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New York's Central Park: One-hundred-fifty Years [SPECIAL FEATURE]

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150 Years of Central Park

1850

1853 : New York State passes the Central Park Act authorizing the acquisition of land between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, from 59th to 106th Street.

1856 : The City of New York acquires the site and adopts a plan by Egbert Viele, who had been hired as Chief Engineer of the Park.

1857 : Frederick Law Olmsted is hired as Superintendent of the Park. Following criticism of Viele's plan, the city announces a competition for the design of the park. (1)

Olmsted is approached by architect Calvert Vaux to collaborate on a design, and their submission, titled the "Greensward," is selected as the winning entry.

1860

1862 : The park's first privately-funded concert is sponsored by the city's railway companies to boost ridership.

1863 : The park is extended through purchase of the rocky, essentially undevelopable land from 106th to 110th Streets.

1864 : Sheep arrive in the sheep meadow. The sheep graze on the lawn until 1934 when they are evicted and moved to Prospect Park in Brooklyn. (2)

1865 : Olmsted and Vaux are hired to design Prospect Park in Brooklyn, their first major city park commission since Central Park.

1868 : Olmsted and Vaux complete work on Brooklyn's Prospect Park, and begin an era of collaboration on city parks across the country. (3)

1869 : The first cultural institution to be located in the park, the Museum of Natural History, opens in the basement of the Arsenal at 66th Street and Fifth Avenue.

1870

1873 : The construction of Central Park is completed to 110th Street.

The park's perimeter wall is completed.

1877 : The Museum of Natural History moves to its present location on the west side of park, at 77th Street and Central Park West.

1880

1880 : The Metropolitan Museum of Art opens in Central Park at 82nd Street and Fifth Avenue.

1890

1892 : A harbinger of preservation battles to come: a "race track" for light carriages, planned for the west side of the park, is defeated on the basis that it is inconsistent with the park's purpose and character.

1898 : The Central Park Conservatory opens at Fifth Avenue and 104th Street. (6)

1899 : First permit is granted for an automobile to drive through Central Park.

1900

1908 : Romeo and Juliet, produced by the Vitagraph Company of America, is the first motion picture shot in Central Park. (7)

