

Part II

# Laurelhurst Park

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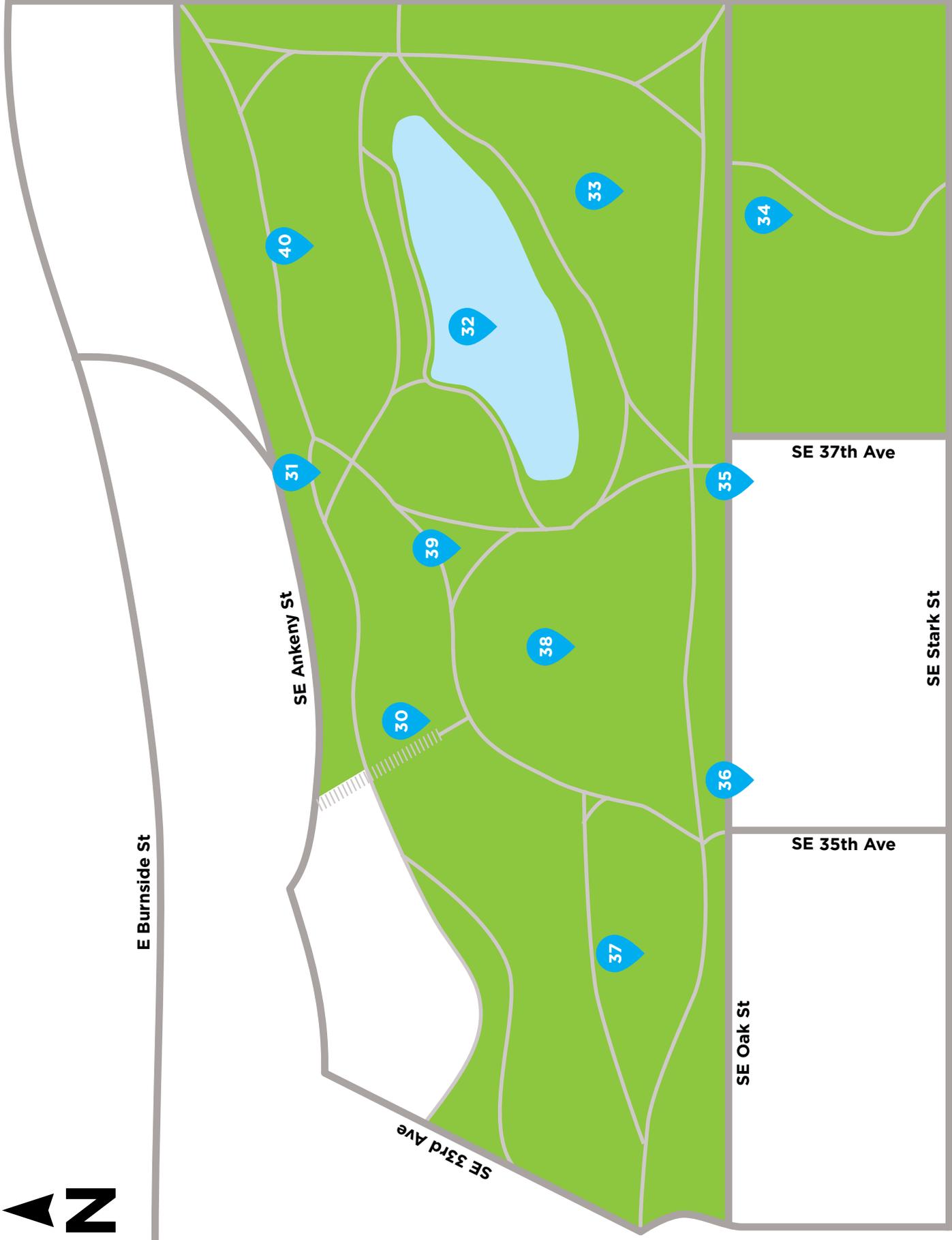
*A Walking Tour  
of Laurelhurst Park*

## **Laurelhurst Park**

Welcome to Laurelhurst Park, one of the jewels of the Portland park system! This 31 acre space became the first city park on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

In 1898, the secretary of Portland's newly formed park association began correspondence with Olmsted Brothers, a firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, the nation's most influential landscape architect and urban planner. The firm was the first of several such firms to flourish around the turn of the twentieth century as a result of the City Beautiful movement, which sought to bring beauty into cities as a reaction to decades of industrialization and poor planning.

The Olmsted's plan for the city was presented in 1903, by John C. Olmsted, nephew and adopted son ▶



► of Frederick Law Olmsted. John Olmsted's plan for a park system in Portland identified locations for thirty-seven park projects encompassed within a proposed system of neighborhood parks, suburban parks, scenic reservations, city squares, parkways, and boulevards, and included among its recommendations the purchasing a swampy, forested corner of William S. Ladd's dairy farm.

