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Guide to the

Minutes of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners

1860-1862, 1864-1873

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Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2014

Summary

Creator: Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.). Park Commissioners

Title: Minutes of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners

Date: 1860-1862, 1864-1873

Size: .25 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Purchased from William Reese Company, 2014

Abstract: The minutes of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners, 1860-1862, 1864-1873, in one volume, document the formative years of Brooklyn's park system and its crown jewel, Prospect Park, as established and developed by acts of the New York State Legislature. After an initial commission was appointed by Act of April 18, 1859 to select grounds for a public park and parade ground in Brooklyn, the Act of April 17, 1860 appointed the first board of Commissioners of Prospect Park to carry out the development of designated lands. Minutes begin on June 28, 1860, the first convening of this board; the last entry is dated December 29, 1873. During that period, under the leadership of Commissioner James S. T. Stranahan, Prospect Park was laid out, designed and constructed, and adjacent roadways were developed. In 1867, the Commissioners were given oversight of the public parks within Brooklyn, and in 1868 the board was reconstituted as the Brooklyn Park Commissioners. The year 1873 marked the beginnings of an economic depression which halted most park work for several years. Entries for early meetings are sporadic, focusing on the valuation and clearance of private properties, protection of park land, and the hiring of engineer Egbert Viele to survey and map the park. Following the Act of April 28, 1864, the minutes document more frequent meetings, the creation of by-laws, and the hiring of landscape architects Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, who submitted their proposal in January, 1866. Entries document discussions as to funding and expenditures, and dealings with Vaux and Olmsted and the implementation of their plans. Topics include the sale and purchase of land to change and extend boundaries, budgets, staffing, park security, plantings, water drainage, road work and transportation access, rules and regulations for the park, donations of animals and statuary, and the use of park land for entertainment, recreational, and commercial purposes. Roadwork projects include the improvement of the Coney Island Plank Road and the creation of Ocean Parkway to link the Prospect Park area to Coney Island. Plans for other parks, such as the proposed vault at Washington Park in Fort Greene for the remains of the Prison Ship Martyrs, are also mentioned.

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Key Terms

Geographic Names

Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)

Fort Greene Park (New York, N.Y.)

Prospect Park (New York, N.Y.)

United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Prisoners and prisons

Occupations

City planners

Civic leaders

Landscape architects

Subjects

City planning -- New York (State) -- New York

Land use -- New York (State) -- New York

Landscape architecture -- New York (State) -- New York

Parks -- New York (State) -- New York

Public lands -- New York (State) -- New York

Recreation areas -- New York (State) -- New York

Streets -- New York (State) -- New York

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Minute books

Names

Olmsted, Frederick Law, 1822-1903

Stranahan, J. S. T. (James Samuel Thomas), 1808-1898

Vaux, Calvert, 1824-1895

Viele, Egbert L. (Egbert Ludovicus), 1825-1902

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Olmsted and Vaux (Firm)