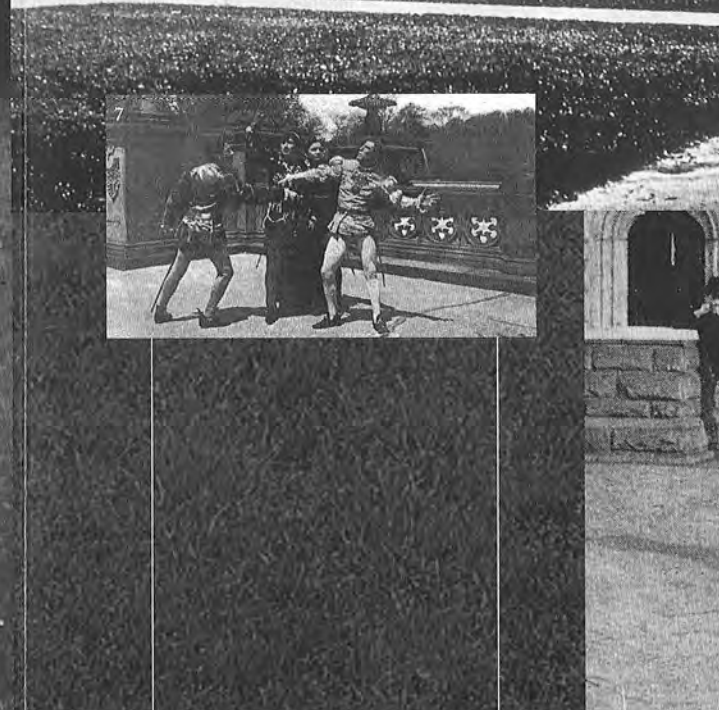
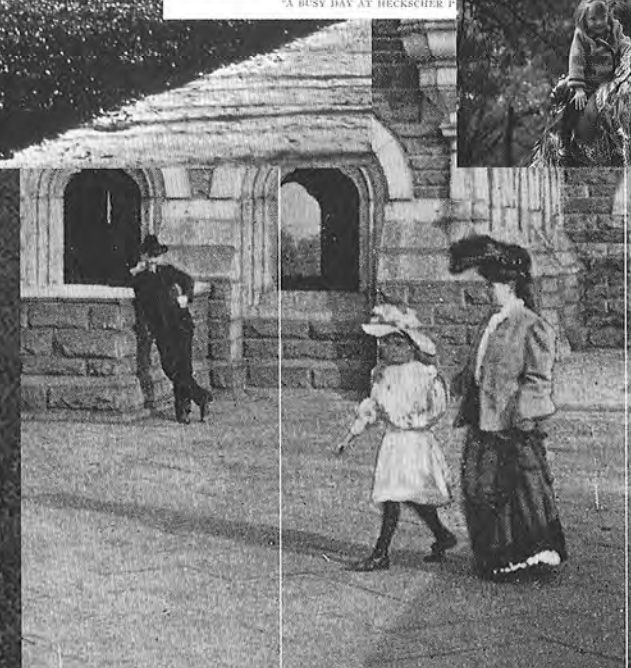
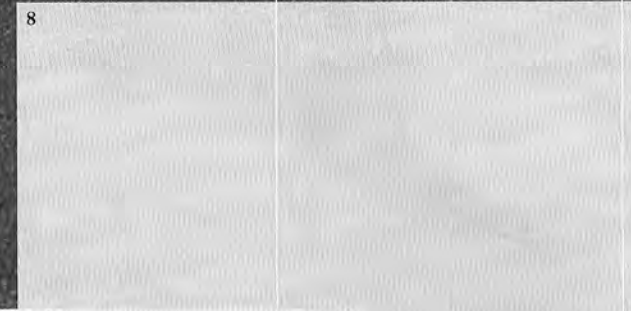
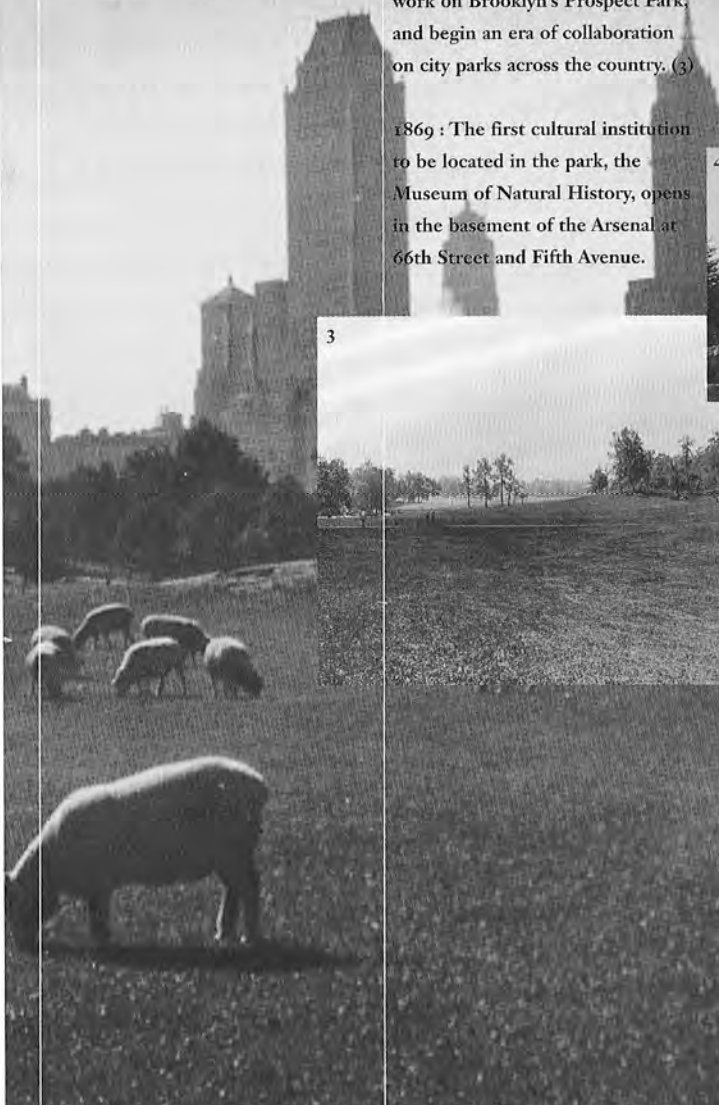
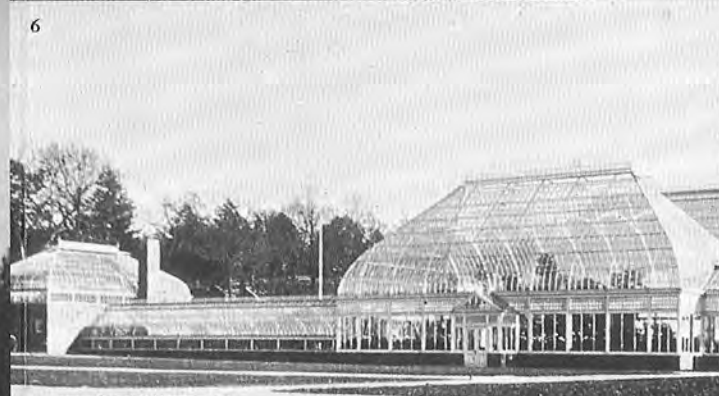
1910

1919 : U.S. Weather Bureau moves its data station to Belvedere Castle. (8)

1920

1925 : A sculpture is commissioned to honor Balto, a sled dog, who was part of a team that traveled through an Alaskan blizzard to deliver an antitoxin needed to halt a diphtheria epidemic—an episode that riveted New Yorkers. Balto is the most requested statue in Central Park. (9)

1926 : Heckscher Playground, the park's first, opens. (10)



8

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1

2

9

1930

1931 : The Reservoir is drained, and controversy grows over use of the site.