At the time, the city was focused on the upcoming Lewis and Clark Exhibition, to be held in 1905, and the extraordinary rise in land values due to the exhibition prevented the Park Board from realizing Olmsted's plan for the Ladd farm or for any of the other thirty-six proposed park sites. It wasn't until October of 1909, under the direction of Superintendent Emanuel T. Mische, that the Portland Park Board purchased the section of land that would become Laurelhurst Park from the Laurelhurst Company for \$92,482.10.

Emanuel Mische brought a remarkable range of experience and skill to the Portland Park Board. Born in Syracuse, New York, he attended the Missouri Botanic School before enrolling in the Bussey Institute—the horticulture school of the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts—in 1894, receiving a scholarship in 1896 to attend the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England, and going to work for Olmsted Brothers in 1898.

During his eight years with Olmsted Brothers, Mische absorbed the philosophies that inspired the work of the Olmsted family. Mische was heavily influenced by the Olmsted technique of dividing neighborhood parks into sections for different types of uses. As originally designed, there were six major sections of land within the park: Concert Grove, Firwood Lake and the Children's Lawn, Plateau Meadow, Broad Meadow, Picnic Grove, and Rhododendron Hill.

The Park Annex across Oak street was added later.

Mische designed Laurelhurst Park to allow for different types of uses within each section. The sections each have their own distinct character and are separated from each other by the original concrete footpath system that circulates throughout the park.

Although Mische designed Laurelhurst Park in 1910, little more than debris clearing happened at the site that year due to funding shortages. Construction began in earnest in 1912 with the grading of walkways, the grading and seeding of lawns, and the installation of log steps. Like the rest of Laurelhurst, minimal grading was done to create the park, instead building the park around the natural contours of the land. ■

### 30) Rhododendron Hill

This hill contains what park designer Emanuel T. Mische described as the "steeper areas" of the park which were to be "devoted to arboreous and shrubby vegetation as an appropriate use of the ground and to add an enriching element and one lessening the cost of maintenance." Mische planted the area profusely with rhododendrons, azaleas, Western hemlock, and magnolias. The rhododendrons that lend the hill its name are concentrated in the center of the incline around a string of straight-run brick stairs that runs from the base of the hill to Ankeny Street.

### 31) Comfort Station

In 1914, Portland architects Whitehouse and Foulhoux designed a men's comfort station for Laurelhurst Park. The building faces Ankeny Street, marking one of the park's main entrances, and currently holds restrooms and the park's administrative office. It was designed as a simple version of the

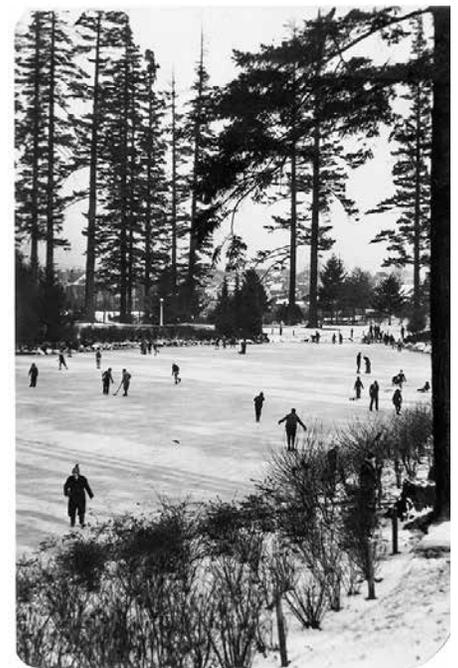
English Cottage style popular at the time (as can be seen in houses all over Laurelhurst).

### 32) Firwood Lake

Originally known by locals as Ladd's Pond, Firwood Lake, as it would come to be known, was not much more than puddle with the odd cluster of cattails—frequented by cattle for a drink, and schoolboys for a swim. Mische transformed the pond by deepening it and manicuring the grounds around it. Boomerang Island was added in 1955.

In early years (around 1918), the pond was patrolled by a white swan named General Pershing, who was said to keep little children from approaching too close to the water. The Park Bureau even went so far as to open a Matrimonial Bureau in 1919 to help find Pershing a mate. In later years, a black-beaked, black-toed swan named Big Boy took over.

For a time in the 1920s and 30s, the Rose Festival Queen's coronation took place in the pond on floating boats and decorated rafts, drawing thousands of onlookers.



Ice skating on Firwood Lake



Clockwise from top: Portland's Rose Festival Queen and her court at LH Park; Edith Daily, Rose Festival Queen, 1924; Rose Festival Garland Dance, 1921

In the winter, when the pond would freeze over, people would ice skate on it, even as recently as 1989.

Plantings around the lake are a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees and mature shrubbery planted in clusters, including common hackberry, silktree, sweetgum, fragrant snowbell, bald cypress, and Chinese witch hazel. Bigleaf maple, sugarberry, and Northern red oak are among those plantings that remain from 1913–1914.

By 1990, nearly 20,000 catfish, carp, and black crappie fish were stirring up sediment on the lake's bottom. Oregon Bass and Panfish Club tried to deplete the population to no avail. Eventually, the sediment buildup and increased levels of dangerous algae compromised the lake's health and appearance.

