

INSIGHT

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NEW MAYOR TACKLES TOUGH JOB IN BIG EASY PAGE 4B

PROSECUTOR MAKES WITNESS PROTECTION A PRIORITY PAGE 6B

COMMEMORATING 150 YEARS IN ONLY 365 DAYS



Highlights of events celebrating Central Park's sesquicentennial:

- Through Sept. 30: "Sheep Grazing in the Meadow: The Olmstedian Landscape," an exhibition of Frederick Law Olmsted's plans of parks around the country; The School of Architecture at City College of New York.
- Through July 3: "Celebrating Central Park, 1853-2003," an exhibition of paintings, watercolors, drawings, prints, photographs and sculpture; Hirsch & Adler Galleries.
- Through Aug. 31: "Central Park: A Sesquicentennial Celebration," an exhibit focusing on the original presentation plans and drawings of Central Park by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux; The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- May 9 to Sept. 28: "Central Park in Blue," an exhibition of blueprint material of Augustus Hepp, a landscape gardener of the 1860s who submitted a plan for Central Park in the 1858 design competition; Museum of the City of New York.
- The month of June: Throughout the park, artists, architects and celebrities transform Central Park benches into works of art. The benches will be auctioned at Christie's in November, with proceeds going to the maintenance and improvement of the park.
- June 5 and June 29 at 7 p.m.: Open air performances by the New York Classical Theatre of Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing," in the park at 97th Street and Central Park West.
- June 10 and June 16, at 8 p.m.: Metropolitan Opera on the Great Lawn.
- June 11 at 8 p.m.: Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis; Rumsey Playfield at 72nd Street off Fifth Avenue.
- July 19, all day: Parkwide 150th Birthday Party.
- June 21-25: The Eighth annual Urban Parks Conference, "Great Parks-Great Cities: Celebrating 150 Years of Central Park," an international conference; various locations. Information: <http://pps.org/GPGC>
- June 27-28: BioBlitz at North Meadow Recreation Center, a 24-hour inventory of all living organisms in the park. Local scientists and naturalists work with volunteers.
- July 7 and July 10 at 8 p.m.: New York Philharmonic performs on the Great Lawn.
- Sept. 2 to Nov. 2: The Birds of Central Park: Audubon's Watercolors, an exhibition of rare works at the New-York Historical Society.
- Sept. 3-7 at 8 p.m.: Central Park Film Festival, presenting five movies in which Central Park plays a major role; Rumsey Playfield.
- Sept. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.: \$1,000-a-plate fund-raising dinners at 150 homes, hotels and clubs with views of the park.
- Sept. 15, 7:45 p.m.: "Light Cycle," a pyrotechnic show featuring a 1,000-foot circle of light in the sky above the park, symbolizing the cycle of renewal.
- Oct. 29, 7 p.m. to midnight: Halloween Ball. A costume party under a tent with live entertainers, dinner and dancing.

SOURCE: CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY WWW.CENTRALPARKNYC.ORG



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Joggers use the path that circles the Croton Reservoir in New York's Central Park on May 20. The park's largest body of water is a favorite attraction for runners, with more than a mile and a half track circling the reservoir's 106 acres.

CENTRAL PARK CELEBRATES SESQUICENTENNIAL SUCCESS OF 'GRAND EXPERIMENT'

By Ula Ilnytzky
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK

Step off Fifth Avenue into Central Park, and the temperature can drop five degrees on a steamy summer day. Eyes accustomed to grimy shades of city gray suddenly flood with every tint of green. Breathe deeply: A heady combination of lilac and magnolia overwhelms.

It's a place to scale rocks, to jog, to swim, to fly a kite, to simply read a book. Life in New York would be "impossible" without the park, declares Sarah Elliott, an avid bird watcher who takes visitors through the Ramble, a 38-acre woodland of secluded glades, outcroppings, cascades and a cave.

"There are so many things people worry about in this city," she says. "To step into the park is a reprieve. You become part of Mother Nature's plan."

Many visitors — including native New Yorkers — don't realize its scope: 58 miles of pedestrian paths and 150 acres of water. The varied topography includes a few fiercely protected American elms; Harlem Hill, a steep challenge tackled by thousands of bicyclists and runners each year; craggy boulders worthy of any nature-starved rock climber; and natural springs evoking the Catskills and Adirondacks.

There are small glades, quiet coves and a bridle trail around the reservoir; hidden inlets and rustic rowboat landings along the undulating shoreline of the 21-acre, butterfly-shaped lake at Bethesda Terrace. Flat, wide-open stretches of lawn dwarf those of almost any college campus.

People even fish on the Harlem Meer.

Natural Beauty Engineered

Yet, for all of its lush 843



A man practices climbing a rock face in New York's Central Park amid yellow forsythia blooms on April 13. Central Park's 843 acres are a manmade oasis offering an example to cities nationwide seeking to provide and maintain a respite amid urban bustle.

acres, Central Park is a created oasis. The vision of designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, it was born 150 years ago when the New York state Legislature set aside land for the nation's first major public park.

