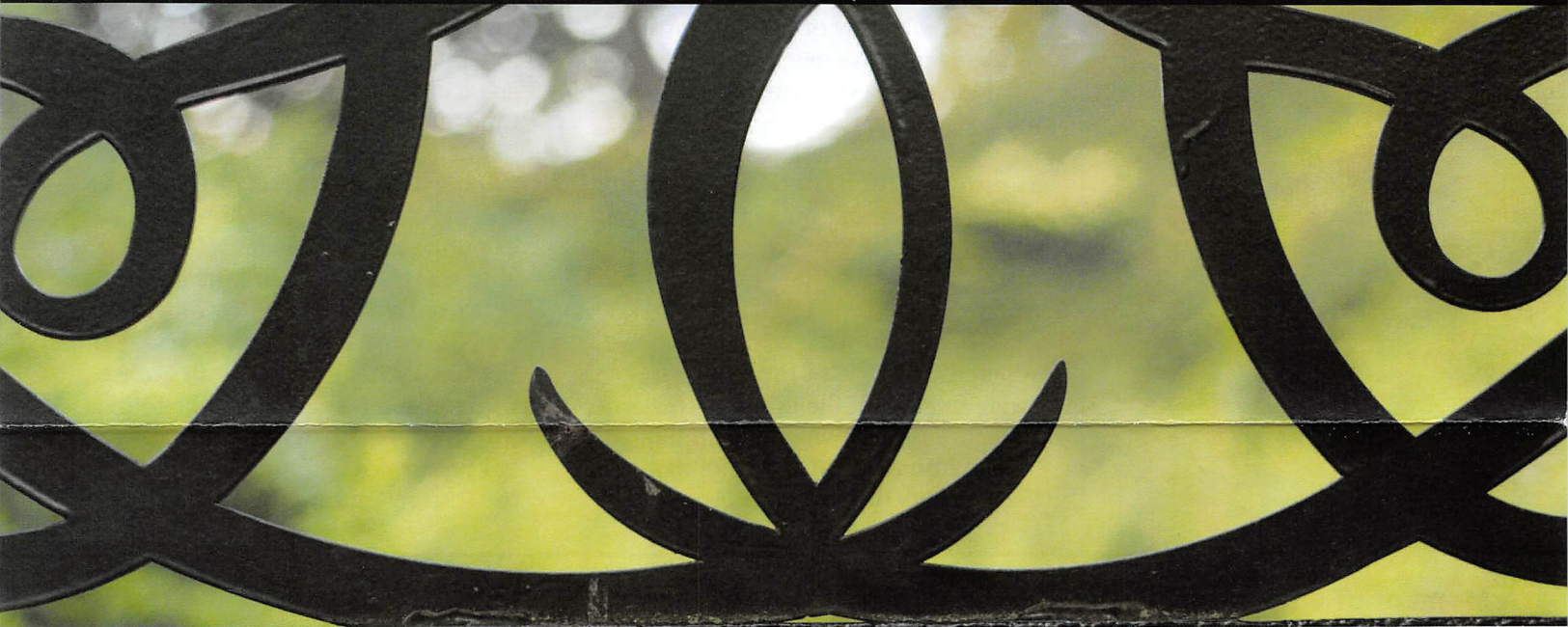


Dumbarton Oaks Park & Montrose Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



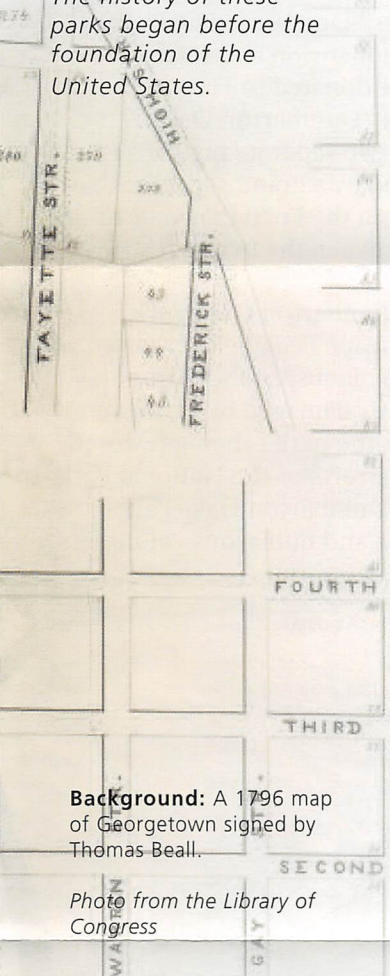
Rock Creek Park
Washington, DC



On opposite borders of Lovers' Lane sit two different parks with two very different stories. Together, they highlight the intricate and varied history of Georgetown's past.

Rock of Dumbarton

The history of these parks began before the foundation of the United States.



When Ninian Beall first saw this land, it looked very different than it does today. The 795 acres, granted to Beall by Lord Baltimore in 1703, stretched dramatically between the Potomac River and Rock Creek. Tall hills to the north of his property swept towards the water, while stream valleys and fertile fields defined the picturesque landscape. In homage to his home country of Scotland, he named the property "Rock of Dumbarton" after a castle-topped rocky outcrop near Glasgow, which also sat at the intersection of a river and stream.

By 1751, much of Beall's original land had been sold off by his descendents. Most of the remaining land was divided and became the familiar grid of Georgetown. The remaining 80 acres of property north of town was split between his two grandsons: Thomas and George Beall.

Thomas' property was in high demand because of its beautiful views of the Potomac River and its proximity to the new nation's capital. As Thomas further subdivided and sold the land that would become known as Georgetown Heights, the area began to fill with beautiful estates, federal-style mansions, and sprawling gardens.

