

Lara Trimarco Prebble
ARTH 318
New England Arts and Architecture

Restoring a Forgotten and Hidden Gem
Hemlock Gorge Reservation

Outside of Boston, on the shores of the Charles River and between the cities of Needham and Newton, Massachusetts is a park known as Hemlock Gorge. When Hemlock Gorge was first established as one of the 1893 Metropolitan Park Commission's earliest acquisitions of parkland it was a destination for Bostonians looking for day trips to escape from the city. The park's folklore claims that at a certain point 5,000 visitors journeyed to Hemlock Gorge on weekends.¹ However, when walking through Hemlock Gorge today it no longer feels like a destination but rather like a lost and forgotten hidden gem. Other early Metropolitan Park Commission acquisitions, including Revere Beach and the Emerald Necklace, are still celebrated as early urban parks but Hemlock Gorge does not have this same name recognition. In a way it feels as if it has been neglected by the public. When walking through the twenty-three acres that define the park today, rather than seeing thousands of visitors, you are lucky if you encounter one. Why has a park that is historically significant for Boston landscape architecture and for the American landscape tradition in general become forgotten? Throughout the 130 years since the founding of Hemlock Gorge, American society's relationship with its public parks has evolved; how people experience landscapes and public spaces is very different today than it was in 1893. As society evolved and

¹ "The Friends of Hemlock Gorge," n.d. <http://www.hemlockgorge.org>.

Hemlock Gorge lost its early advocates, the Metropolitan Park Commission, which is today part of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, failed to invest in the upkeep and redesign of Hemlock Gorge. Consequently, the neglected landscapes of the Metropolitan Park Commission, including Hemlock Gorge, have become incomprehensible, out of date and ultimately forgotten by society.

After investigating the gradual deterioration of Hemlock Gorge from the destination it once was to the current state it is in, I will propose design solutions to help rehabilitate the park. With these redesigns, I hope to stay in character of the landscape designs, traditions and aesthetics that the earliest architects would have envisioned for the landscape while also redesigning it to help it become a park of the 21st century. Additionally, as the Metropolitan Parks Commission and Department of Conservation of Recreation have not proven themselves to be accountable for the maintenance of Hemlock Gorge, I hope that these proposals will encourage new visitors and ultimately create a new generation of park supporters and advocates.

On a walk through Hemlock Gorge today, it would be hard for one to disagree with the idea that this park is a hidden gem. After exiting Interstate 95, it only takes a minute to get to the park and once you enter, the sounds of the water crashing over the dams cover all sounds of traffic. It feels as if you have escaped Boston as well as the Boston suburbs. Two old, tiny parking lots are found at the north and south entrances and from these points, the park does not seem out of the ordinary. It is not until one starts walking into the park, following the shoreline of the Charles River and escaping into nature from the Boston suburbs that they experience the real effect of the park. The

twenty-three acres of the reservation follow and hug the shoreline of the river and at the heart of the park is Echo Bridge, a 19th century aqueduct that predates the establishment of the reservation. The large stone arches of the bridge cross the river and as the name of the bridge suggests, create an amazing acoustical effect. As a result of over a century of existence, the pathways that weave through this landscape are overgrown and consequently difficult to follow as many lead to dead ends. For the paths that do not lead to dead ends, they carry visitors to the high points on the remnants of glacial eskers and across Echo Bridge. Paths also lead down steep slopes to the low points of the landscape following the shoreline and across the smaller wooden footbridge which leads to the island on the north side. With dense vegetation during the summer months it is not easy to navigate and for those unfamiliar with the landscape it is almost like a maze. Along the way visitors catch glimpses of beautiful views of the geology of the gorge, the old mill on the southern side of the park, water crashing down the dams and Echo Bridge. However, while still beautiful, this park does not fulfill its potential.

Within the same year as the foundation of the Metropolitan Park Commission in Boston, the World's Columbian Exposition took place in Chicago. The recently appointed landscape architect of the Metropolitan Park Commission, Charles Eliot and the commission's secretary, Sylvester Baxter, were both in attendance and were inspired by the Exposition's landscape designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. However, Eliot recognized that the Boston landscape was very different from that of Chicago.²

² Karl Haglund. *Inventing the Charles River*. The MIT Press, 2003, Page 117.

Eliot found the greater Boston area to be an environment that other American cities, including Chicago, “would give millions to create if it were possible.”³ He continued to say that “stupid indeed will be the people of greater Boston if they fail to perceive and attend to their interests in this matter before the opportunity is lost.” In the landscape design for Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, the focus had been on how the landscape could assist in grouping and collectively unifying the architecture of the White City. Eliot on the other hand envisioned creating for Boston an “Emerald Metropolis” which would include parks in the city but would also reach out to the exterior of the city to create a system of parks.⁴ This system of parks followed the natural landmarks and edges of the greater Boston area including shorelines of the Atlantic and riverways. This system of expanding outwards from the city led Charles Eliot to Hemlock Gorge.

Charles Eliot was a dominant figure in the early years of the Metropolitan Park Commission as well as for the design of Hemlock Gorge. Eliot grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts where he enjoyed exploring the North Woods of Cambridge but also would take trains outside of the city to hike and explore new landscapes similar to that of Hemlock Gorge.⁵ His uncle, Robert Peabody, was an architect as well as a friend of Frederick Law Olmsted and introduced Charles Eliot to the young field of landscape architecture. After graduating from Harvard, he continued his education at the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture at Harvard and joined the Olmsted firm as an apprentice.⁶ Approximately a decade later, in 1891, the Trustees of Reservations called

³ Charles W. Eliot. *Charles Eliot Landscape Architect*. Houghton Milton, 1902.

⁴ Karl Haglund. *Inventing the Charles River*, 119.

⁵ Gordon Abbott, Jr. *Saving Special Places: A Centennial History of The Trustees of Reservations: Pioneer of the Land Trust Movement*. Ipswich, Massachusetts: Ipswich Press, 1993, page 4.

⁶ Ibid.

a meeting to discuss open space in Boston out of concern that Boston was behind other important cities in terms of available public and open space.⁷ The Trustees initially settled on a park act for towns and cities in the Boston area and gave them autonomy in respect to the design and maintenance of their public spaces. After expressing concern that this park act would force the designs of public spaces and parks to follow city boundaries rather than natural boundaries, Eliot suggested the creation of the Metropolitan Park Commission. An organization like the one that Eliot proposed “could act regionally to acquire and manage open spaces for the benefit of residents of all greater Boston Communities.”⁸ Additionally it would be the first organization of its kind in the United States and therefore a model for the landscapes of other metropolitan areas. Eliot drafted the bill and the Metropolitan Park Commission was signed into state law in June, 1892. Two months later, Charles Eliot was appointed as the landscape architect and began the process of collecting and acquiring the land to create the “emerald metropolis.”⁹ Out of concern for protecting public access to water, most of these acquired landscapes were located along marshes and shores of the Neponset, Mystic and Charles River as well as along the Atlantic shoreline.¹⁰ To justify the expense of this project, Charles Eliot wrote “it is impossible to imagine a more purely beneficent expenditure of public money, or one more productive of genuine well-being and healthy

