Friends of Fort Tryon Park
GAZETTE
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A Fine Balance

by Nancy Bruning

When we walk through the Heather Garden and Fort Tryon Park, who among us thinks about what it took to create this lush oasis at the edge of the island, or what it takes to restore and maintain its beauty? Instead, we take it in—the colors, the aromas, the clean air, the trilling birds and swooping butterflies, the buzzing bees, the river and bridge sparkling in the distance. But from time to time, we might wonder—what is the park staff doing, and why? Some changes might be pleasing and make sense to us; others might make sense only over time. Fort Tryon Park, designed during the height of the Depression by Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., son of the famed designer of Central Park and the premier landscape architect of the time, is a dynamic balance of nature and artifice. Light and shadow, peaks and valleys, curves and straightaways, openness and intimacy, rock and flora and fauna and water and sky. And for the past two decades, the challenge has been to restore and maintain the park while balancing the past, present and future—as well as the budget.

It's hard to believe that 20 years ago, our beautiful park was a mess. During New York City's financial crisis in the 1970s, Fort Tryon Park, like others, became neglected. Many areas were overgrown. The Billings Lawn (just west of the garden) was off limits and a hangout for druggies. The Linden Terrace and Lawns were also unsafe.

The park's ongoing restoration began in the early 1980s, when the Rockefeller Family, who originally donated the land and the park to the city in the 1930s, expressed renewed interest. Thanks to an endowment by the Greenacre Foundation, an arm of the Rockefeller Foundation, and to a change in city and local administration including Councilman Stanley Michels and now Robert Jackson, the park is deliberately and surely being restored to its former glory. And all this is happening with a minimum of staff. During the initial phases of the restoration, there were 30 people including horticulturists working on the garden. Today staff fluctuates from three to six, depending on the seasons. Compare this with the 500 people who worked on the original park and garden, and the original maintenance staff of sixteen.

About 250 trees have been pruned and large ones thinned to restore and reveal the view—to make "picture holes" so we can again see the river and the Cloisters.

The restoration staff began by researching the records to identify the existing plants that were a part of the original design. From this, they created a layout of the original planting scheme, with modifications to make it somewhat lower maintenance; they also created a master plan for the entire park. Both the "hard parts" or infrastructure—roads, paths, drainage—and the "soft parts"—the landscaping and plants—were included. Most of the work has concentrated on the Heather Garden, but work has gradually fanned out from the garden to restore the appearance and safety of other park areas.

One of the most dramatic efforts involved trimming and thinning the trees, many of which had grown so large they obliterated the vistas the park was originally designed to enhance. Some had suffered from years of improper trimming and looked like big meatballs according to Jane Schachat, director of Northern Manhattan Parks. Several came down because of Dutch Elm disease. Some varieties of plants had taken over, obliterating the diversity of the original plantings. There were misguided previous "improvements" which had to be undone. Plants were relocated to other parts of the park or to other parks that were more suitable. In order to do justice to the garden's name, heaths and heather plants were added and hundreds continue to be replaced every year because of their limited life spans. The paths and stairways to the Billings Lawn have been repaired, as has the path from Broadway up to the Cloisters around what is now the dog run. Other recent improvements involve the Jacob Javits Playground near Dyckman Boulevard and the benches along Broadway. Slowly but surely the remaining paths in need will be repaired.

As you wander through the eight miles of paths ribbon and wind through the park's 67 acres you feel a magnificent sense of peace and quiet; but this solitude may reduce your feelings of safety. As you round a curve or reach a peak, you are delighted by a magnificent vista; but as the trees and shrubs grow, these views become obliterated. In restoring the sight lines and opening up the views, says Schachat, you may lose some of the solitude

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Flowers in Bloom by Marianne Carroll

These are the flowers in bloom and the vines and shrubs with seasonal interest in the Heather Garden of Fort Tyron Park:

