

The Back Bay Fens

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- 1900
- Boston, MA 02215
- Frederick Law Olmsted / Arthur Shurtleff
- Public park, part of the Emerald Necklace
- 63.18 Acres / 2.75 mill. sq.ft.

The Back Bay Fens is an iconic piece of public space in the city of Boston. Outside of the cold winter months it is used widely by the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods as well as by the students from colleges within the area.

The park is broken up into a few different sections. To start, there is the Muddy River that flows through the park and empties into the Charles River. Multiple athletic fields and courts are used by the colleges, youth sports organizations, and the public. There are also community gardens, several memorial statues, and plenty pedestrian paths throughout the Fens

The park was originally designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1900 to help solve draining issues. It had turned into an open sewer, created health issues and an undesirable stench for the area. Olmsted proposed to turn it back into a park full of natural plantings similar to the original tide.

Today, the park has changed from the time that Olmsted worked on the project. After the Charles River was dammed, the water in the tide marsh became fresh water and would not support the plant life. Olmsted's design remains most visible in some of the bridges and the tree edges that line the park, today's look of the Fens is mainly due to landscape architect, Arthur Shurtleff.



Courtesy: Blog.the-bac.edu



Courtesy: Landscapenotes.com



Courtesy: Fenway Victory Gardens Facebook page

Shurtleff is responsible for adding the sport fields along with the Kelleher Rose Garden. He was able to give the park a more formal landscape style with romantic settings. Being that garden was added in the 1930's, Shurtleff's design reflected popular elements of that time.

The community garden within the Fens, also known as the Fenway Victory Gardens, is a historic landmark of Boston in its own right. During World War II, when food was in short supply, due to supporting the troops, President Roosevelt asked for people to grow vegetables. Boston set aside 49 acres to achieve this and the Fenway Victory Gardens is one of the last "Victory Gardens" still around.

Today, residents still tend to around 500 garden plots that are roughly 15 feet by 25 feet each. They are all unique in their own right. Some are full of vegetable planting, while others are arranged with fountains, ponds, birdhouses, and many other decorations. That is what makes this community garden so special, it reflects the caretakers within the community.