⁷ Gordon Abbott, Jr. *Saving Special Places*, 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

happiness.”¹¹ By 1902, Eliot had acquired over 9,248 acres of public land and 26.3 miles of public parkway totaling over \$7,049,256.¹²

Prior to the establishment of Hemlock Gorge, the land surrounding Hemlock Gorge was not labeled as a residential neighborhood. When looking at an 1875 map, roads such as Eliot Street which help define the boundaries of the park existed but many of the side streets do not.¹³ When looking at a 1921 Zoning Map the area surrounding the park was clearly labeled as a neighborhood for general residence.¹⁴ While studying this map, the roads near Hemlock Gorge seemed to be more abundant in comparison with other areas of the city at this time. Perhaps access to Hemlock Gorge was a draw for people to relocate to living here. However, when walking through Hemlock Gorge today, the overgrown pathways give the impression that this landscape is a wild and natural reservation despite being surrounded by, today what is considered, a “thickly settled” neighborhood.

Charles Eliot considered Hemlock Gorge to be the “most strikingly picturesque spot within the metropolitan district.”¹⁵ While considered beautiful, it was not a wild and pristine landscape. The mill existed, Echo Bridge had already been constructed by the Boston Water Board in 1876 and the landscape was already known as Echo Bridge Park.¹⁶ The Friends of Hemlock Gorge report that a large dance hall constructed in the Gothic style of architecture had existed on site as well as a music stand for concerts.

¹¹ Ibid, 21.

¹² Ibid, 21.

¹³ “Outline Map of Newton, MA,” 1875. <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/39621>.

¹⁴ “Map Accompanying Draft of Zoning Ordinance for the City of Newton Massachusetts,” 1921. <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/39228>.

¹⁵ *Charles Eliot Landscape Architect*, 465.

¹⁶ “The Friends of Hemlock Gorge”.

After the construction of this dance hall, a train line was redirected to carry people here from the city.

In the history provided by the Friends of Hemlock Gorge, it is stated that the park continued to prosper for a period of time after the foundation of the reservation.¹⁷ The Olmsted firm's topographical map includes many of the original paths as well as outlines of existing buildings (Figure 1). The dance hall, however, is not present in this map which suggests that its demolition was one of the first changes the Olmsted firm made. When Echo Bridge Park became Hemlock Gorge Reservation it is recorded that the general public was very disappointed as the dance hall closed. When Charles Eliot announced that the Olmsted firm would be the firm redesigning the landscape, popular opinion immediately changed as people were very excited.

Unfortunately, the popular opinion of Hemlock Gorge did not last forever; in the 1920s it is recorded that the numbers of visitors began to decrease. Simultaneously in 1920 the Metropolitan Park Commission joined with the Metropolitan Water and Sewer Districts and collectively created the Metropolitan District Commission.¹⁸ With changes in park administration their roles, responsibilities and involvement in the park changed as well. To accommodate new landscape traditions and trends of the time, funding began to shift toward recreational facilities rather than picturesque parks like Hemlock Gorge, which were labeled as "non-activity" sites. Simultaneously after 1920, Hemlock Gorge lost one of one of their most important advocates. The Olmsted Brothers firm at this time was being led by Frederick Law Olmsted's son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and

¹⁷ "The Friends of Hemlock Gorge".

¹⁸ "A Brief History of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge," n.d. <http://www.hemlockgorge.org>.

his stepson, John Charles Olmsted. Based off of letters exchanged between the Olmsted brothers and employees of the Metropolitan District Commission, it seems that the brothers were heavily involved in advocating for Hemlock Gorge. For example, their letters suggest the addition of a bathhouse and their concern for the current condition of vegetation (Figure 2).¹⁹ Both Olmsted brothers were involved in the firm and therefore oversaw the continued involvement with the landscape. When looking at their individual careers, John Charles seemed to have had a more involved relationship with the family's firm. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr, on the other hand, was not only a landscape architect but also a professor and therefore not all of his work concerned his family's business. Additionally, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. took on the role of senior partner in the firm after his brother's death in 1920 and began to work on new projects such as a regional plan for the city of New York.²⁰ For these reasons one can assume that out of the two brothers John Charles had a stronger and more involved relationship with Hemlock Gorge.

The timing of the loss of funding as well as an important advocate suggest that these are factors that caused Hemlock Gorge to become neglected. Related to the themes of neglect and funding, landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh makes an interesting point in his essay *Landscapes over Time*. He argues that there is a cycle of forgetting, especially in regard to funding. Defunding the maintenance of a park, he writes, does not immediately have an effect on the landscape's condition nor on its aesthetic. Instead it may take several years before the effects are visible. By the time

¹⁹ "Olmsted Brothers Letters to the Metropolitan Park Commission," n.d. Library of Congress.

²⁰ National Association for Olmsted Parks. "Olmsted Legacy," n.d.
<http://www.olmsted.org/the-olmsted-legacy/about-the-olmsted-legacy>.

change caused by neglecting the landscapes is noticeable, people have forgotten what these landscapes were in the past.²¹ There is also a cycle in that once a park deteriorates, people are discouraged from coming and therefore would not be willing to invest or create a vision for the park's future.

With a park that appears to be pristine and natural like Hemlock Gorge, it seems that the area would not need as much attention as other landscapes. However, upkeep was still needed to sustain Hemlock Gorge's popularity. The design of urban parks and public spaces has evolved throughout the last one hundred years and this evolution has been a reflection of the changing relationship between American society and the landscape. In her book *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, sociologist Galen Cranz creates a system of classifying the different eras of park and public space design in America. The first period of landscape design is titled the "Pleasure Ground" which would roughly be the period between 1850 and 1900. The Pleasure Ground was followed by the "Reform Park" of 1900-1930, the "Recreation Facility" of 1930-1965 and the "Open Space System" for the period from 1965 to 1982 when the book was published.²²

The design of Hemlock Gorge falls between two eras; the *Pleasure Ground* and the *Reform Park*. Early parks of the 19th century such as Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts and New York's Central Park are often characterized as being "organized around passive use"²³ and any activities would likely take place

²¹ Michael Van Valkenburgh. "Landscapes over Time." *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, no. March 2013 (n.d.).

²² Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, 1989.