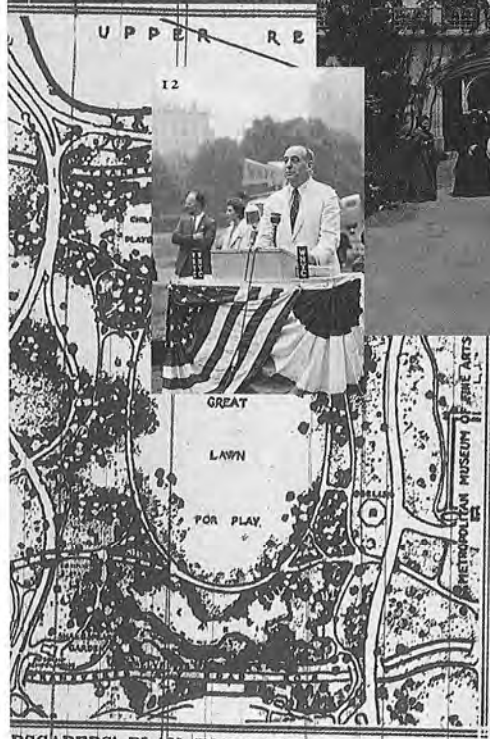
1934 : Robert Moses is appointed Parks Commissioner. Moses adopts the ASLA's Great Lawn design. (12)

Sheep are evicted from sheep meadow to Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

1936 : Robert Moses builds twenty playgrounds around the perimeter of Central Park.

1937 : The Great Lawn is built. 13

The Conservatory Garden is completed following the demolition of the Conservatory in 1934.



1940

1940 : Marble Arch and other notable park landmarks are destroyed in an effort to make the park more accessible to automobiles. (13)

1949 : Kate Wollman donates \$600,000 to build a skating rink in the park. Wollman Rink opens in 1950, one of the first examples of a donor attaching their name to a facility. (14)

1950

1956 : Plans for a parking lot next to Tavern on the Green are protested by angry mothers who stand in front of the bulldozers with their baby carriages. "The Battle of Central Park," covered widely in the press, ultimately forces a concession from Moses and marks the beginning of the end of his reign.

1959 : An Alice in Wonderland sculpture is commissioned by philanthropist George Delacorte. (15)

1960

1960 : The U.S. Weather Service, which had occupied Belvedere Castle since 1919, leaves the Castle. Vandals move in. (16)

1962 : New York Philharmonic Orchestra performs first concert on Central Park's Sheep Meadow.

1965 : In the wake of the destruction of New York's Penn Station, Central Park is declared a National Historic Landmark.

1967 : Anti-war march on the United Nations, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, begins in Central Park.

1966 : Mayor John Lindsay closes the park drives to automobile traffic on weekends, beginning a policy of limiting car traffic in the park that continues today.

1967 : Barbra Streisand concert, the first large popular concert in the park, is aired on television on September 16, 1968, as "A Happening in Central Park."

1969 : The Moon landing is televised on the Sheep Meadow.

1970

1970 : New York City's first marathon is held in Central Park. For the first six years, the marathon is run entirely in the park. It is extended throughout the five boroughs in 1976 for the U.S. bicentennial. (17)

1976 : Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan declares Central Park a "national disgrace" and proposes that it be taken over by the National Park Service.

1974 : Central Park is declared a Scenic Landmark by the City of New York.

1979 : James Taylor concert draws thousands to the Sheep Meadow. Portions of the proceeds are donated to a revitalization fund.

1980

1980 : The Central Park Conservancy is founded, and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers is appointed the first administrator of Central Park. (19)

John Lennon is killed in front of his apartment building, The Dakota, on Central Park West at 72nd Street. Yoko Ono makes a gift to the Conservancy for the creation of Strawberry Fields, across from the Dakota, in his memory. (20)

1981 : The Sheep Meadow, the first major landscape reconstructed by the Conservancy, reopens. (21)

Simon and Garfunkel reunion concert in Central Park draws approximately 500,000.

1982 : Two million people descend upon the park to protest nuclear power in the largest demonstration in American history.

1989 : The Conservancy receives a gift of \$17 million, the largest gift ever made to a municipal park, which comes with the condition that it be matched by both the Conservancy and the city. 20

1990

1992 : Red tail hawks build a nest and mate in Central Park.

1993 : The Charles A. Dana Discovery Center opens, signifying a commitment to equal investment in the northern portion of the park and partnership with the Harlem community. (22)

1998 : The Conservancy signs a management contract with the city, formalizing its role and responsibility as steward of the park. (23)

Photo credits

1, 11 — Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

2, 4, 5, 6, 13 — Herbert Mitchell Collection.

3 — Prospect Park Archive.

7 — New York Public Library

9, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 — Sara Cedar Miller, Central Park Conservancy.

10, 12, 14 — New York City Parks Photo Archive.

15 — Project for Public Spaces.

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