

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

SEP 15 1989

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Deering Oaks other names/site number

2. Location

street & number Bounded by Forest St., I-295, Park Ave., Deering Ave. city, town Portland state Maine code ME county Cumberland code 005 zip code 04101

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public, building/district/site/structure/object, and counts for contributing/noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: [Signature] SHPD Date: 9/8/89 State or Federal agency and bureau: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register 10/16/89 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/Park

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/Park

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/Awalls N/A

roof N/Aother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The fifty acre Deering Oaks was deeded to the City of Portland in 1879. Bounded by Portland Street (now Park Avenue) to the south, Grove Street (now Deering Avenue) to the west, Green Street (now Forest Avenue) and the Deering meadow and Deering town boundary (now Interstate Route 295) to the north. A small area in the southeast corner of the site not included within the original boundaries of the park but was acquired bit by bit up to 1930. The park was laid out by William A. Goodwin, City Civil Engineer, in December of 1879.

The City had been interested in the site for a number of years and finally, in 1875, the Deering family offered fifty acres of their land to be used as a "park forever" on the condition that real estate taxes on their remaining property would not be increased for ten years. An agreement was reached and in March of 1879 the Oaks was deeded to the City. The 1879 Portland Auditor's Report stated:

It is expected that in the not far distant future, the grounds will be laid out into a park ...which will be not only ornamental but healthful, where our citizens will spend many pleasant hours in health deriving exercises and though 'leaves have their time to fall and flowers to wither, still, may' those brave old oaks be spared the woodman's axe and grow and thrive to show the wisdom of purchase.

Goodwin's design for Deering Oaks was in the picturesque and naturalistic style incorporating some formal elements. The southern and western boundaries followed the orthogonal city street pattern. Here Goodwin proposed a row of border trees flanking the walk. Along the irregular eastern boundary, a more naturalistic walk was proposed in response to the conditions. "Marginal Way", the northern boundary of the park, was defined by a formal curved drive bordered by trees with a fountain proposed at the intersection of the internal path system, and the drive. Within the boundaries Goodwin proposed a curvilinear path system through wooded and open areas. A major element of the plan was to create a pond in the southeast corner of the park. A duck house located on an island and fountain were to be focal points of the pond. Two bridges were proposed along the pond walk. The location of a bandstand was indicated in an open area to the northwest

See continuation sheet

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of the park. However, the existing stately oaks were the greatest asset of the site. "The crowning glory of the oaks will always be the 'breezy dome' of the old woods, to which elms and beeches and birches, the maples and evergreens and shrubbery can never be much more than ornamental fringing (Auditor's Report, 1879-80)."

Historic views of the park and a 1905 drawing prepared by the Olmsted Brothers indicates that much of Goodwin's design was implemented. Major elements that appear not to have been executed include border trees along Portland and Grove Streets and the formal east-west drive at the northern boundary of the park.

Goodwin proposed constructing a dam to collect the overflow from a nearby reservoir to create a pond. In 1882, he reported that:

A bank wall of ledge stone laid in cement with granite coping has been built around the cove on the northeasterly corner of the pond, being 102 feet long and containing 35.4 cubic yards exclusive of coping at a cost for wall of \$159.75, for coping \$90.00; total cost \$249.75. This will be of service at some time as a boat landing in summer and a gathering place for skaters in winter; but I would not recommend its further extension. It is expensive, and does not compare in symmetry of appearance with green sward coming down to the water's edge, fringed at salient points with willows and other waterside trees and shrubs. These can be attained at small expense, but the men and materials must be on the spot at just the right time for such work in the spring, as they have not yet been.

Against Goodwin's recommendation, the retaining wall around the easterly side of the pond was continued in 1889 to include a portion of the northerly end adjoining the drive accessed from Forest Avenue. The following year the wall was extended another 200 feet; again in 1903 the wall was extended along the southerly side of the pond.

The auditor's annual reports include references to the construction of a bandstand in 1883. The fountain was added in 1885 and the duck house in 1887. The metal, 3-tiered fountain has been replaced by water jets laid out in two concentric circles. The original stick-style duck house was replaced in 1987 by a similar structure. The City also purchased a swan boat, a gondola and a number of row boats.

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On May 24, 1894, the Portland Daily Transcript reported the Portland architect, Frederick A. Tompson was designing a waiting room for Deering Oaks. The building was constructed of reused paving blocks donated by the street commissioner, a turret built of granite to the roofline, with shingles above is joined to the southeast corner. The turret has a conical slate roof. A slate hip-roof covers the rectangular building.