²³ *Ibid*, 7.

outdoors to allow people to escape the indoors and artificial light. It was believed that going into nature “would not merely give respite to the tired worker but also stimulate and exercise the unused part of his mind.”²⁴ Another aspect of this design period that is very important to the landscape of Hemlock Gorge is the emphasis on the picturesque. European landscape models at this time emphasized symmetry and rationality and were therefore considered “unsuitable models” for American cities at the time as landscape design of the time was viewed as an opportunity to provide “relief from the evils of the city and to escape to the country.”²⁵ On the other hand, the extreme opposite of the European landscape models, the wilderness, would be difficult to place within a metropolitan area. Instead a picturesque landscape, like Hemlock Gorge, created a groomed and cultivated idea of nature that would be suitable for its proximity to the city but also allow visitors to feel as though they could escape. The pathways of Hemlock Gorge appeared natural but were instead predetermined, foot bridges allowed visitors to cross to the island without having to hop from stone to stone or wade in the water. The overgrown picturesque landscape that one sees today mirrors and mimics nature in such a way that it would be easy for a visitor to believe that the landscape was pristine and untouched. In terms of the land chosen for these parks, Cranz explains that they were often parcels of land which had no competition as they were “unusable for other purposes.”²⁶ Charles Eliot had witnessed throughout his life that land near the shoreline of Boston which was once considered undesirable was now becoming prime real estate.

²⁴ Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design*, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

²⁷ He predicted that this would occur not only in Boston but also in smaller cities in the surrounding area such as Newton and Needham. For this reason, a majority of the land he acquired for the initial Metropolitan Park Commission were marshes and wetlands which were difficult to develop at the time. Hemlock Gorge was an exception to this general trend as being Echo Bridge Park, it was already a destination and beginning to be developed. Instead of seeing it as a wasteland, Charles Eliot admired the beauty and character of Hemlock Gorge.

The next park period, known as the *Reform Park*, contrasted the *Pleasure Ground* park in that in respect to their appearance these new parks were symmetrically designed rather than attempts to imitate nature. The designs also began to suggest how people should use the space and designated areas for different activities. For instance, in the design of Hemlock Gorge, the Olmsted Brothers had suggested in their letters the later addition of a bath house for people to swim in the Charles River. This would have been a redesign to encourage how people should occupy and use the space. Additionally the designs of parks began to be seen as a form of charity.²⁸ Society was changing and life in America was evolving with new reforms that led to shorter work weeks, longer vacations and ultimately gave people more free or “leisure time.”²⁹ Cranz explains that there had been a widespread belief that people did not know how to occupy themselves with their newly found free time. Simultaneously, this “leisure time” was seen as a threat to society as people could spend it in immoral places such as the saloon. For this reason, the design of the *reform park* was seen as a moral defense and

²⁷ Karl Haglund. *Inventing the Charles River*.

²⁸ Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design*, 61.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 62.

an attempt to redirect how and where people used their spare time.³⁰ This period marks the arrival of the playground movement and reform programming as the parks were no longer seen as substitutes for “rural summers but a response to relentless urban rhythms.”³¹ Hemlock Gorge was initially designed as a *pleasure ground park* but fits into this period of park design as well. Through the relationship with the Olmsted Brothers who advocated for the upkeep and reuse, Hemlock Gorge was, despite its original picturesque and pleasure ground master plan, able to evolve into a reform park and reflect both areas of design. Another aspect of this period of landscape design was the creation of the neighborhood park. At the time of its foundation, Hemlock Gorge was somewhat isolated but, as the populations of Needham and Newton grew, Hemlock Gorge evolved into a park for the surrounding neighborhoods rather than people commuting from the city. Perhaps the presence of this park was a driving force and influence for where people wanted to live in these cities.

The following period of the *Recreation Facility* brought with it the termination of the idealistic “efforts to use parks as a mechanism of social reform.”³² Cranz describes that the concept of recreation became an “essential of life” and that facilities such as swimming pools and baseball diamonds became expected in urban park designs. Post World War I, the idea of community wide events led to parades, festivals, musical theater, storytelling and pageants.³³ During the *Reform Park* design era, some aspects of Hemlock Gorge had evolved and changed to fulfil new park design trends that were

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design*, 69.

³² Ibid, 101.

³³ Ibid, 115.

different from the park characteristics popular before. Throughout the *Recreation Facility* design era, the design of Hemlock Gorge did not change nor respond to any of the new public park styles. Trees were not cut down to make way for a soccer field or tennis courts nor was this a venue adapted for festivals such as parades. As a consequence of loss in funding as well as the loss of advocates like the Olmsted Brothers, Hemlock Gorge did not evolve during this period while other parks of the same original *pleasure ground* period did. Central Park now has baseball diamonds, Revere Beach has programmed events like sandcastle building festivals and parts of Franklin Park now contain a zoo as well as a golf course.

The fourth era of park design is the Open-Space System in which parks were designed in response to the lack of open space in recreation era park design.³⁴ In terms of activities, this era is known for “anything goes.”³⁵ Whether venues for rock concerts or protests, a variety of activities were socially allowed within the park context. While Cranz’s book does not list Boston Common specifically, the descriptions of this park tradition and landscape bring today’s Boston Common to mind. This landscape was clearly not designed during this time; however, the open space and open design of the landscape has allowed it to resemble a park design of the *open-space system*. Cranz’s system of classification does have its limitations in that this book was written about thirty-five years ago which is enough time for a fifth era of park design for American landscape architecture.

³⁴ Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design*, 135.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 139.

I would name this fifth era as the *Post-Industrial Period* of park design. When I think of recent park designs, I envision public spaces whose dimensions are restricted by industrial barriers. Similar to how Charles Eliot's selected land that was seen as "unusable," today's "unusable land" continues to be the spaces from which parks are designed. As it would be rare to have a city with abundant open space to be redesigned, these undesirable pieces of land are often post-industrial sites. For example, the Lynch Family Skatepark was designed under a Boston highway while New York's Highline was constructed and designed on abandoned railway tracks. The landscape design tradition and movement we are currently in takes postindustrial spaces seen as waste lands and converts them into accessible new spaces.

Occasionally, it is possible to come across land in urban areas that was already designated as public space but recently redesigned. One example is Millennium Park in Chicago. One landscape architecture journal presents a comparison between Central Park and Millennium Park to represent how society's relationship with parks has evolved over time.³⁶ These two parks share many similarities in that they are large parks located in the hearts of both of their cities. While it is impossible to see all of Central Park within a day, a visitor can see all of Millennium Park in about two hours. Rather than having the experience of getting lost in time and space as was the intended effect of Central Park's design, Millennium Park is much more adapted for the busy visitor who only has so much time for leisure. In regard to aesthetics, Central Park incorporates the picturesque as well as the sublime to appear like a natural landscape. Millennium Park,

³⁶ Land8: Landscape Architects Network. "Two Famous American Urban Parks Demonstrate How Citizens Changed in 160 Years," July 30, 2017.

on the other hand, does not attempt to mimic nature and is clearly a designed space with symmetry of paths, futuristic architecture and open lawns rather than forests. Finally, Central Park would have initially been considered a “non-activity” site as it was intended to be a space for people to take respite from their busy urban lives. Millenium Park is instead heavily programmed and every part of the park has a purpose. One area has a playground, another has an ice skating rink and another provides a venue for large concerts. Other parts include sculptures, fountains and splash pads where people can cool off during hot summer months.