October

African Blue-Eyed Daisy; Ageratum; Tsarina; Aster; Autumn Crocus; Bearded Iris; Beauty Berry; Betty Prior Rose; Blue Salvia; Butter & Eggs; Butterfly Bush; Calendula; Colchicum (Fall Crocus); Cooper Hawk; Cosmos; Cotoneaster; Dahlia; Daphne; Firethorn; Flowering Tobacco; Foxglove; Gladiola; Haste; Hawthorn; Heather; Heirloom Zinnia; Heliotrope; Heritage Rose; Holly; Hollyhock; Impatiens; Juniper; Kinglet; Lavender; Lemon & Tangerine Gem Marigolds; Malta; Mexican Sunflower; Montauk Daisy; Morning Glory; Nasturtium; Osprey; Petunia; Phlox; Lumbago; Red Tailed Hawk; Sedum; Snapdragon; Snow Geese; Spider flower; St. John's Wort; Stonecrop; Virginia Creeper; Vulture; Warbler; Yew

November

African Blue-Eyed Daisy, Ageratum, Aster, Autumn Crocus, Bearded Iris, Beauty Berry, Betty Prior Rose, Blue Salvia, Butter & Eggs, Butterfly Bush, Calendula, Cooper Hawk, Cosmos, Cotoneaster, Dahlia, Daphne, Firethorn, Flowering Tobacco, Foxglove, Gladiola, Hawthorn, Heath, Heirloom Zinnia, Holly, Hollyhock, Impatiens, Juniper, Kinglet, Lavender, Lemon & Tangerine Gem Marigolds, Malva, Mexican Sunflower, Osprey, Petunia, Phlox, Plumbago, Red Tailed Hawk, Snow Geese, Spider flower, St. John's Wort, Stonecrop, Virginia Creeper, Vulture, Warbler, Yew

December

Beauty Berry, Cotoneaster, Firethorn, Hawthorn, Heath, Holly, Yew

City News

Ups and Downs of Parks Funding: $7.5 Million Restored

Just as the previous edition went to press, the Gazette announced that the City Council And the Mayor agreed to restore $7.5 million in proposed cuts to the Parks & Recreation Department as part of the Fiscal Year 2003 $42.3 billion budget. For this we can thank City Council Parks Committee Chair Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. and City Council Speaker A. Gifford Miller. For the past 15 years, the Parks Department has suffered drastic reductions including a 40% cut to maintenance and operation and a 75% decline in recreational staff. Parks advocates were hoping for a full restoration of $11.2 million in proposed programmatic funding because the restoration of $7.5 will not elevate the quality of park services citywide. However, restored funding will include $1.3 million to maintain the current level of staff and will cover 51 Parks Maintenance Workers, 51 Parks Playground Associates, Parks Seasonal Workers during peak park usage in the spring and summer.

Community News

Henry Hudson Parkway: Scenic Byway or Drag Strip?

Friends of Fort Tryon Park has joined forces with the Riverdale Nature Preservancy, which is working to get a formal New York State Scenic Byways designation for the Henry Hudson Parkway. Fort Tryon Park borders the northbound lane of this historic Bronx and Manhattan Parkway, and many of us live within earshot. The New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) is proposing to straighten the road and remove the S-curve north of George Washington Bridge to give it "full highway standards." This would facilitate traffic flow at 50 mph on the Parkway in our area, making it an ideal drag-racing strip as well as cut into Fort Tryon Park, Fort Washington Park, or both. According to the Preservancy, "Not only is the parkway itself a significant historic resource, its corridor offers a sequence of individual views of dramatic outcrops, natural and designed landscapes, engineering and architectural landmarks." The parkway has already undergone questionable "improvements" that are not in keeping with the original design and materials. By obtaining designation as Scenic Byway, we would insure that this beautiful city feature and neighborhood asset would be protected against further uglification and provide Federal funds to improve it. For information call 718-549-0830 or visit http://www.henryhudsonparkway.org.

