

The Landscape Architect's Guide to **BOSTON**

Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University

History

1842 Benjamin Bussey donated his country estate, Woodland Hill, to Harvard University “for instruction in agriculture, horticulture, and related subjects.” Harvard used this land for the creation of the Bussey Institute, which was dedicated to agricultural experimentation. In 1858 James Arnold specified that a portion of his estate was to be used for “the promotion of Agricultural, or Horticultural improvements” so in 1872, Arnold’s gift was combined with 120 acres of the former Bussey estate to create the Arnold Arboretum.

1872 Charles Sprague Sargent was appointed director and Arnold Professor of Botany shortly after the establishment of the institution. In collaboration Sargent the scientist collected and sited thousands of specimens by genus and Frederick Law Olmsted the designer laid out the road system and overall planting scheme creating an arboretum in harmony with the rest of the Emerald Necklace System. The Hunnewell building was designed by architect Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow Jr. in 1892 and constructed with funds donated by H.H. Hunnewell in 1903.

1878 Sargent asked Olmsted to do studies for the site, which Sargent hoped to incorporate into the Boston park system.

1879 Olmsted prepared a plan for the “Map of Proposed Arboretum Showing Its Outlines and Local Connections, with a Study for Public Drive Passing Through It.” The plan showed a design for the circulation system of the Arboretum and a proposed parkway connecting Jamaica Pond to West Roxbury Park (Franklin Park). Following many iterations of the planting and circulation studies, Olmsted and Sargent finally devised a plan that included multiple entrances and exits, a planting area that appeared at the time sufficient to accommodate all the plants that would be grown in the collections, and attractive roadways and landscape features to provide access through the collections as well as to the summit of Bussey Hill.

1882 The Arborway connecting Jamaica Pond to Franklin Park was designed by Olmsted and was completed by 1895.

1882 The land was deeded to the City of Boston and incorporated into the so-called “Emerald Necklace.” Under the agreement with the City, Harvard University was given a thousand-year lease on the property and was named the trustee. Under the lease, Harvard, acting through the Arboretum, would conduct research, develop and curate the living collections, and maintain the buildings within the Arboretum, while the City would build and maintain the boundary walls, gates, and roadway system, provide security, and otherwise facilitate public use of the grounds.

1883 Grading began on the main drive, but the major construction work in the Arboretum took ten years to complete.

1885 Henry Sargent Codman prepared a tree collection plan, which was accepted, and installation of the permanent tree collection began in 1886.

1880-1910 Boston Parks Department annual reports from this period contain information on the Arboretum and Sargent’s relationship and association with both Frederick Law Olmsted and the parks department with remarks on “boundary walls,” shrub plantings, exotic and introduced species, and other insights to his opinions on landscape management. The reports also have photographs of works in progress.

1937 Isabel Anderson donated the majority of her late husband’s bonsai collection (30 plants) to the Arnold Arboretum, along with the funds necessary to build a shade house for their display. Following her death in 1949, the remaining plants were donated to the Arboretum and remains today as the Larz Anderson Bonsai Collection.

Interestingly, the Arboretum was first listed as a National Historic Landmark in January 12, 1965 and then placed

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on the National Register of Historic Places in October 15, 1966.

1994 the “Master Plan Design Studies Summary Report” was prepared for the Arboretum by Sasaki Associates.

Resources:

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[The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#)

[Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#)