Background: A 1796 map of Georgetown signed by Thomas Beall.

Photo from the Library of Congress



Above: A cart overlooks the Potomac River from early Georgetown Heights. Illustration by George Isham Parkyns, 1795. Image from the Library of Congress.

In 1800, William H. Dorsey, an influential judge, purchased 20 acres of land west of Lovers' Lane. After a succession of owners and names, the Bliss family purchased the property and named it Dumbarton Oaks in 1920.

In 1804, Richard Parrott, an industrialist and cotton miller, bought the wooded section of land east of Lovers' Lane that would eventually become Montrose Park.

Both estates would not be reunited under one owner again until they were donated to the federal government: Montrose Park in 1911 and Dumbarton Oaks Park in 1940.

Parrott's Ropewalk

An industrialist moved to Georgetown Heights.

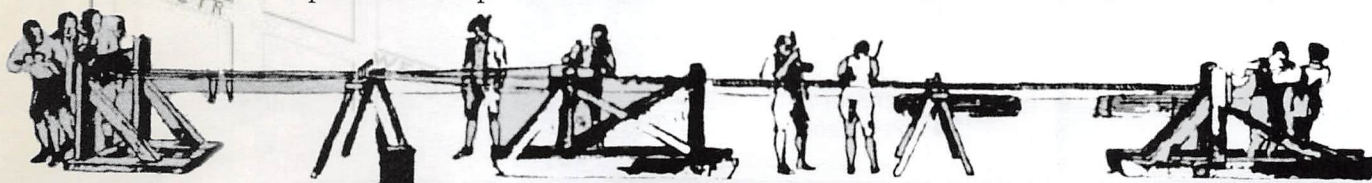
Below: Ropewalks were long stretches where lines of hemp could be twisted into rope.

Dumbarton Oaks Park has always been a place of residence, relaxation, and recreation. In contrast, Montrose Park has distinctly industrial beginnings. Richard Parrott built a ropewalk even before he built his federal mansion.

You might notice the path as you walk through Montrose Park. It is long, flat, and narrow. It was along this humble path that hemp would be twisted into

thick strands of rope. Rope was essential to life in the early 1800s; it was used for everything from sailing to surveying land.

The ropewalk and the rope created there were important enough to the early U.S. government that the British targeted it during the War of 1812. In 1814, they burned it to the ground. Historical accounts suggest that this was the only damage dealt to Georgetown during the war.



Saving Montrose

One woman's vision saved the Montrose estate.

Background: The Armillary Sphere in Montrose Park is dedicated to Sarah Louise Rittenhouse, whose hard work helped create the first public park in Georgetown.

By the time Georgetown was incorporated into Washington, DC in 1895, it had gone through major changes — gone were the days of lofty manor houses and rambling gardens. Instead, Georgetown was full of industries like slaughterhouses and power plants. The shift caused many of the high-profile residents of these neighborhoods to abandon their estates around the turn of the 20th century.

Montrose was one of these abandoned properties. Sarah Louise Rittenhouse, who lived nearby, watched with frustration as the estate fell into disrepair.

When the owners of the Montrose estate finally put the house up for sale, Rittenhouse knew it would be turned into a housing development like so many other estates. At the time, Georgetown had no public parks for

children to play in, so Rittenhouse and other local women petitioned the federal government to buy the land and save it for public use.

When she first brought the petition to Congress in 1904, Speaker of the House Joseph “Uncle Joe” Cannon refused to let it pass saying that he “wouldn’t give a nickel for parkland anywhere.” But Rittenhouse wasn’t deterred. She worked tirelessly by writing articles, ringing doorbells, crafting petitions, and organizing her neighbors in a show of public support. Finally, in 1911, the land was purchased and the park was approved by the U.S. government.

Because of her efforts, Sarah Louise Rittenhouse is considered the founder of Montrose Park. An armillary sphere in her honor can be found in the gardens at the R street entrance of the park.

A Moment of Bliss

The Bliss family hired Beatrix Farrand to make their bucolic dream a reality.

After travelling the world, Diplomat Robert Bliss and his wife, Mildred, were ready to call someplace home. In 1920, the Bliss family bought a total of 55 acres next to Montrose Park and named it Dumbarton Oaks. Their dream was to create a countryside refuge in the middle of the city. They hired Beatrix Farrand to turn their vision into reality.

Farrand was one of the most celebrated American landscape architects of the early 1900s. She combined English, Italian, formal, natural, and impressionist influences to create a single united landscape. With these elements, Farrand designed Dumbarton Oaks to be her masterpiece.

The landscape was arranged to flow seamlessly from the formal gardens by the Bliss’ mansion down into the wooded countryside landscape of the stream valley to the north. Paths lined with native plants guided visitors

through themed spaces, from towering tulip poplars and rolling hills to the peaceful bubbling of water along the stream’s reflecting pools and waterfalls.

In 1940, the Bliss family donated the naturalistic landscape to the U.S. government. It became part of Rock Creek Park as “Dumbarton Oaks Park.” The adjacent mansion and formal gardens were donated to Harvard University as “Dumbarton Oaks.” Today these two separate properties are connected by a grand staircase that passes through the Forsythia Gate at the boundary between the two parks.

Over time, Dumbarton Oaks Park natural landscape became overgrown with invasive plant species. Farrand’s stonework was damaged by stormwater flows. Today, the park is being restored through the efforts of the National Park Service, the Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy, and numerous volunteers.

Background: The Forsythia Gate marks the boundary between the formal gardens in Dumbarton Oaks and the more naturalistic Dumbarton Oaks Park. Photo by Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy.

Location:

Montrose Park
Rose Garden Entrance
3099 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Dumbarton Oaks Park
Lovers’ Lane Entrance
3058 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

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