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## New Rochelle's Not-So-Secret Gardens

### Hudson Park Pavilion and Bandshell

The old Hudson Park Cottage was formerly located at the crest of the park's knoll. Although no longer standing, a pavilion built at the same time, in the late 1800s, continues to provide a shaded area for viewing the beach and Echo Bay. According to City records, the bandshell was built in 1929, and has been rehabilitated a number of times over the years. It continues to showcase entertainment that fills the park on summer evenings with music and vivacity.

### Wildcliff and Wildcliff Greenhouses

Commanding the best view of all, Wildcliff sits beyond the bandshell. The impressive stone villa was designed by the renowned Alexander Jackson Davis, and completed in 1855 for the Davenport family. The stone "gothic villa" was enlarged in 1865 and again in 1919. Owner Clara Prince donated her home and its one and a half acres of land to the City of New Rochelle in 1940. After having been utilized for city offices the building has housed a variety of not-for-profit groups and functions, including Wildcliff Natural Science Center and East Coast Performing Arts. This building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

Against all odds and more than a century after they were built, the nearby greenhouses are still flora-filled. From World War I until the early 1970s, a city-employed team grew multitudes of flowers for New Rochelle's numerous parks, public buildings and street islands in the greenhouses. The Friends of Wildcliff have maintained them for the past three decades.

**New Rochelle Rowing Club** (see New Rochelle Heritage Awards article on page 3)

## Huguenot Park

The three-acre land that comprise Huguenot Park, including what is now "Twin Lakes", were acquired by the City in 1923 as a site for the community's new high school and a park. At the time, the twin lakes were one large lake, formerly a part of the Mount Vernon water supply, and had been used for a major ice manufacturing business by the Mahlstedt family. The Mahlstedt Ice Company was one of three major ice enterprises in New Rochelle, and thrived from the mid-1800s until the invention of mechanical refrigeration.

### Historically Significant Elements

#### Mahlstedt House – Huguenot Children's Library

"The brick house up in the woods," as locals called it, was built in 1869, the first

in New Rochelle to be constructed of brick. Three generations of Mahlstedts lived in the house when they operated the ice making business here.

When the City purchased the land in 1923, the house became the Huguenot Branch of the New Rochelle Public Library. After being abandoned in the 1990s due to fiscal constraints, it was restored by a grassroots effort of the Partnership for the Huguenot Children's Library and today serves as the only Westchester public library devoted to materials and programs for children.

### Japanese Cherry Trees

In 1932, in honor of George Washington's 200th birthday, the Garden Club of New Rochelle purchased 100 Japanese Cherry Trees that were planted around the lake. Several still bloom each April and May.

### WWII Marines Memorial

A white marble monument with a plaque, located near the causeway leading to the High School, was dedicated on June 3, 1949 to the 15 New Rochelle men who died while fighting in the U. S. Marine Corps during World War II.



Huguenot Park aerial, 1926



Huguenot Children's Library today



Huguenot Park Lake and New Rochelle High School

## Ward Acres

Ward Acres is 62 acres of woods and meadows that was once Hillanddale Farm, a nationally known horse farm for the breeding of American trotters. Beginning in 1884 when he first settled near today's Quaker Ridge Road, Watson B. Dickerman amassed a total of 500 acres that stretched into Mamaroneck for his renowned enterprise. After his death in 1923, his widow sold a large portion to the Ward family of "Tip Top Bread" fame and financial success. "Homewood" was the residence of patriarch Robert Ward until his death in 1915, when it became the home of the new president of Ward Baking Corporation, his son William. After William's untimely death in 1929 at the age of 44, his widow Ethel continued to live in Homewood and manage the Ward Dairy. Her son, Jack, founded the American Saddle Breeding Company on the property and raised racehorses as well, including "Hickory Mistress" who won over 21 blue ribbons in 1947. (The current Hudson County Montessori School was the stable and garage for Homewood, which no longer stands.)

Ethel and Jack Ward sold off most of the estate in the 1950s to developers of housing subdivisions. Ethel donated land to the City of New Rochelle for the construction of the William B. Ward Elementary School, and in 1962 the City purchased the remaining 62 acres for Ward Park.