The park commissioners were so proud of the new stone building that they included the following description about it in the city's 1894-95 municipal report:

The commissioners have for a long time felt the urgent necessity of providing a structure to be occupied as a waiting room, which should be made convenient for public use; and is presenting to the citizens of Portland the new stone building built in the fall of 1894, the commissioners feel that they have filled that long-felt want, and the completion of the improvement will no doubt be hailed with great satisfaction by the patrons of Deering Park.

The outside is very pleasing architecturally and quite rivals the ornamental buildings in the parks of larger cities. Inside it is a place of elegance and comfort. At one corner opens the large round alcove under the tower. The room is 16 by 25 feet and 15 feet in height. In front of this is a counter in handsome wood, over which the man who is to have charge of this waiting room will dispense refreshments.

The floor and ceiling are finished in hard wood, but the windows and fireplace are the real masterpieces of this attractive interior. In beauty and elegance they would be worthy of the private home of any rich man.

The windows all have a round or oval center of clear glass, about which are grouped and clustered small panes of many and beautiful colors. Set in the thick stone walls the effect is very charming.

Above the ornamental wooden mantel is a handsome picture frame of oak made from a stump cut in the park two years ago, and which Commissioner Smith has been seasoning every since. Inside of the frame is a slab of slate set into the brick of the chimney on which in golden letters is that immortal verse from Longfellow, ending

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with 'A boy's will is the wind's will, And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'

In 1908 toilet facilities were added to the waiting room. The one story wing was consistent in design and materials with the original building. The waiting room and toilet facilities survive today. A non-historic addition has been added to the west of the 1908 addition.

The 1898 Auditor's Report states that, "the entrance at Grove Street has been completed...." This pedestrian and vehicular gateway survives. The central vehicular drive is flanked by pedestrian walkways, delineated by paired, square, random ashlar granite blocks with a solid granite cap. A wing wall of the same design as the piers, approximately 3 feet high and 3 feet wide connected to the outside pier curves in a quarter circle terminating at a matching granite pier.

The two bridges shown on the 1879 plan were constructed of wood in a rustic style. By 1902, however, they were in need of repair. One was eliminated in 1904 when the loop at the southern end of the pond was filled and incorporated into the southern drive. The rustic bridge spanning the ravine at the western inlet was replaced by the existing bridge in 1911, this elliptical arched 8' wide foot bridge, constructed of concrete and granite, spans 40 feet with approaches of 20 feet. Pilasters rise at the spring of the arch, continue up through the balustraces and terminate at the hand rail. Originally, light posts were mounted at these four points. A wooden bridge was added immediately to the east of the concrete bridge.

During the winter months skating was a popular activity. In 1887 the Park Commissioners reported \$150 had been appropriated to clear the snow from the Oaks Pond.

It was thought better that the children should enjoy this kind of amusement in the Oaks, instead of going a distance out of town where the ice is treacherous and where the rake of the wind makes one liable to take cold, after taking a long walk and in a heated and perspiring condition the season of skating was thus prolonged for some weeks. The skating on the pond in Deering Oaks during the winter of 1908-09 was unusually fine. Christmas was a record breaker for good skating, . . . it was estimated that fully three thousand boys and girls were on the ice during the afternoon and there was about as big a crowd in the evening (Annual Report, 1909).

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In 1903 it was reported that . . . "A great deal of the work that was laid out in the original plan of Deering Oaks has been completed, such as laying of driveways and walks, grading and turfing." Additions after 1903 included the construction of the State St. entrance and grading and planting improvements to the Larabee purchase added to the park in 1894.

In 1897 the Park Commissioner informed the City government of their intention to erect a new gateway at the State Street entrance to the Oaks. F. M. Blaisdell, architect of Boston, was commissioned to design the gate. The bids for the project came in too high and the design was scrapped. Local architect Frederick A. Tompson was hired to prepare a new design for the gate. In 1902 \$2,000 was appropriated for the construction of two granite posts with an additional \$3400 appropriated the following year. Construction of the foundation began that fall. The columns constructed of North Jay granite are nine feet square at the base and twenty-three feet high above the sidewalk. Ornamental electric light fixtures to surmount the columns were purchased from Winslow Bros. of Chicago. "They are of an ornamental style and were designed especially for this purpose and will give a finished appearance to the posts" (Auditors Report, 1903). The light fixtures do not survive.