Celestial Events

By Marianne Carroll

New Moon

October 6
November 4
December 4

Full Moon

October 21
November 19
December 19

Sunday Sunset Times

Join us to watch the sunset on Sundays on Linden Terrace

Oct 6	6:30 pm	Dec 1	4:29 pm
Oct 13	6:19 pm	Dec 8	4:28 pm
Oct 20	6:08 pm	Dec 15	4:29 pm
Oct 27	4:59 pm	Dec 22	4:32 pm
Nov 3	4:50 pm	Dec 29	4:37 pm
Nov 10	4:43 pm		
Nov 17	4:36 pm		
Nov 24	4:31 pm		

Reminder: Daylight Savings Time ends 2:00 am Sunday, October 27th

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Park Events and Reports

Park Safety

Over the summer, there was an increase in crime, vandalism and other undesirable activity in and around the park. Since safety is a primary issue, FFTP is working with other community groups, individuals and city agencies to nip this danger in the bud. Community Board 12 is taking the lead and has called several meetings, which included community representatives, the Parks Department, the Police Department, and the Metropolitan Museum. We all agree that both immediate and long-term measures are needed. This situation is likely to improve at least somewhat on its own with the colder weather, but we all need to be vigilant and use common sense—and above, to remember that the more we use the park the safer it is. To report suspicious activity, vandalism or other criminal activity call the PEP Officer at 212- 496-2109.

Park Access

On Sunday, September 22, park goers were surprised to find tents being erected, trucks on the promenade, and scores of scampering men and women in black. Upon investigation, we discovered that an unprecedented event was to take place that evening: the wedding of actor Lawrence Fishburn. We also learned that the park had particular meaning for the bride and groom, and in return for the pleasure of using it as a setting for this important personal occasion, special contributions were made to the Heather Garden Endowment, the New York Restoration Project, and the Medieval Festival. In order to minimize impact to the community, the planners used only the areas necessary for the event. The party paid for all extra parks personnel and park security, as well the cost of clean up. Still, the Linden Terrace was closed for a day, and some of the surrounding paths were partially obstructed. We wish the couple well and are glad they love the park. However FFTP shares the concerns of the community about private use of this public space and we will advocate on behalf of better communication about and advance notice of any future similar events that will affect access.

Spring Planting Festival

Sunday, October 27, 10 am - 2 pm
Meet at Margaret Corbin Circle

1000 bulbs to plant! Things to paint! Leaves to rake! Weeds to weed! This is your last chance to pitch in for this year until we resume beautification next March.

DogFest 2002

Saturday, October 26, 12 Noon - 4 PM
Sir William's Dog Run

Performances, storytelling, vendors, Vets, costume contests, educators, face painters and yes, Peter the Great Pumpkin returns to the dog run! For more info: forttryondog@yahoo.com

Beautification Reports

By Mike Klein

In **August** we cleaned out the entire stone culvert on the lower subway terrace—a Herculean effort since the culvert was filled with tons of mud, weeds and leaves. The culvert acts as a drainage system; the stone craftsmanship is a marvel and would cost a fortune to build today. During our last storm there was a lot of tree damage in the park and park staff was able to clear much of it away. However, the northernmost area of the lower subway terrace also sustained much damage. Large trees and branches crashed down, crushing other shrubs. Thanks to FFTP member Don Myers and some of the regular volleyball players we cleared this away as well and accomplished what looked like an impossible job. Thank you Don for taking the initiative on this task.

In **September** we removed overgrown ivy from stone walls and trimmed back the ivy along walkways and paths. We cleared vines off railings, raked leaves, weeded the upper slope, planted three hues, scraped and painted a very long row of benches, and watered shrubs. Later in the day, there was unexpected cleaning up to do, thanks to two large parties on the terrace. While we love to see people actually using this part of the park, we hope that in the future people will realize that it is the party-throwers' responsibility to help restore order after the festivities so that other people can also enjoy the park and the hard-earned results of all our volunteer labor.

If we owe you a T-shirt, please pick it up at the FFTP table at the next Beautification or other event. If you wish to have your T-shirt sent by mail, please send $3 to cover postage along with your name and address to FFTP c/o Fort Tryon Jewish Center, 524 Fort Washington Ave., NY, NY 10033.