### Historically Significant Elements

#### Barn Complex

Built by Dickerman in 1906 as a state-of-the-art horse facility, the 15,000 square foot barn complex was last used for the race horses of Jack Ward, who renovated it in 1945 and 1953. Of shingle style design, which was popular for New England estates of the period, the buildings formed a U-shaped complex that included East and West Stables and a North Stable alongside a large barn. Two "apartment" wings were built on the northwest and southeast sides. A stone wall running from East to West Stables created a courtyard that may have served as a paddock with a central watering basin.

#### Horse Cemetery and Stone Marker

A number of tombstones marking the graves of some of Dickerman's famous race horses are located along a path that parallels Pinebrook Boulevard, as it approaches the northeast ramp onto Quaker Ridge Road: "Ethelberta", Grand Dam of Bellini (1875); "Merry Clay", Dam of Bellini (1881); and "Bellini" (1887). Nearby, a stone marker reads "Hillandale Farm".



Guernsey Cattle, Ward home, c. 1930s



Ward Acres barn today



Ward Acres stone wall and trail today

### Trails, Stone Walls and Bridge; Forge

Most of the numerous and fairly extensive trails that run through the 62 acres were first created for the horses raised here. Another trail is the former rail bed of the New York-Westchester-Boston Railway. Throughout the property, rubble masonry stone walls built in the 19th and early 20th century also continue to mark boundaries once important to the horse farm operations. A small and elegant stone bridge of mortared, rubble masonry and fieldstone provides a crossing over a stream near the horse cemetery. On the Broadfield side of the park, the rectangular concrete building served as a forge, or blacksmith shop, for Dickerman and, later, for Ward.

### New York-Westchester-Boston Railway Remnants

Between 1912 and 1938 the New York-Westchester-Boston Railway had two lines crossing through New Rochelle. One cut through the northern section of Ward Acres and included a rail spur, called a siding, which allowed for the loading and unloading of the farms' horses and equipment. Maps show that the siding was adjacent to the forge. Along the former rail bed of the NYWB, concrete foundations and other remnants of the erstwhile railway can also be seen.



## Message from the Chairman

New Rochelle looks particularly good in spring and summer, when the foliage is rich and gardens are in full bloom. It is no wonder the French Huguenots chose this fertile land for their new home in the 1680s! These seasons provide an ideal time for touring the Queen City – on foot or by bike or car. This issue of *The Preserver* can serve as a mini-guide to your travels around town and into New Rochelle's illustrious past, as it contains descriptions of various built and natural properties with historical significance. Whether a cultural landscape, a Heritage Award property, or a winning restoration in downtown New Rochelle, all the properties are well worth visiting, or revisiting.

All too often, we think of historic preservation in relation to built structures. This issue will begin with a concept gaining great momentum on a national level—protecting historic landscapes. We hope it will help provide a new perspective on our venerable community, and all its historical treasures.

## What is the HLRB?

The HLRB is a seven member City Board, first appointed by City Council in 1985 to preserve New Rochelle's past and raise awareness of the City's rich history. The members are all local residents, volunteers, and knowledgeable in local history. The HLRB recommends the designation of districts and landmarks to City Council, and reviews all exterior renovations and new construction in the local historic district. The Board receives grants periodically for various historic preservation projects. The HLRB is committed to identifying, maintaining, and perpetuating the historic elements that make New Rochelle unique.

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# New Rochelle's Not-So-Secret Gardens

## Public Parks as Historic Cultural Landscapes

We delight in seeing a beautifully restored building that resounds of a former era, and countless studies have shown the economic rewards such an effort brings to the property owner and its community. The enormously popular PBS program, "Antiques Road Show", has taught us the importance (and monetary value!) of the proper care and treatment of objects relating America's great history. Now, in addition to structures and artifacts, Americans are becoming keenly interested in the preservation of natural elements and their relationship to the growth and development of the country—as "cultural landscapes".