Although included in the Portland Park system proposed by the Olmsted Plan, only one reference to their design is mentioned, that is, with regard to driveways, grading and ornamental flower-beds and shrubbery in the vicinity of the State Street Entrance. (1903)

In the 1970s, a northerly section of Deering Oaks was lost to Interstate 295. The area has been bermed and is visually screened from the passive, tranquil area of the Oaks. It contains one contributing building, one contributing site, five contributing structures, two non-contributing structures.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1879 - c. 1920

Significant Dates

1879
1894
1905

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Goodwin, William A., C.E.
Olmsted Brothers

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The movement to acquire the Deering Oaks signalled Portland's interest in participating in the Public Park movement. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the acquisition of Deering Oaks was both socially and environmentally motivated. It is eligible for nomination to the Register under criterion C for its significant landscape design.

During the time that the Deering family owned the 100 acre site, neighborhood children enjoyed playing in the Oaks. One Portland youth, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would go "...tramping through these woods with a gun", as did his companions, but he enjoyed much more to lie under a tree and read.

Longfellow referred to these woods years later in his poem Changed:

From the outskirts of the town,
Where the old milestone stood,
Now a stranger looking down
I behold a shadowy crown
Of the dark and haunted wood.

"My Lost Youth", includes the following references to the Oaks:

I can see the breezy dome of groves
the shadows of Deering's Woods.

and

And Deering's Woods are fresh and fair
and with joy that is almost pain
My heart goes back to wander there
and mid the dreams of the days that
were I find my lost youth again.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

City of Portland Auditor's Report. Portland: Ford & Rich, Printers.
Various issues between 1870 - 1930.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 42.71

UTM References

A 19 | 397040 | 4834670
 Zone Easting Northing

C 19 | 397900 | 4834390

B 19 | 397520 | 4835000
 Zone Easting Northing

D 19 | 397040 | 4834170

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the City of Portland tax map 35 - I - 1.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the entire remaining parcel historically associated with Deering Oaks Park.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Igleheart, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date July, 1989

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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The development of Deering Oaks is credited to William A. Goodwin. His commitment to and vision for the Park was evident throughout his eleven-year involvement as City Civil Engineer. Goodwin was born in Saco, Maine, on July 22, 1822, and graduated from Bowdoin College, class of 1843. After graduation he taught school for two years; then in 1846 studied civil engineering "in the field." He worked for the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad as an assistant civil engineer for eight years. Following that he was chief engineer for a number of different railroad lines where he surveyed and laid out track. Goodwin was in the U. S. Civil Service, and was an engineer for the U. S. Lighthouse Board from 1855-1870. From 1872 to 1892 he was the City Engineer of Portland. His obituary noted, "...that he was scholarly in his tastes and clever with the pen. He was an occasional contributor to the Atlantic Monthly and to the proceedings of the American Philological Association." Goodwin died March 21, 1896.

Like many of his contemporary park planners, Goodwin's practical knowledge of civil engineering and surveying was coupled with prevailing societal concerns of publicly supported open space. In 1879 he said, "the magnificent area of fifty acres comprising Deering Oaks, and the greater part of the adjacent meadow on the northerly side of the woods... for years to come will demand the best thought of our citizens." He insisted on an immediate and careful inspection of all of the trees, and said, "No trees should be cut even in trimming without deep sense of responsibility and earnest conviction of necessity." Goodwin also encouraged the City to acquire the property abutting the park to the southeast which housed a tannery, pork factory and slaughter house. Goodwin's vision extended to developing links between the Deering Oaks and the Eastern and Western Promenades. In the "Annual Report for the Years 1881-1882" he states, "the circuit of our public grounds, beginning with either Promenade and thence passing through our shaded streets and the Oaks to the other Promenade, affords a variety and a natural beauty of scenery to be found in but a few cities of this country. The foreground of these several landscapes and marine views will doubtless be cared for little by little as the means of the city were warrant."

Although Deering Oaks has suffered from limited city budgets and heavy use through the years, much of the work designed by Goodwin and executed during his years as city Civil Engineer survives. A portion of the northern end of the park was taken in 1970 for the construction of Interstate Route 295. Earthen berms were created and plantings were installed to screen the road from view. Despite this loss, the integrity of the park remains since Goodwin's design intent has been preserved.

