate play equipment
- G. The landscape of the play must both encourage imagination and maintain safety
- H. Recreation has expanded from play to include refreshment of the mind and body

VII. Conservation Areas

- A. Conservation area recreation has an entirely different emphasis from active parks
- B. Conservation areas preserve and protect the plants, animals, and a diversity of life
- C. Conservation areas have a two-fold purpose to preserve nature and to educate the public
- D. Conservation concepts had a major awakening in 1968 with the first Earth Day
- E. Conservation areas are learning centers to study and explain the concepts of ecology

- F. Conservation revised the definition of recreation within the range of public interests
- G. Site analysis determines if it is advisable to open a conservation area to public use
- H. Communities must protect conservation areas from pressures of increased use
- I. Boardwalks, observation towers, and canoe trails are examples of physical improvements and access facilities designed to protect unspoiled natural environments from harm
- J. Landscape architects design a variety of open spaces for recreation
- K. The design process applies to parks, playgrounds, and conservation areas
- L. The landscape architect organizes input and clarifies the user expectations for the park
- M. Preliminary plans present opportunity for public input leading to the final design
- N. Construction documents and specifications are prepared for the implementation phase

VIII. Stewardship

- A. A community faces decisions to the extent and type of stewardship for maintaining parks
- B. Assessing community needs and acquiring land is the first of many vital steps
- C. Funding, planning, and implementing is no less critical than acquiring land
- D. Open space for public enjoyment must not be wasted with poor design
- E. Landscape architects help guide communities to balance park development that is both sensitive to the natural conditions and responsive to the user needs