*Cultural landscapes can range from thousands of acres of rural tracts of land to a small homestead with a front yard of less than one acre. Like historic buildings and districts, these special places reveal aspects of our country's origins and development through their form and features and the ways they were used. Cultural landscapes also reveal much about our evolving relationship with the natural world.*

Preservation Brief 36: *Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes* By Charles A. Birnbaum, National Park Service, Department of the Interior

A sampler of public parks in New Rochelle illustrates a range of significant cultural landscapes — right in our own backyard.

## Davenport Park

### Historical Significance

The 18 acres of rolling lawn down to the Sound's edge were bequeathed to the City of New Rochelle in 1929 by Lydia Thorne. Wishing to protect the tranquil aura of the estate-lined Davenport Neck, she carefully worded the deed so that the land could be used for passive recreation only. In the decades that followed, neighboring mansions and acres were sold off for residential developments, beach clubs and marinas. Yet Thorne's gift has remained, simply and serenely, for all to enjoy, as Davenport Park.

### Archeology

Over the years, digs have yielded an abundance of fragments evidencing the Siwanoy Indian encampments that once dotted the Sound's shores. A documented account of Mary LeCount, who died in 1841

at the age of 105, related meeting some of the members of this Algonkian tribe. LeCount was the descendant of one of the property's first owners — the Huguenot settlers, who, in the 1690s, first farmed acres of salt hay meadows on the promontory now referred to as Davenport's Neck.

### Wartime Roles

America's Cause for Independence brought 8,000 German soldiers to these shores on October 22, 1776. Under the command of General Knyphausen, the 2nd Division of Hessians and the Regiment of Waldeckers disembarked their flatboats and marched along the Neck and into the Town of New Rochelle,



Davenport Park, 1930



Davenport Park Shakespearean garden



Davenport Park today

where they joined General Howe's British soldiers for the Battle of White Plains.

During the War of 1812, local militia was stationed here to guard against British incursion. On the night of September 9, 1812, the volunteers witnessed a British squadron challenge a flotilla of American boats moving up the Sound from the East River, just off New Rochelle's shores.

### Growing Treasures of the 20th Century

The Avon Bard Club first created the gardens along the northern boundary of Davenport Park as a Shakespearean Garden in 1937. The New Rochelle Garden Club currently maintains the Elizabethan landscape, which showcases plants mentioned in Shakespeare's works.

Towering trees on the southern side of the park are memorialized on a plaque-bearing monument near the top of the hill. Commemorating George Washington's 200th birthday, a committee of patriotic New Rochelleans planted 13 trees to represent the original 13 colonies.

## Hudson Park

From the early 1700's when French Huguenot David Bonnefoy and his wife resided on the Echo Bay tip, this land was known as Bonnefoy Point. Records show that this spot was used as a picnic area as early as 1842, and continued to accommodate outings when it was purchased by Alexander B. Hudson and Thomas Disbrow in 1873. As "Hudson's Grove", it was a trolley destination. The Town of New Rochelle purchased Hudson's property in 1883, giving the community its first public park. Over the next four decades several adjoining parcels were purchased from various individuals. Throughout, thousands of residents flocked to Hudson Park to spend summer days at their beach.

### Historically Significant Elements

**Bathhouse:** In 1937, with Public Works Administration funding, the original wooden bathhouse that was likened to a "house of horrors" in its final days, was replaced with the current stone structure. It was enlarged in the late 1970s, and the roof restored in the late 1990s.

**Huguenot Memorial:** Located on the knoll above the entrance to the beach, a monument holds a plaque listing 151 Huguenot names "identified with the history of New Rochelle during the colonial period." The monument was gifted by the Huguenot Association of New Rochelle and the Westchester County Historical Society in 1898, 230 years after the founding of the community by ancestors of the Association. In 1908 a plaque with the names of the earliest Huguenots was added. During the city's 250th anniversary the original tablet was replaced with a more complete listing—names of Huguenots who settled in New Rochelle up to 1775.

