

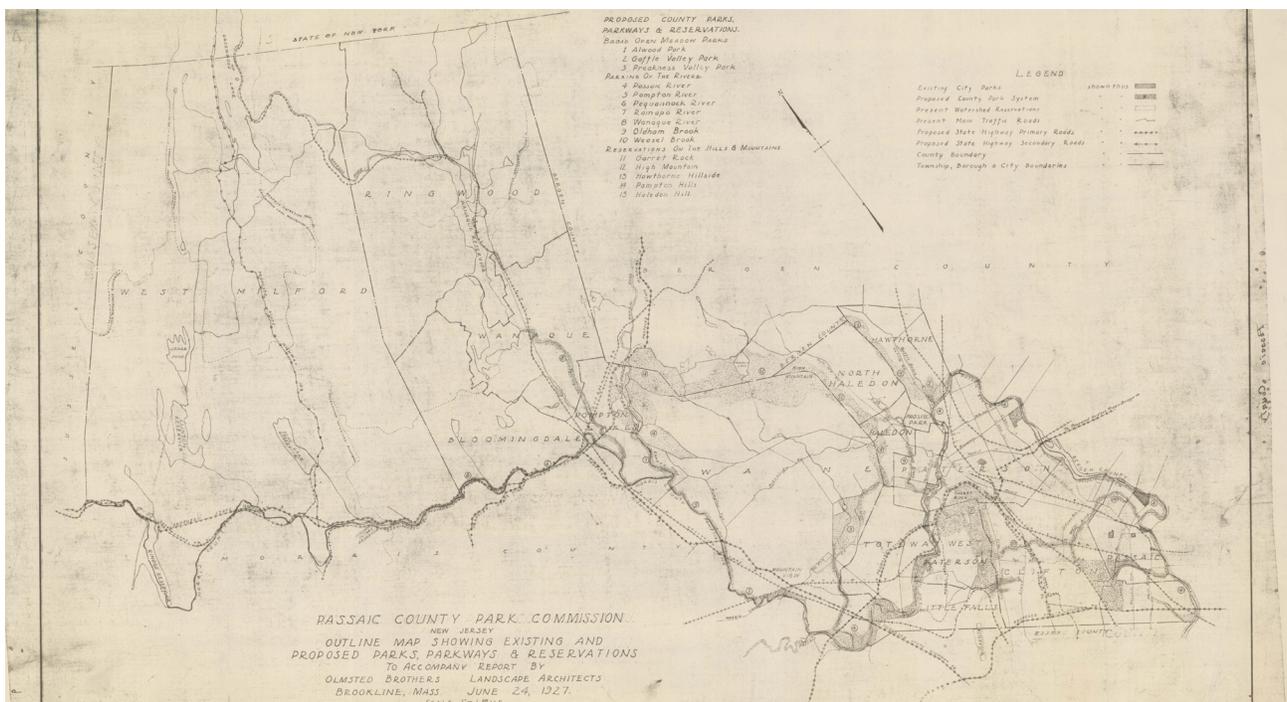
The History of the Passaic County Park Commission

The establishment of the Passaic County Park Commission began at the annual meeting of the Passaic County Planning Association on May 26, 1925, in Clifton, NJ. At this meeting a resolution was adopted authorizing the appointment of "a committee of three with power to initiate a movement looking toward the creation of a county park commission for Passaic County."

The appointment of the preliminary Park Commission was made by Judge Charles C. Black and filed with the Passaic County Clerk on July 3, 1926. The first commissioners were Garret A. Hobart, Louis V. Hinchliffe, Robert D. Benson, Henry Van Ripper Scheel and Miss Florence Halsey. The preliminary Commission organized on July 13, 1926, in the office of the Paterson Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Robert D. Benson was elected president, and Mr. Garret A. Hobart, vice-president, and Mr. Charles A. Winans was named secretary.

The preliminary Park Commission was tasked to hire the most prestigious landscape architects and planners in the United States – the Olmsted Brothers firm. This Commission had the authorization to spend up to \$10,000 in the creation of a survey. Following the lead of Essex and Union Counties, the Commission petitioned the firm to prepare a master plan to certify the public need for a park system, evaluate potential sites to be acquired for parkland, and prepare a report that could be used to generate public support.

The firm's report was submitted to the Commissioners on July 9, 1927. In the report, they identified the purpose for the investment of public funds in the creation of Passaic County's Park system was "to provide for the happiness and well-being of people..." and that "no other public expenditure tends to appreciate in value...with the passage of time, as do other public works." Percival Gallagher was the lead Landscape Architect representing the Olmsted Brothers firm.



Existing and Proposed Parks, Parkways, & Reservations, June 24, 1927.

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

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In its work on the preliminary report, the commission made numerous tours of Passaic County to become familiar with its topography, the centers of population and opportunities afforded for a comprehensive park system. They were assisted in this work by Passaic County Engineer Garwood Ferguson.

The preliminary commission filed their report advocating for a county parks system with Justice Charles Black on September 10, 1927. Justice Black issued an order directing the question of a permanent commission with the authority to establish a county parks system to a referendum vote at the next General Election on November 8, 1927. The referendum was passed and the preliminary commission issued their final report to the Supreme Court and submitted their resignations.

On November 18, 1927 Justice Black appointed Robert D. Benson, Garret A. Hobart, Louis V. Hinchliffe, LeGrand Parish, and William B. Gourley to serve without compensation as a permanent Passaic County Park Commission. At its first organization meeting on December 3 Robert D. Benson was elected president, Garret A. Hobart vice-president and Louis V. Hinchliffe treasurer. The office of the new parks commission was established at 45 Church Street in Paterson and the commission hired Frederick W. Loede Jr. as executive engineer and secretary.

In view of the previous work done by Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Mass., for the preliminary Commission, it was decided to continue their services as consulting landscape architects. The Olmsted Brothers is one of the oldest firms of its kind in the country and their reputation combined with the valuable experience gained in laying out the Essex and Union County Park systems, influenced the Commission in deciding that employing them would lead to the development of a park system closely linking the adjoining systems of Union and Essex Counties.



Lambert Tower at Garret Mountain Reservation.
Courtesy of the County of Passaic Archives.

The Commission was fortunate in having the continued service and advice of Percival Gallagher, one of the partners, who attends meetings of the Commission and works with the Engineer and Secretary in the field and in the preparation of maps and designs for the various projects.

The Commission's first year was spent in studying the situation as a whole before any park land was acquired. This study consisted largely of engineering field work and consideration of the report made by Olmsted Brothers to the temporary Commission. Even in the brief time between the preparation of the preliminary report and the organization of the permanent Commission, physical changes had occurred in various sections of the County which prevented the Commission from following the early recommendations in their entirety.

The finest example of public spirit towards the establishment of a parks system was shown in the offer of Mr. and Mrs. Le Grand Parish, of Mountain View, (Wayne) to deed as a gift to the Park Commission approximately forty-eight acres of land with a frontage of nearly 1,500 feet on Preakness Road in Wayne Township. LeGrand Parish is a member of the Park Commission. This property adjoins the Preakness Valley Park and golf course.