Is it possible for a small park like Hemlock Gorge to reconnect with society while maintaining the character and aesthetic early designers imagined for it? At first it may seem impossible as today’s parks are very different from the Hemlock Gorge and other designs of the *pleasure ground* period. However, it was possible through the support of advocacy of the Olmsted Brothers for Hemlock Gorge to evolve into a park of the *reform park* movement. I believe it has the potential to evolve once again; but this time evolve into a 21st-century park.

Design Proposals:

With these suggestions to the Massachusetts Department of Parks and Recreation, I am proposing design solutions with the goal of maintaining the character and original design that Charles Eliot, the MPC and the Olmsted firm envisioned; Simultaneously, I hope to help Hemlock Gorge evolve into a contemporary park.³⁷

³⁷ I would like to acknowledge that I am coming from an outsider’s perspective as I am not a part of the Newton and Needham communities nor was I even aware of this park’s existence three months ago. I also have only been able to visit on weekends in the fall so I am not familiar with Hemlock Gorge during

Additionally, with these proposals, I do not intend for Hemlock Gorge to return to having 5,000 visitors a day as I value landscapes that allow visitors to feel as if they are escaping into nature. However, I hope to encourage more community members to take advantage of their proximity to a beautiful resource.

There are numerous character-defining aspects of Hemlock Gorge which I wish to maintain, to restore and to increase accessibility to with these design proposals. As the Charles River is at the core of this landscape, increasing accessibility both visually and physically to the river is important. In regard to the water, after crashing over the dams the surface of the river is uniquely patterned with water bubbles and swirls. Overall I would like to maintain the original trail plan that Eliot had proposed as represented in the firm's topographical map. With that in mind, I would however consider rerouting some paths to weave between the river and woods if it would make it easier for visitors to access the water. Other character-defining aspects of the landscape are the remnants of the old mill, Echo Bridge, as well as the geology of the gorge and the topography of the landscape. Restoring and maintaining access to all of these points and aspects of the park are the primary goals of my design. These characters were important to Charles Eliot and the Olmsted Firm which is why I hope that they will continue to be the points of inspiration for designers and architects who work with Hemlock Gorge in the future.

Throughout this essay, I have described Hemlock Gorge as a forgotten landscape but I would like to add that it is not completely forgotten. The Friends of

other seasons as well as during the week. Therefore if these proposals were to be implemented, I would want input from the community who knows this landscape best.

Hemlock Gorge are group of volunteers and community members who lead annual clean ups and other projects the park is in need of. For example they recently treated the Hemlock trees for Woolly Adelgid, added railings to Echo Bridge that would make crossing this structure feel safer and designed a new map for the park (Figure 3). As they are a small group of volunteers, their resources are unfortunately limited. If my proposals were to be carried out, Hemlock Gorge would need much more community support and funding.

One problem or concern with the current design and aesthetic of Hemlock Gorge is that, while it may not be completely forgotten, it feels as if it is for a visitor unfamiliar with the park. This appearance can often correlate with the idea of a desolate and unsafe environment. First impressions are crucial and one project currently being carried out by the Friends of Hemlock Gorge is the replacement of the large, faded “Hemlock Gorge Reservation” signs at the entrances to the park. The parking lots are in need of repavement and the parking lines need to be repainted. Thirdly, at these entrances are bulletin boards with information posted by the Friends of Hemlock Gorge and DCR about the park. There are currently many blank spaces on these boards and many of the papers on display are faded. For this reason, I propose the redesign and reorganization of the boards to include boxes with free maps of Hemlock Gorge and other seasonal information (Figure 4).

Continuing with the theme of signage, I suggest implementing more signs throughout the landscape that would help direct visitors. The first time I visited I went with friends and without access to a map nor the presence of trail signs, exploring the

park was a process of trial and error. From the parking lot on the southern side it was difficult to figure out which direction to go. The presence of the river and the bright color of a new bench are both visual focal points that led us in the wrong direction. We were led to a dead end and my friends and I had to blaze our own trail to figure out how to enter the park. No sign at this area of Hemlock Gorge leads visitors to the main path so including a sign that would hint where to begin would be helpful.

Even in the park trail signs are lacking and it wasn't until my third visit that I finally found one. As it was weathered I could tell that this wooden sign was not a recent addition. Assumably, at one point there had been more but as they were constructed from wood, they may have decomposed, broken and were never replaced. I propose the replacement of signage in this landscape that mimics the simplicity of the remaining sign's design. Rather than wood, I propose making the sign from a more durable material such as metal. Additionally, as many people visit parks today as a form of exercise, I propose adding the trails' distances (Figure 5).

Apart from the aesthetics and presence of signage, I would like to propose other designs that directly address safety in the park. The old mill on the southern side of Hemlock Gorge is now an antiques store with a back patio overlooking the river. Situated above the dam with view of the gorge and Echo Bridge, this back patio is a very scenic spot. Currently there are tables and umbrellas but this patio does not have a purpose that would attract visitors. As contemporary landscapes need to be programmed spaces, this patio provides an opportunity to create a gathering area for community events. For example this patio could be a venue for casual concerts, an

outdoor cafe during summer months, or other events that would bring more people into the park. Programming this patio would affect the safety of Hemlock Gorge as this patio is visible from many parts of the southern side of reservation. Personally, if I were visiting Hemlock Gorge and saw a group of people nearby on the patio, I would feel safer knowing that others were nearby. At the time of the Olmsted Firm's design, a bridge had stood above the dam. With the reprogramming of the mill's patio, I propose rebuilding this bridge as it would directly connect the patio to the park. This way a visitor who came for the sole purpose of drinking coffee or attending a concert is visually invited to enter the landscape (Figure 6).

Another proposal in regard to public safety in Hemlock Gorge is related to Ellis Street which borders the park on the eastern edge. To stand under Echo Bridge and test out the acoustics, visitors need to cross Ellis Street after descending from old metal steps of Echo Bridge. Traffic can be heavy and with the massive arches of the aqueduct, it is difficult to see cars coming whether they are speeding or not. It is equally difficult for drivers to see pedestrians. For this reason in regard to pedestrian safety, I propose adding a crossing sign with flashing lights. This would help pedestrians feel a little more secure when crossing the street as the lights would help their presence be more visible.

Returning to the character-defining aspects of this landscape, another aspect that I would wish to restore are the focal points that Eliot and the Olmsted firm had envisioned. In regard to restoring Eliot's initial vision for the park, Charles Eliot wanted

to create a cultivated and manicured wilderness.³⁸ While the geology of the gorge is impressive and Echo Bridge was intended to be a focal point, today with overgrown foliage many of these viewpoints are obstructed from the pathways. It is difficult to understand where specifically Charles Eliot and the Olmsted Firm would have intended these viewpoints to be but early photographs in the Olmsted Park Archives offer suggestions and hints (Figure 7).³⁹ Following the viewpoints in the photographs and from my own visits, I propose the clearing of new vistas to help make the bridge more visible and frame scenes of the river (Figure 8).