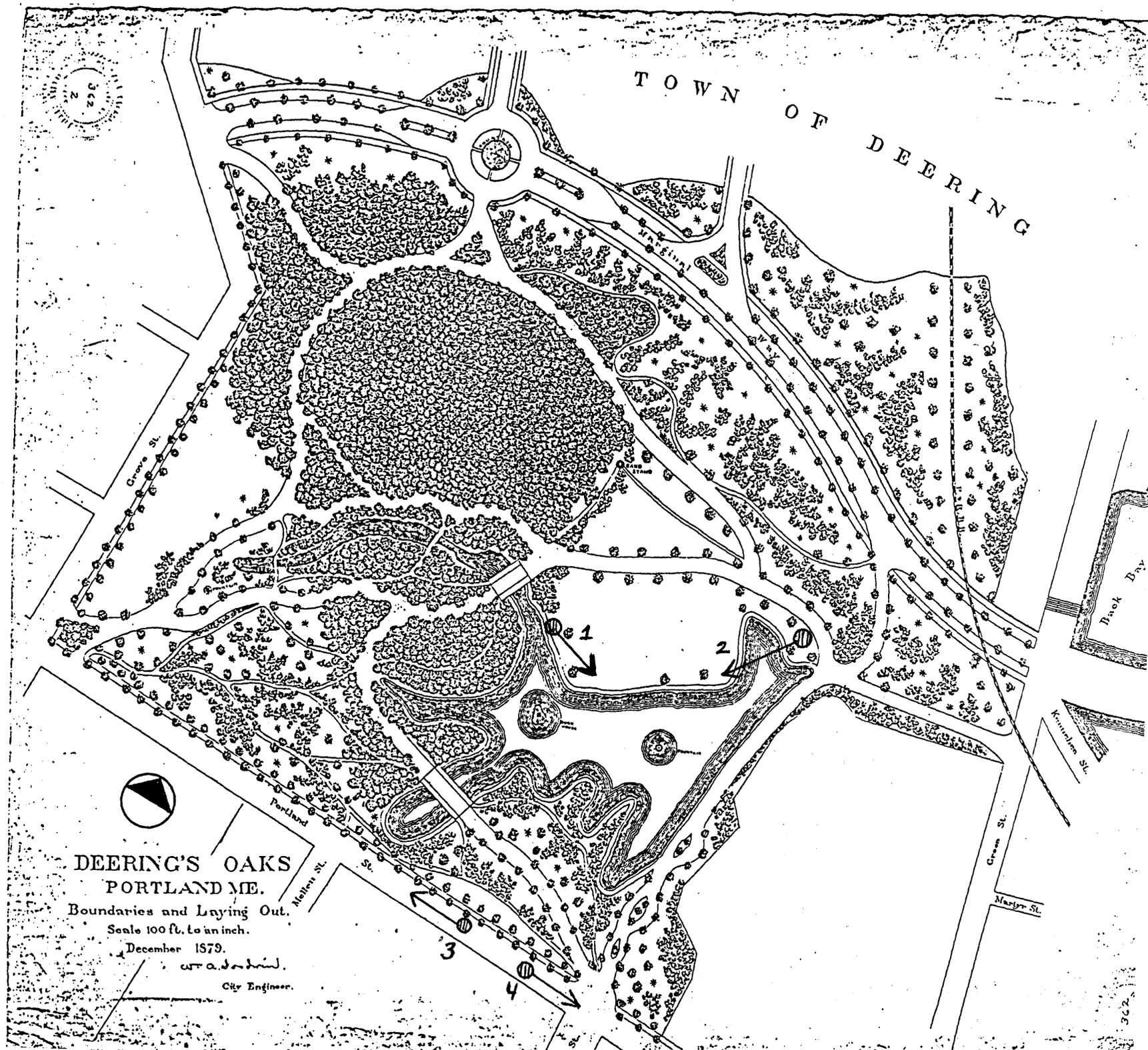
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The name The Oaks or Deering Oaks for this public breathing place, seems to have become well established. It is scarcely ever termed the "Park" and is a name so much fitter and better than the latter that special care should be taken to retain it. The place can probably never become a park with expensive park-like structures and accessories, but will always be "The Oaks" whatever may be done in or about it (City Auditor's Report, 1881-82).

DEERING OAKS
Portland, Maine



DEERING'S OAKS
PORTLAND ME.

Boundaries and Laying Out.

Scale 100 ft. to an inch.

December 1879.

W. A. Jordan,

City Engineer.

362
PLAT



Back Bay

Kinsland St.

Green St.

Martyr St.

362