*Continued on pg. 4*



Hudson Park Beach c. 1910



Hudson Park entrance today



Hudson Park bandshell today



# Prestigious Preservation Award for New Rochelle's Downtown

The Preservation League of New York State selected the New Rochelle Business Improvement District "Model Development Block" to receive its prestigious Excellence in Historic Preservation Award. This statewide awards program recognizes individuals and organizations for demonstrating an outstanding commitment to the preservation of New York State's irreplaceable architectural heritage.

"This five-building project, conceived as a model to illustrate the benefits of the restoration of historic properties, owes much of its success to the enormous amount of imaginative and resourceful collaboration among local businesses, state agencies and regional organizations," said Jay DiLorenzo, President of the Preservation League. "The positive and visible results, including additional commercial and residential preservation and economic development, are already serving as an inspiration to other municipalities."

Contributing to the success of this effort were the New Rochelle Business Improvement District, Community Preservation Corporation, Susan Doban Architect, PC of

Brooklyn, and Polonia Development and Preservation Services of Queens, along with the individual building owners. Funding from the Empire State Development Corporation Main Street Program, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the City of New Rochelle helped support the project.

All of the designs required New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) approval. "The challenge was to preserve the historic character using materials, forms, and proportions that would appear convincingly historical, while making use of readily available, economical materials; but also to create designs that would enhance the character of upper Main Street as a modern, vibrant, shopping street," Ms. Doban said. "It's incredibly exciting to see the richness of the past preserved alongside projects that are very much of the present. Architectural richness is one of Main Street's great assets."

The award was presented at the Preservation League's Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony in New York City on May 15, 2008 at the historic Park Avenue Armory.

## The Restored Buildings of the Model Block

### The Curtain Shop, 541 Main Street

The Curtain Shop's stunning "new" façade, formerly hidden by a cracked stucco covering, was unveiled on June 27, 2006. Magnificent terra cotta detailing and arches were revealed—along with the original name of the building "The Arcade", as well as the date the business started (1882) and the date the structure was completed (1897).



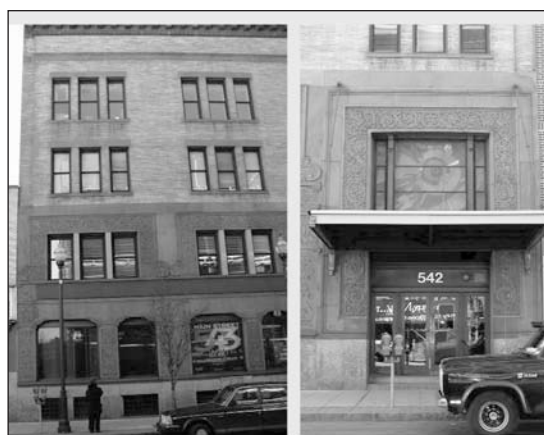
Before



After

### The (former) New Rochelle Trust Company Building, 542 Main Street

Originally constructed in 1893 as the two-story Bank of New Rochelle, with two stories added in 1909 for the New Rochelle Trust Company, 542 Main Street's brownstone, brick and granite façade was restored. A large ornamental canopy which was not original to the building was removed so that the beautiful, ornate brownstone work could be more fully visible. The building was also once home to a glass company, and the ornamental stained glass window above the building's entrance was also protected by the renovation.



Before



After

### Diamond Glass, 555 Main Street

Built as a three story structure in 1895, and greatly altered in 1925, 555 Main Street experienced several other changes over the years, including the addition of metal panels on the front of the building. As all original historic detail had been eliminated, the architects used modern materials to emulate the proportions of the original façade. New window openings were also provided to complement the owner's interior conversion of the second floor vacant space into rental loft units.



Before



After

### Talner Jewelers, 565 Main Street

Many of this building's original 1925 features were revealed and restored, by the removal of metal panels that had covered three-quarters of the building, and the cleaning, patching, re-pointing and restoration of the original terra cotta, which was a whitish, bone color with blue and red accents. Where the bricks had been painted over on one side, the paint was removed revealing an attractive wire cut, buff colored brick, which was steam-cleaned and re-pointed. A new masonry coping stone that was neutral in appearance was also installed.



