



Essex County Parks Archives

Essex County Department of Parks,
Recreation, and Cultural Affairs

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Upcoming:

Approach of Anniversary

The Parks Archives is undertaking a series of newsletters and Facebook posts as we near the 125th anniversary of the Essex County Park System. Look up the **Archives of the Essex County Park System** on Facebook and be sure to like the page!

News:

Presentations Available

In February, Parks Archivist, Kathy Kahl, gave a talk at the Bloomfield Public Library on the beginnings of the Essex County Park System titled "Early Innovation in a Public Space." If your organization would like to schedule a presentation on the Essex County Park System as we approach its 125th anniversary, please contact us.



Essex County Executive
Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

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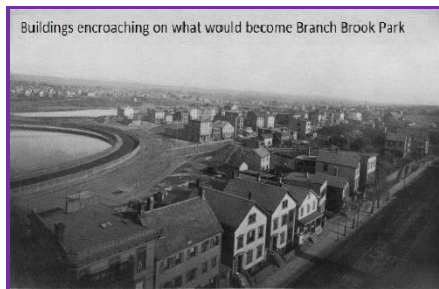
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Putting Essex County First

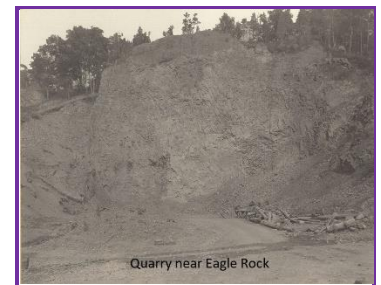
Why the Business Community?

The creation of the Essex County Park System was quite a feat; an earlier attempt by Newark alone had failed. In 1894, businessmen from both the Newark Board of Trade and the Board of Trade of the Oranges were discussing the idea of a "suitable park system." Why would industrialists and business owners be so invested in a cause that we associate today with environmentalists?

At the time, Newark was a manufacturing powerhouse. Profitable businesses included the Radel Leather Manufacturing Company, Ballantine Brewery, Lister Brothers Passaic Carbon and Agricultural Chemical Works, Clark Thread, Balbach Smelting and Refining, Heller & Merz (synthetic dyes), Tiffany & Co. (jewelry), and Murphy Varnish Works. More and more workers and their families crowded into tenements close to the factories. The work that attracted skilled labor also degraded local resources such as water, trees, and stone. Ubiquitous smokestacks were a sign of the toll these industries took on the air and water quality.



Buildings encroaching on what would become Branch Brook Park



Quarry near Eagle Rock

Newark was not a healthy place to live. However, the area continued to be built up as more people came for work opportunities. With the land east of First Mountain rapidly being developed with residences, and quarries encroaching on natural wonders just outside the city, clever businessmen realized the importance of buying and preserving open space while it was still possible. They also trusted that parks would pay for themselves through an increase in the value of adjacent properties. Then to, the industrialists and lawmakers did not want to fall behind other cities. Add to those reasons, the growing belief, not just among reformers and environmentalists, that a connection to nature had healthful benefits, and it is easier to see why a park system in the greater Newark area was an idea whose time had come.