Photo Exhibit

In future issues, James Renner, Historian for Community District 12 will be providing us with articles about the fascinating past of the park and the community. In the meantime, visit his exhibit of historic photographs of Washington Heights and Inwood at the Fort Washington Branch of the New York Public Library during the month of October 2002. These photographs dating from the 1860's to the 1960's show what these communities had looked like and how they evolved. 535 West 179th Street between Saint Nicholas and Audubon Avenues; (212) 927-3533.

Candlelight and Music Vigil

by Susan Kalev

Under a rising half-moon and whispering trees in the dark, among hand-held candles 300 of our local community members came together on 9/11/02 on the Cafe Lawn. The commemoration—coordinated by Steve Simon, Julio Batista and Rosa Naparstek, and sponsored by various local community organizations—united the diverse voices of our Washington Heights neighborhood in sorrow and in solidarity.

Musicians and vocalists performed honoring the victims and heroes, and residents stepped up to the microphone to share memories and feelings. Former Councilman Stanley Michels and Dr. Ruth were among those we heard, but most speakers were nameless and faceless in the growing darkness, each of their voices resonating in our hearts. Because this was a special night, because we were together as a group, because we saw ourselves reflected in another's grief, we grew and strengthened as a community. This unique event empowered each speaker to be eloquent.

The service ended on a note of hope as residents marched in groups to the two young Styrax japonica (Japanese Silver Bell) trees planted last year and placed red carnations provided by FFTP around their slender trunks. In the summer night participants headed for home, some still carrying the flickering memorial candles.

The following are proud Sponsors of the FFTP Gazette. We thank them for their support.

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Contacts

FFTP website: http://www.hhoc.org/fftp
FFTP phone: (212) 927-7174
FFTP email: friendsofftp@aol.com
To volunteer at Heather Garden: (212) 795-1388
Fort Tryon Park on the Internet: www.nyc.gov/parks
The Cloisters: (212) 923-3700 or www.metmuseum.org

New Leaf Cafe: (212) 568-5323
To report an emergency (vandalism, dangerous conditions): 1-(800) 201-PARK.
To report graffiti: (212) 304-2278 (ask for Danny)
Forestry (tree pruning, dead tree and limb removal): (212) 860-8144

Council Member: Robert Jackson (212) 928-1322
Speaker of the City Council: Gilford Miller (212) 535-5554
Manhattan Parks Commissioner: William Castro (212) 408-0201 william.castro@parks.nyc.gov
NYC Parks and Recreation Commissioner: Adrian Benepe (212) 360-8111

***Did You Know?* We now have over 400 members!**

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but you also make people visible and increase their sense of safety.

Tim Steinhoff, the garden horticulturist says, "The garden was planted for maximum show—plants as theater." It is rich with drama, but also rich with subtleties—shifts in levels, colors, and textures that continue to evolve over time from season to season and year to year. The garden and park are dynamic—tomorrow they will look different than they look today. New plantings may look small and bare and need time to come into full growth; they also need to be shaped and managed when overgrown or have reached the end of their lifespan. The park requires patience and hard work. It reminds us that although life itself has its thorns and is fleeting, each day can be as glorious as a rose in full bloom.

It is our aim to involve the entire community surrounding this park in maintaining and improving the park's appearance and condition and promoting its constructive use by the public. Such involvement and cooperation should help solidify and enliven this community and make it and the park more attractive, safe and desirable.

Friends of Fort Tryon Park

New York Restoration Project's Try On Fort Tryon Park! festival on July 27, included hay rides, farm animals, a stilt walker and balloon artist, face painting, sand art, paper making, nature walks, African drumming, storytelling, Dominican dancers, a blues band, and a bird of prey exhibit, complete with flight demonstrations

New web site address! www.hhoc.org/fftp

Friends of Fort Tryon Park, Inc.
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Make every day Earth Day! Keep Washington Heights Clean!

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