

LeGrand Parish



Portrait, Courtesy of the Passaic County Historical Society.

On April 13, 1866, LeGrand Parish was born in Friendship, New York. "Le Grand" means "The Great" in his French ancestors' language. Thomas Edison Laboratories was where he began his profession. Many railroad patents were owned by Parish, including steam circulation and lining systems for fireboxes, a unique air brake coupling device, and a train car door latch. He worked with railroads after leaving Edison Laboratories and became president of the Lima Locomotive Works in Lima, Ohio. Parish grew wealthy because of his numerous innovations, and he utilized his fortune to help his community. He contributed land for the community club and firehouse in Wayne later in life, as well as a ball field in Mountain View that is now known as the Parish Oval and the Passaic County Golf Course.

In 1896, LeGrand Parish married Madge L. Little, in Chicago. Madge's family had been residents of Passaic County for many generations. After a few years, the couple relocated to New York City before settling in Wayne's Mountainview neighborhood in 1914. They remodeled a house that had been in Mrs. Parish's family for over one hundred years. The house was located at the foot of Lower Preakness Avenue which is now known as Parish Drive. Their former residence is now the home of the Lakeland Unitarian Fellowship.

Parish's property took in most of the area bordered by Prospect Street, now known as Alps Road on the north, Maple Avenue and Lower Preakness Avenue on the east Lower Preakness Avenue on the south, and the D.L. & W. railroad tracks and Old Pompton Turnpike on the west.

During the Great Depression, many of his neighbors sought his assistance. LeGrand Parish was more than eager to help them. In the words of his former secretary:

"Most of the produce of the fan and dairy herd maintained by the estate were given to the towns needy. I vividly recall the 'magic figure' of eight-hundred dollars. That was the amount of cash he liked to have in his pockets at all times to help out destitute neighbors. It seems that I was constantly running to the bank. As soon as his pockets were emptied, off I'd go to the bank again."



Parish Family Home, Courtesy of the Wayne Museum.

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Mr. Parish's extensive business experience and civic outlook made him the most logical choice for appointment by former Supreme Court Justice Charles Black to the Passaic County Parks Commission which was in the process of organizing. Parish was one of the five appointees to the permanent board following the adoption of the park referendum in November 1927. He succeeded Garret A. Hobart Jr. as vice-president of the commission in September 1931, when Hobart advanced to the presidency upon the death of Robert Dix Benson. Mr. Parish took an active interest in the development of the park system. It was his aim to see it reach a standard equal to similar projects in Essex, Union, and Hudson counties.

In 1930, when the commission was engaged in the construction of the twenty-seven-hole Passaic County golf course, in Wayne township, Parish oversaw the work. Appearing on the grounds as early as the workers, taking no more than thirty minutes for lunch and remaining at the scene until the workday had ended. When the work was not moving fast enough Parish ordered his own steam shovel moved from his estate to the golf course property and there it remained until the construction work was completed. He also sent, with his steam shovel, his own operator who remained on his personal payroll.

Not long thereafter Parish and his wife donated to the parks commission forty-eight acres of land along the Preakness Road in Wayne township, a gift then valued at \$50,000. This property adjoins Preakness Valley Park, and it became a valuable addition to the county park system.

In acknowledgment of his service, Parish was named chairman of the Preakness Valley Park Committee and once the golf course was opened on July 1, 1931, he became a daily visitor and studied the playing trends and course maintenance of the golf course. Even when he was ill towards the end of his life, he requested that the daily record of golf course play be brought to him. He mingled with the golf players and sought their comments on how to make the golf course better.

He was also chairman of the Garret Mountain Reservation Committee and a member of the of the Goffle Brook park and planting committee.

LeGrand Parish died on May 10, 1933.



Aerial Image of the Preakness Valley Golf Course.
Courtesy of the County of Passaic Archives.



Golfers enjoying the course, Clubhouse is featured in the background.
Courtesy of the County of Passaic Archives.