From reference to early photographs we know that a footbridge has always connected the island to the western shore. However, the original one had aesthetically been much more rustic than the fabricated wooden bridge that stands there today. While the current bridge is functional, it has lost a lot of its character and charm so I propose replacing today's bench with one similar to the original Olmsted bridge (Figure 9). In regard to the topography of the landscape, when looking at the Olmsted's topographical map, it shows that bridges over the gorges had once been a part of the park's design. The geology and viewpoints over the Charles River are stunning but the landscape is also interesting within the woods. Including bridges over these land gorges would provide viewpoints in the park of the forest rather than only providing views that favor the river view (Figure 10).

³⁸ Karl Haglund. *Inventing the Charles River*. The MIT Press, 2003.

³⁹ Commonwealth of Massachusetts Metropolitan Park Commission. "Topographical Map of the Hemlock Gorge Reservation," 1905. Olmsted National Park Service Archival Records. https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/34001447585/in/album-72157682528816685/.

Returning to the idea of redesigning pathways that weave between the woods and shoreline, to improve visual accessibility to the Charles River, I propose removing the decking beneath Echo Bridge and replacing it with a platform that is less restrictive and more open (Figure 11). Currently the decking is tightly fenced-in, confining people to a small area beneath the bridge. Additionally returning to the concern for safety, the deck under Echo Bridge is not visible when walking down the staircase and this can feel a little unsettling not being able to see if someone is there. For this reason, in addition to expanding the decking, I propose adding a path that gently winds down and follows the shoreline of the river before reaching the deck (Figure 11). Also expanding the deck would provide another programmable space and musical groups would have enough room to perform beneath the bridge and experiment with the acoustics of the architecture.

Another setback in regard to the design of Hemlock Gorge is that it does not determine nor communicate how it should be occupied or how it should be experienced. This, as we saw with the comparison between Millennium Park and Central Park, is an important design element of 21st-century parks. People visit Revere Beach to swim in the ocean and visit the Fens to garden in the community garden plots. These 19th-century parks have evolved to have an emphasis on their recreational activities and host events such as sand castle building and fun runs. Like these other landscapes of the Boston region, Hemlock Gorge's landscape has a lot of potential for providing different activities and forms of recreation. One example, as mentioned earlier, is

marketing and advertising Hemlock Gorge as a venue for concerts if the patio and platform beneath the bridge were to be designated as public-event spaces.

Continuing with different activities and forms of recreation, Hemlock Gorge's 23-acres are ideal for hiking. Clearer signs of these pathways as discussed earlier would be helpful for making hiking in the park accessible to a larger audience. Creating a map that lists distances as well as color codes difficulty levels in terms of steepness would be helpful for giving people an idea of the landscape before they visit. Third, paving some of the existing pathways with a material would permit this landscape to become more inclusive of the elderly, people with disabilities, as well as young children in strollers. As of now, it would be very difficult and practically impossible for anyone in a wheelchair or stroller to navigate the landscape. For these paved paths, asphalt with stone in the top layer would create a natural aesthetic (Figure 12); and recently there have been many advancements in designing permeable cement. Some of the steep paths are in need of new woodchip coverings and I have attached a palette for possible color tones below (Figure 13).

In regard to picnicking, Hemlock Gorge would be a beautiful spot. When I visited I did not see any picnic tables and none were marked on the map. I propose the addition of seating for picnicking that blends into the landscape. For example to preserve a natural aesthetic, boulders with flattened tops (Figure 14) could be situated along hillsides and their locations could be included on the map. Similar to picnicking areas in National and State Parks, signs with information about the "Carry In, Carry Out"

policy for trash would need to be present at the park entrances as well as near picnicking sites.

Apart from hiking and picnicking, other activities could be advertised for Hemlock Gorge as well. For example, with its 23 acres, relationship with the Charles River and status as a reservation, Hemlock Gorge would be a wonderful stop for migratory birds during the spring and fall seasons. Often Audubon centers provide checklists of bird species that visitors may potentially see at their sanctuaries during particular seasons. Including a pamphlet like this at the entrance boards near the parking lot could help give Hemlock Gorge a new reputation as a birder's destination and encourage visitors who came to the park for other reasons to experience the park in a new way.

The few people I passed while visiting the park were fishermen so this park, while perhaps not advertised online, is known as a spot for fishing. These fishing spots could be marked on the map as well and similar to the pamphlet with information about migratory birds, a poster that mentions the fish common to this part of the Charles River could be included at the entrance bulletin boards. When designating these fishing areas, it would also be wise to consider cutting back on vegetation as when casting rods, the fishing line and hooks may get caught on the branches.

I often feel that people tend to think of landscapes only in how they appear during warm summer months when in reality, especially while living in Massachusetts, summer months are only a fourth of the year. For this reason, it is important to encourage seasonal use of the park. To do so, I propose marking skiing and snowshoeing trails on the public map. A few members of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge had shared memories

of ice skating during past winters on New Pond which is a shallow offshoot of the river in the northern part of the park. While encouraging visitors to ice skate on New Pond, caution signs should be placed along the Charles River as its currents may cause soft spots in the ice.

Apart from marketing activities through the implementation of new signage, Hemlock Gorge could become an educational space to inform visitors about the history and current condition of the park. For example, when searching online about Hemlock Gorge, very little of the published history acknowledges the 20,000 Ponkapoag Native Americans who had lived in this area before. A branch of the Algonquin tribe, the Ponkapoag Native Americans, had an established village in the proximity of the land today known as Hemlock Gorge. Including informational signs throughout the landscape would encourage visitors to think of the people who were there before Echo Bridge and educate them about a history that is far too often erased. In regard to a more recent history, the old mill is visible from many points but no historical information is provided. Informational signs throughout the landscape would help educate visitors about the site's history from various points in time.

Signage can also help educate visitors about the park's environmental condition. Similar to the fish located in the river and the migratory birds, signage can provide information on plants and other wildlife species that are found there. These signs could provide information on environmental struggles and challenges that Hemlock Gorge faces. For example, signage could address Hemlock Gorge's recent history with Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and how the Friends of Hemlock Gorge have treated these

trees.⁴⁰ This could lead to a discussion about invasive species and other environmental challenges the park is facing. Additionally these signs would be opportunities to self-advertise the Friends of Hemlock Gorge's work and hopefully encourage visitors to become involved.

I would like to add that text is not the only way to educate people about their surroundings. Inspired by Jane Kim's Migration Murals throughout the United States, I propose a mural of Charles River fish along the side of the mill's western wall near the patio. When the Newton Upper Falls dam was constructed it blocked the migration routes of the herring and salmon. While in the short term this made it easier for the Ponkapoag native americans to fish, in the long term it was detrimental to the fish populations. In her Migration Mural series, Jane Kim paints biologically and scientifically accurate depictions of animals that once migrated through landscapes where buildings now stand (Figure 15). Painting representations of these fish on the edge of the mill would symbolically mark one of the first locations on the Charles River where their migration routes were blocked before nearly twenty other dams were later constructed at various points of the river.