Before



After

### 573-579 Main Street

A simple rectangular building at the corner of Main Street and Center Avenue, which was built in 1929, 573-579 Main Street features popular Art Deco motifs, such as arches at the parapet; elaborate organic designs of fruits, trees, faces, animals and trees; and small geometric designs below the office window sills. Restoration of the building included steam cleaning and re-pointing and new windows, which brought out the building's highly ornamental terracotta parapet and spandrels.



Before



After



# Six Properties Selected for City's First Heritage Awards

*As you travel around New Rochelle this summer, be sure to keep on the lookout for Heritage Award Signs, identifying six different "gems" that relate New Rochelle's remarkable past. These are residential, quasi-public and public buildings that contribute to the continued preservation of the city's historical and cultural heritage—the key factor in the Heritage Award program, which was initiated by the Mayor's Heritage Task Force in 2007. The following six properties, described and pictured here, are the first of many to be recognized by this program that continues to distinguish places important to our community's past, and encourages their preservation and protection for the future.*

## Why a Heritage Award Program?

In 2007 Mayor Noam Bramson organized a Heritage Task Force to help initiate projects that would increase awareness and

appreciation of the community's vast historical "treasures". The committee, comprised of residents qualified in historic preservation, local history and landscape design, developed the Heritage Award Program to begin recognizing the scores of New Rochelle properties that are important to the community's extraordinary 300+ year history. This was a critical need highlighted in a Reconnaissance Level Survey\* funded by a New York State Certified Local Government Grant in 1997.

## Interested in Nominating a Property?

The City of New Rochelle recently announced the second year of its Heritage Award Program and is now seeking nominations for properties that exemplify New Rochelle's significant historical and cultural

heritage. The City welcomes nominations from individuals, organizations, businesses or municipal representatives of properties in one or more of the following categories:

- Residences older than 50 years that are significant to New Rochelle's history
  - Public or quasi-public structures (e.g. house of worship, home of an organization, etc.) older than 50 years that are significant to New Rochelle's history
  - Stellar restoration, residence
  - Stellar restoration, adaptive reuse
  - Home of nationally prominent individual
  - Significant architect or architectural style
  - Significant landscape or landscape feature (e.g. cemeteries, stone walls, signs; excepting gardens)
- Guidelines and Nomination Forms are

available on the City's website:

[www.newrochelleny.com](http://www.newrochelleny.com) or at the Mayor's Office in City Hall. The deadline for nominations is September 19, 2008. Judging and validation will take place in the Fall, with the award winners announced in January 2009 and Heritage Awards installed in Spring 2009.

Note: As the Heritage Award program is intended to identify unrecognized historically significant properties, New Rochelle properties already designated by the National Register of Historic Places are not eligible.

\* The Reconnaissance Level Survey also resulted in "A Tour Guide to Historically Significant Sites in New Rochelle", an illustrated fold-out map that was produced by the HLRB with a 2005-06 NY State Certified Local Government grant. Free copies are available in the City Clerk's office at City Hall.

## THE 2008 HERITAGE AWARD PROPERTIES

### The Israel Seacord House

Site of Seacord Family Homestead & Farm  
c. 1700's

Located on the corner of North Avenue and Quaker Ridge Road, at 1337 North Avenue, the original section of the house on this site is believed to have been constructed in the 1770s by Israel Seacord, on land deeded to him by his father, James. During the Revolutionary War, Sir Lord William Howe, commander of British forces, made his headquarters in the Seacord farmhouse before marching his troops to the Battle of White Plains in October 1776. Records show that the land remained in the Seacord family until the turn of the 20th century when it was purchased by Charles and Regina Niehaus. Charles was a nationally recognized sculptor and Regina became a renowned horticulturist. The farmland was sold off bit by bit, to the developers of the Bonnie Crest neighborhood, and the Israel Seacord farmhouse was enlarged over the years. The current residents of the house have made numerous and accurate restorations to the exterior and interior during their 30 years of ownership.