This year, theater, music, dance and sports mark a year of birthday celebrations. Two museum exhibits commemorate its sesquicentennial. The original plans and drawings of the "Greensward Plan" submitted by Olmsted and Vaux are at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Central Park in Blue," at the Museum of the City of New York, highlights newly discovered blueprints by landscape architect Augustus Hepp. A new book, "Central Park, an American Masterpiece," details the park's extraordinary history.

There is much to celebrate. Central Park is almost restored to its original splendor and drawing 25 million people annually, a leap from the days

when a fiscal crisis rendered it little more than an ugly wild patch on the urban landscape.

The story began between 1853 and 1856, when city commissioners paid more than \$5 million for a rectangle of undeveloped land running from 59th Street to 106th Street between Fifth and Eighth avenues. In 1858, Olmsted and Vaux won a competition to design the space.

Ten million cartloads of soil were brought in to fill a landscape consisting mostly of swamps and 450-million-year-old bedrock that was moved or blasted with gunpowder. An underground drainage system was installed to create ponds and lakes.

"They look like they're natural, but they're run by the city water system," says Sara Cedar Miller, the Central Park historian and photographer of "Central Park, an American Masterpiece."

"The landscape was redesigned and reconfigured to

THINGS TO KNOW
Facts and figures about Central Park:

- Designers: Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.
- Origins: In 1853, the state Legislature first set aside land for a major public park. City commissioners spent \$14 million for undeveloped land and construction from 59th Street to 106th Street, between Fifth and Eighth Avenues. Designers were chosen in public competition in 1858. Park was developed over a span of 16 years.
- Acreage: 843 acres, 6 percent of Manhattan's total acreage. Includes seven water bodies totaling 150 acres, 136 acres of woodlands and 250 acres of lawns.
- Perimeter: 6 miles (2.5 miles up and down the avenues and 0.5 miles across Central Park North and South).
- Pathways: 58 miles of walking paths; 4.25 miles of bridle paths.
- Trees and benches: More than 26,000 trees and nearly 9,000 benches.
- Bridges and arches: 36.
- Birds: 215 species in a 6.1-acre sanctuary, many rare to the area.
- Sculptures: 29, including statues of Alice in Wonderland and Hans Christian Andersen.
- Attractions: Delacorte Theater, a 1,885-seat auditorium for the performing arts; the 5.5-acre Central Park Zoo with 1,400 animals, including Antarctic penguins and polar bears.
- Recreation: 26 ball fields; 30 tennis courts; 21 playgrounds; one carousel; two ice rinks, one of which is converted into a swimming pool in the summer.
- Visitors: 25 million annually.
- Management: Central Park Conservancy, a private, not-for-profit organization founded in 1980, manages Central Park under a contract with the city.
- Budget: The conservancy provides more than 85 percent of Central Park's annual \$20 million operating budget.

SOURCE: CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY WWW.CENTRALPARKNYC.ORG

look natural, but it's anything but natural," she says, calling it all a "marriage of aesthetics and engineering."

Human Cost High

That natural look came at great cost — 16 years of labor and \$14 million for land and construction. (By comparison, the United States purchased Alaska for \$9 million a few years later.)

And there was a human cost, too. Although Manhattan was largely undeveloped above 38th Street, more than 1,600 people were displaced to make way. Most were poor shanty dwellers, but New York City's first significant community of property-owning black Americans, called Seneca Village, also was uprooted. The Croton Reservoir now floods that territory.

A Catholic school and convent were forced to relocate, too, becoming a residence for Olmsted and Vaux during the park's development. Two bone-boiling factories were closed, one on a site where the world-famous Tavern on the Green restaurant now serves a Dijon mustard, herb-crusted lamb for \$36.

But if the poor were displaced to make way for Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux had an egalitarian vision — a park entirely for public use, for both rich and poor.

"It was the greatest social

democratic experiment of the 19th century, and every city in the nation wanted a public park like Central Park," Cedar Miller says. Cities such as Albany and Buffalo in New York state, Louisville, Ky., Montreal, Boston and San Francisco all asked Olmsted and Vaux to design parks.

At the time, the need to escape the ills of urban life were great. New York City was a place "with horse manure covering everything, pollution worse than anything we have today ... the poor houses, the bad ventilation. Infant mortality was at its peak. So people came to the park because many of them were living in unhealthy conditions," Cedar Miller said.

Olmsted and Vaux believed "that nature brought everyone together," and that a public park "would soothe tensions," Cedar Miller added.

Oasis From Crime, Stress

The park still serves that purpose.

"It's our oasis from all this," said Bobbe Schwartz, gesturing toward the skyscrapers beyond the park walls as she walks her King Charles spaniel along a winding path near "Maine Memorial," a grand monument commemorating the sinking of the USS Maine during the Spanish-American War. "It's such a genteel place."

It hasn't always been. During

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The Bethesda Terrace, with its ornate stone stairway and arches decorated with detailed carvings, attracts a wedding party for a photo session on May 20 at New York's Central Park.

TOMORROW

JOHN BRUMMETT DELIVERS THE SCOOP ON JOURNALISM

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