Through these proposals, I believe that Hemlock Gorge has the potential to evolve into a 21st century park despite being originally designed during the 19th century. I hope to restore the park to being considered a destination while also allowing it to evolve into a space welcoming of all people and include spaces for activities; I hope that these proposals will help visitors see Hemlock Gorge in a new light. Again, while I do

⁴⁰ "The Friends of Hemlock Gorge".

not expect for 5,000 people to visit every day, I would hope more people would visit the park on a regular basis.

The correlation between the passing of the Olmsted Brothers and Hemlock Gorge being neglected reveal the importance of having advocates to campaign for the park. When individuals become involved with and use a landscape, they become connected. Therefore encouraging new people to connect with Hemlock Gorge would create a new generation of advocates and more motivation to maintain and upkeep Hemlock Gorge for generations to come. With the history of defunding and the number of other parks they manage, it is difficult to imagine that the Department of Conservation and Recreation would be eager to immediately fund the redesign of this landscape. For this reason it is important to encourage public involvement not only on behalf of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge but other individuals, institutions, businesses and organizations that have been active in supporting their communities. The past century has shown that the Department of Conservation and Recreation cannot be held accountable for maintaining this park. To ensure a prosperous future for Hemlock Gorge, community level involvement is crucial.

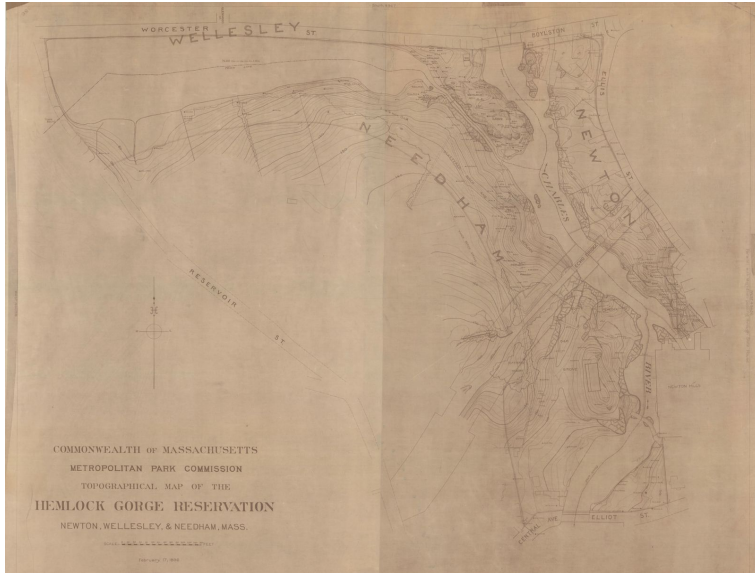
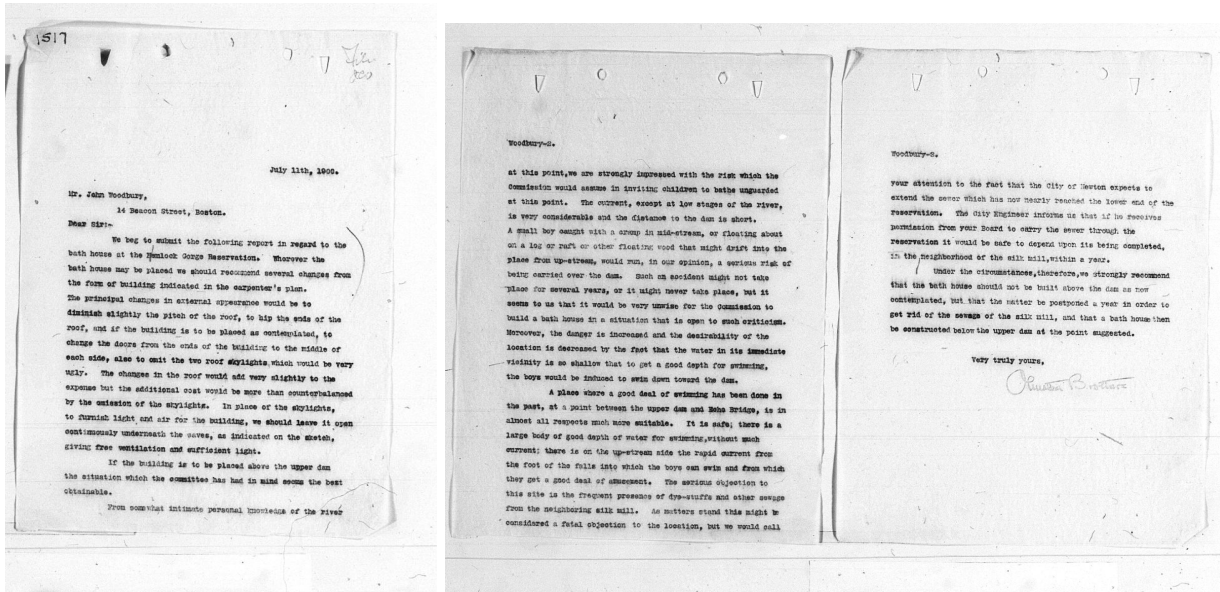


Figure 1

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Metropolitan Park Commission.
"Topographical Map of the
Hemlock Gorge Reservation,"
1905. Olmsted National Park
Service Archival Records.

Figure 2.

"Olmsted Brothers Letters to the Metropolitan Park Commission," n.d. Library of Congress.



Mr. John Woodbury,
14 Beacon Street, Boston.

July 11th, 1900.

Dear Sir:-

We beg to submit the following report in regard to the bath house at the Hemlock Gorge Reservation. Wherever the bath house may be placed we should recommend several changes from the form of building indicated in the expert's plan. The principal changes in external appearance would be to diminish slightly the pitch of the roof, to hip the ends of the roof, and if the building is to be placed as contemplated, to change the doors from the ends of the building to the middle of each side, also to omit the two roof skylights which would be very ugly. The changes in the roof would add very slightly to the expense but the additional cost would be more than counterbalanced by the extension of the skylights. In place of the skylights, to furnish light and air for the building, we should leave it open continuously underneath the eaves, as indicated on the sketch, giving free ventilation and sufficient light.

If the building is to be placed above the upper dam the situation which the committee has had in mind seems the best obtainable.

From somewhat intimate personal knowledge of the place

Woodbury, c.

at this point, we are strongly impressed with the risk which the Commission would assume in inviting children to bathe unguarded at this point. The current, except at low stages of the river, is very considerable and the distance to the dam is short. A small boy caught with a group in mid-stream, or floating about on a log or raft or other floating wood that might drift into the place from up-stream, would run, in our opinion, a serious risk of being carried over the dam. Such an accident might not take place for several years, or it might never take place, but it seems to us that it would be very serious for the Commission to build a bath house in a situation that is open to such criticism. Moreover, the danger is increased and the desirability of the location is decreased by the fact that the water in its immediate vicinity is so shallow that to get a good depth for swimming, the boys would be induced to swim down toward the dam.