### Mayflower Hill House

c. 1911

The first property to earn a New Rochelle Heritage Award for "Exemplary Restoration", the house at 189 Mayflower Avenue, was accurately and beautifully restored to its original appearance by its current owners over the course of three+ years. The extensive exterior work, meticulously documented, transformed a dreary looking building that had been "patched-repaired" and neglected over the years into a stellar example of the homes New Rochelle boasted during its early years as a premier New York suburban community. The style of the house incorporates late-Victorian and Shingle style features, and includes one three-sided turret, two bays facing the street, and a large front porch with pillars, as well many other key elements that now resound original intent and craftsmanship.

The house first appears on city maps in 1912, and its location is documented on the corner of Mayflower Avenue and Faneuil Place. Interestingly, the house has attributes that would date it at the turn of the 20th century, which could mean that it was built earlier and then moved to its current location. Situated near the top of Mayflower Avenue, the home was located in what was known as "Huguenot Park". This was one of many "residential parks" developed in New Rochelle between the 1880s and 1920s as distinguishable neighborhoods in park-like settings.



Before



After

### The Leonard Seacord House

Site of Seacord Family Homestead & Farm  
c. 1700's

A section of the former farmhouse at 1075 North Avenue is believed to have been built in the late 1770s, as the first home of one of the community's earliest Huguenot settlers, John Renoud. The house and its land later became part of the Seacord family's extensive holdings in this area of town. Over the years, many additions and changes were made to the original structure, and now represent many different periods of New Rochelle's past. Leonard Seacord was the last in the family to own the farmland that extended from his house at 1075 North Avenue to the Hutchinson River. Remaining intact during New Rochelle's huge real estate boom in the 1920s, the land was sold to the Seacord Development Corporation in 1946 and the property was subdivided for the homes that now line Seacord Road.



### St. John's Wilmot Church

1859

The oldest extant church building in New Rochelle, St. John's Wilmot Church continues to be an important reminder of the community's earlier years. Located at the intersection of North Avenue, Wilmot Road and Mill Road, the church anchors the history-rich area of "Cooper's Corners", named for the owner of a general store in this 17th - 19th century "satellite" hamlet of New Rochelle. Completed in 1859, the charming wood-frame church building with a steeple atop a bell tower (now enclosed) was designed and built by Alexander Durand as a wayside Episcopal chapel for Trinity Episcopal Church on Huguenot Street in the southern part of New Rochelle and St. James-the-Less in Scarsdale. Soon it was an independent church, serving parishioners in the northern reaches of New Rochelle and beyond. Built on a foundation of Tuckahoe marble, the building's interior retains such original details as 19 mahogany pews and chandeliers.



### New Rochelle Rowing Club

Est. 1880

One of the oldest athletic organizations in the county, the New Rochelle Rowing Club was founded in 1880 by a group of prominent local men. The club moved from its original site on Pelham Road at the bottom of Church Street (at the time, waterfront property), to its present location in Hudson Park in 1882. The first building at this site was lost to fire around 1900 and immediately replaced by the current two-story clubhouse. Over the years the Club held three national rowing championships and participated in numerous major meets. The building, which still houses the graceful boats, is topped by an 1864 clock tower that was removed from the former City Hall on Main Street when it was demolished in the 1960s. Club members restored the cupola and lifted it to its perch in 1974, where it continues to serve as a landmark to boaters on Long Island Sound.



### Jefferson Elementary School

1932

One of a number of schools built or enlarged in New Rochelle during the late 1920s and early 1930s to accommodate a mushrooming population, Jefferson School on Weyman Avenue, was entirely unique in its Art Deco design. The buff brick building includes outstanding details exemplifying this popular design trend, including its limestone trim, a stone above the door with the name in the "Broadway" font, and other streamlined "Moderne" stylized ornamentation. This structure replaced an 1895 schoolhouse that was named after the third U.S. President in 1919. Completed in 1932, the current building was designed by the prominent New York City firm of Starrett and Van Vleck. The architects' works also include Henry Barnard School and Isaac E. Young Junior High School (now Middle School) in New Rochelle, and Lord & Taylor's, Saks Fifth Avenue, the Downtown Athletic Club and Bloomingdale's, in New York City.