A place where a good deal of swimming has been done in the past, at a point between the upper dam and Stone Bridge, is in almost all respects much more suitable. It is safe, there is a large body of good depth of water for swimming, without much current; there is on the up-stream side the rapid current from the foot of the falls into which the boys can swim and from which they get a good deal of amusement. The serious objection to this site is the frequent presence of dry-stuffs and other sewage from the neighboring mill mill. As matters stand this might be considered a fatal objection to the location, but we would still

Woodbury, c.

Your attention to the fact that the City of Boston expects to extend the sewer which has now nearly reached the lower end of the Reservation. The City Engineer informs us that if he receives permission from your Board to carry the sewer through the Reservation it would be sure to depend upon its being completed, in the neighborhood of the mill mill, within a year.

Under the circumstances, therefore, we strongly recommend that the bath house should not be built above the dam as now contemplated, but that the matter be postponed a year in order to get rid of the sewage of the mill mill, and that a bath house then be constructed below the upper dam at the point suggested.

Very truly yours,

Olmsted Brothers

Figure 3.
Friends of Hemlock Gorge Park Map

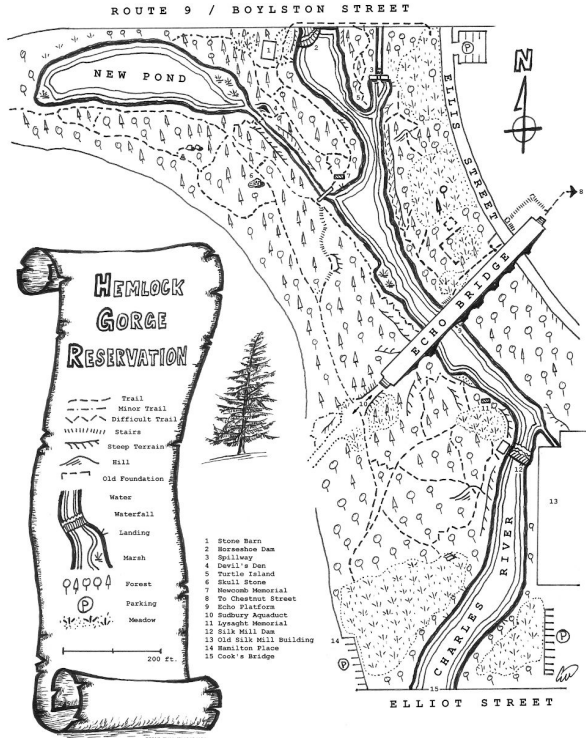


Figure 4.
Sketch of redesigned entrance bulletin boards

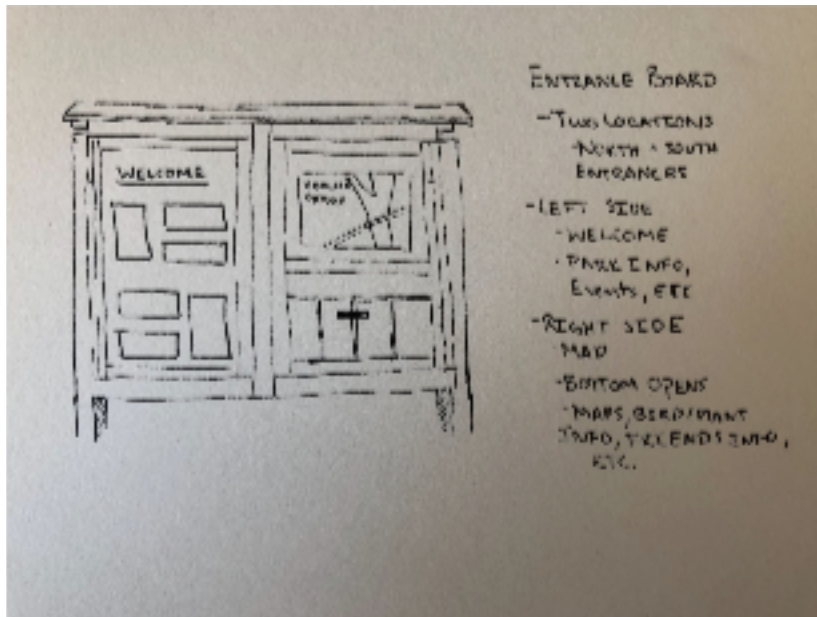


Figure 5.
Sketch of Trail Sign design

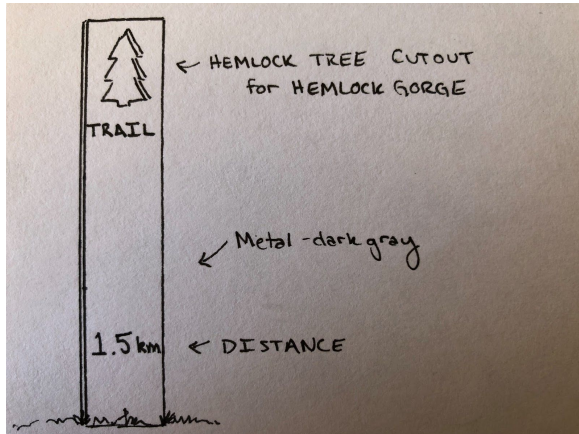


Figure 6.
Location of proposed bridge and trail to connect patio with park on Friends of Hemlock Gorge's Park Map

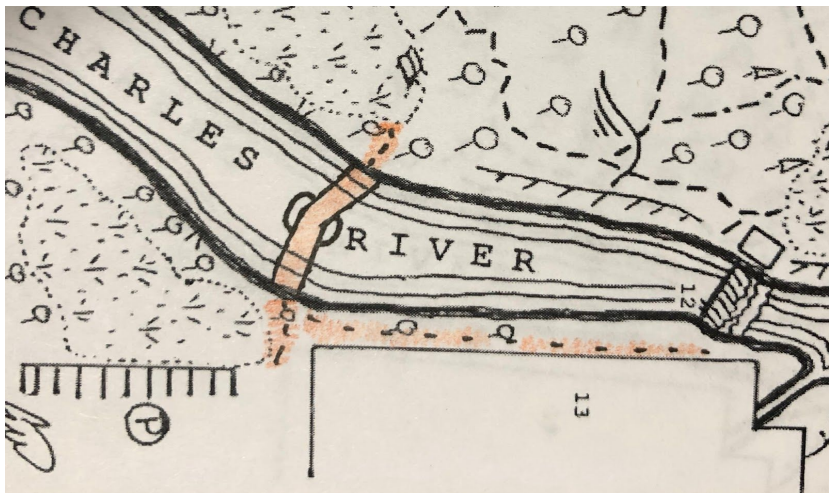


Figure 7.
Photograph of Hemlock Gorge,
Courtesy of National Park Service,
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic
Site



Figure 8.
Sketch of Proposed Vistas and Viewpoints from Paths. Viewpoints of Echo Bridge and the geology of Hemlock Gorge

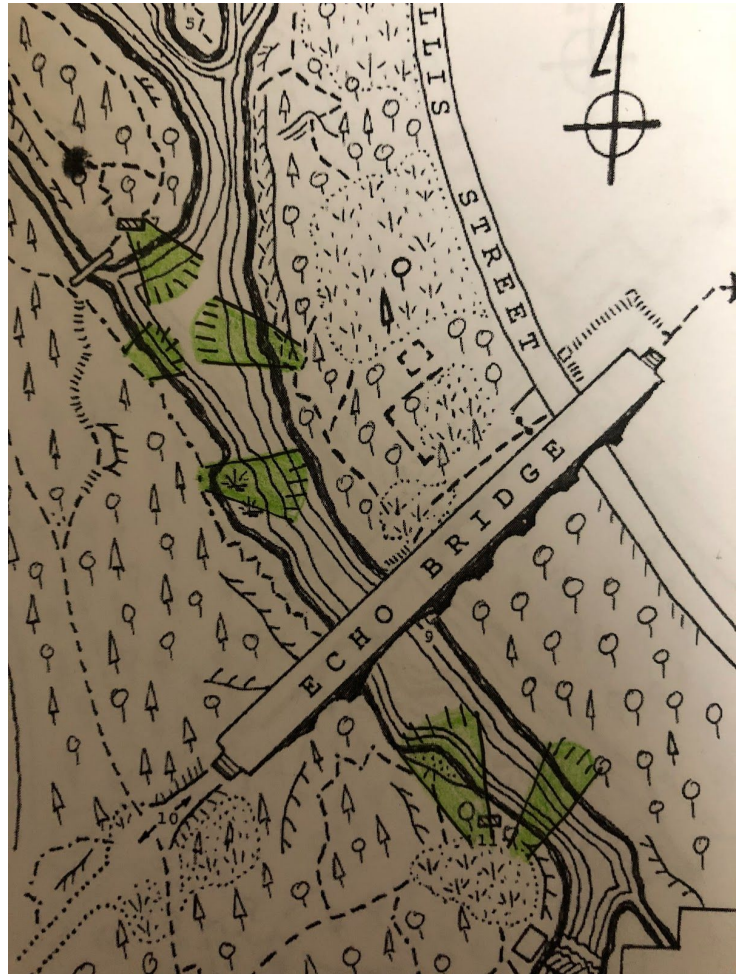


Figure 9.
Photograph of Hemlock Gorge,
wooden bridge.
Courtesy of National Park Service,
Frederick Law Olmsted National
Historic Site

Figure 10.
Location of proposed bridge above inland gorge

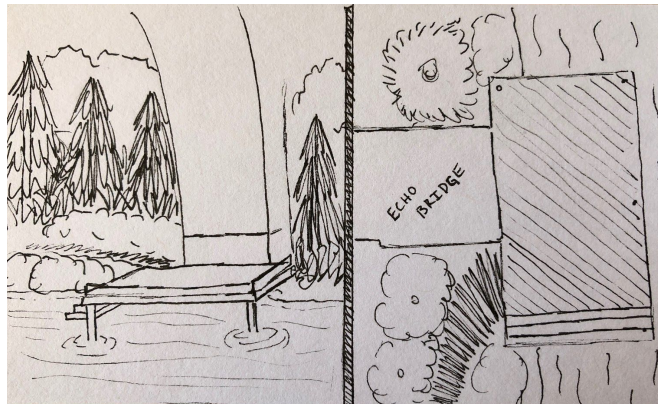


Figure 11.
Sketch for decking and path proposals
beneath bridge
Left: Rendering of decking, path, and
vegetation on left
Right: Plan of decking, path, and vegetation
on right

Figure 12.
Asphalt with stone for handicap accessible
pathways

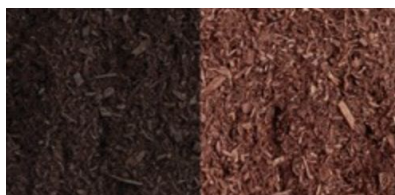


Figure 13.
Woodchip color palette for pathways

Figure 14.
Sketch of boulder seating in hillsides

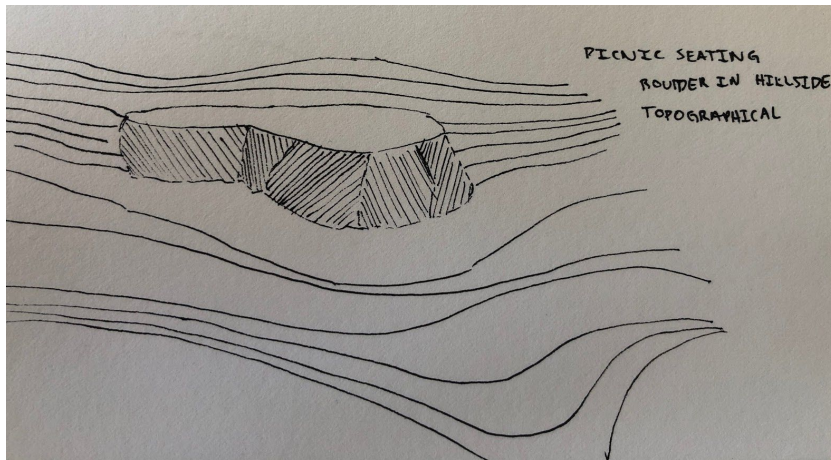


Figure 15.
Jane Kim's Migration Murals



Bibliography:

Charles W. Eliot. *Charles Eliot Landscape Architectl.* Houghton Milton, 1902.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Metropolitan Park Commission. "Topographical Map of the Hemlock Gorge Reservation," 1905. Olmsted National Park Service Archival Records.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/34001447585/in/album-72157682528816685/.

Evan Westrate. "Hemlock Gorge Reservation Map." Friends of Hemlock Gorge, 2018.

Galen Cranz. *Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, 1989.

Gordon Abbott, Jr. *Saving Special Places: A Centennial History of Hte Trustees of Reservations: Pioneer of the Land Trust Movement.* Ipswich, Massachusetts: Ipswich Press, 1993.

"Hemlock Gorge Reservation," n.d. <https://www.mass.gov/locations/hemlock-gorge-reservation>.

Karl Haglund. *Inventing the Charles River.* The MIT Press, 2003.

Kenneth W. Newcomb. *The Makers of the Mold: A History of Newton Upper Falls, Massachusetts*, 1997.
http://www.hemlockgorge.org/FHG_Makers_of_the_Mold/MakersTitlePage.htm.

Land8: Landscape Archtiects Network. "Two Famous American Urban Parks Demonstrate How Citizens Changed in 160 Years," July 30, 2017.

"Map Accompanying Draft of Zoning Ordinance for the City of Newton Massachusetts," 1921.
<http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/39228>.

Michael Van Valkenburgh. "Landscapes over Time." *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, no. March 2013 (n.d.).

National Association for Olmsted Parks. "Olmsted Legacy," n.d.
<http://www.olmsted.org/the-olmsted-legacy/about-the-olmsted-legacy>.

"Olmsted Brothers Letters to the Metropolitan Park Commission," n.d. Library of Congress.

"Outline Map of Newton, MA," 1875. <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/39621>.