Sunshine was unable to reach the bottom of the lake, which is needed to keep algae down. To bring the lake back to health, the Portland Parks & Recreation department drained and dredged the lake in 2010 and installed an oxygen circulation system. Today, thousands of fish still inhabit the lake along with ducks and turtles.

### 33) Plateau Meadow/ Heritage Tree #160

This section of the park contains many of the original old Douglas and grand firs that Mische called the trees "the crowning glory of the park", considering them the central design element of Laurelhurst Park. His decision to minimize grading at the park was

a result of his respect for the trees and his desire to maintain the grandeur of their appearance.

Later additions, evergreens and exotics, have contributed to the stunning display of variety at Plateau Meadow. These include dawn redwood, a rare deciduous conifer, giant redwood, Port Orford cedar, Northern red oak, tulip tree, Japanese crabapple, Pacific dogwood, Southern magnolia, Whitcomb flowering cherry, and Katsura tree.

The park overall contains approximately 120 species of trees, comprising nearly 1000 individual trees, 10% of which pre-date the park, and 30% of which are from the park's original plantings, with new trees being planted yearly.

Heritage Tree #160 is located in Plateau Meadow and is a Katsura tree—latin name *cercidiphyllum japonicum*—native to northern China and Japan. It stands about 70 feet tall, with a spread of about 61 feet, and trunk circumference of 10.2 feet. It has fall color and blossoms in the spring. Katsura trees became popular in the late 1950s with a growing post-war interest in Japanese culture. You can find the tree just off the back right corner of the Horseshoe Pits' fence.

### 34) Park Annex

In 1919, the Pacific Coast Parks Association honored Mische by voting Laurelhurst the most beautiful park in the west. Between 1921 and 1922, Mische's successor, Charles Paul Keyser, purchased an entire block across Oak Street from Laurelhurst Park to serve as a playground. Keyser oversaw the development of the playground throughout the 1920s, installing tennis courts, handball courts, play equipment, a wading pool, a recreation building, and a kitchenette.

At the park annex, the boys were to play on the South side, the girls on the North side, with general games held in the middle.

The Tudor theatre style building in the Annex has a unique chimney that splits in two on the balcony level with a spot to stand in the middle. Although the fireplace is no longer in use, the picturesque balcony is still available for observing classes. With the installation of a professional grade dance floor, the studio has primarily been used for performing arts classes.

### 35 & 36) Franz Brothers' Homes

These two homes were once owned by the Franz Bakery brothers Englebert and Joe Franz. The Franz brothers immigrated to the United States in 1896 to work in their uncle's bakery. In 1906, they saved enough money to buy the bakery from their uncle and grow it into a thriving business which continues today.

### 37) Picnic Grove

Picnic Grove is utilized, as originally intended by Mische, as a gathering place for large groups. The area displays long strings of picnic tables on concrete pads at its flat west end. Mische did a great deal of planting in this area to augment the Douglas fir, Western yew, and black walnut that he found there in 1913. European beech, sugar maple, Norway maple, bigleaf maple, coast redwood, giant sequoia, common persimmon, holly, sycamore, and umbrella pine comprise Mische's selections for Picnic Grove. According to the park's planting inventory, this original vegetation is still in existence.

### 38) Broad Meadow

Broad Meadow represents Emanuel Mische's vision to create distinct sections of the park for vigorous activities: "the flatter areas are to be open to games, picnicking, rambling and fiestas." Consequently, Mische planted very little at Broad Meadow, which consists of a wide expanse of



Clockwise from top: Winners of a Hula Hoop Competition at Laurelhurst Park, 1968; Herman Bohlman Bird Watches at Ladd's Pond (prior to park construction), 1901; Children playing in Park Annex fountain, 1945

cultivated lawn with a level, treeless center surrounded by gentle slopes with dense and varied tree clusters. Broad Meadow is now home to the dog park, as well as the summer movies in the park program.

### 39) Children's Lawn

This small triangular bit of grass is known as the Children's Lawn. Within the Children's Lawn sits a sculpture titled "Triad". Originally completed in 1980 and remade in 2003, *Triad* was designed by Evelyn Franz, who received her Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture in 1976 from Portland State University.

### 40) Concert Grove

This section of the park is called the Concert Grove. The Grove

is a gently sloping tract of cultivated lawn that covers the northeast portion of the park. Mische intended to build a music gazebo in the center of the Grove, but money shortages cancelled the plan. Nevertheless, the Grove has historically been the location of musical and theatrical performances, attracting large crowds to the expansive area. Since Mische envisioned a space that would accommodate such crowds, he planned a spare planting program for the Concert Grove. The annual report to the Park Bureau in 1915 noted that because of its central location, the patronage of the park was "enormous" and that one local band concert drew 32,000 people, "the largest crowd ever assembled in a Portland park for a single band concert. ■

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### About This Tour

For information about the source material, email [laurelhurstwalkingtour@gmail.com](mailto:laurelhurstwalkingtour@gmail.com). This tour is available in both print and audio formats on the Laurelhurst Neighborhood Association website.

### About the Author

My name is Amelia Shields, I'm a Grant High School student (class of 2020) and a Girl Scout. I created this historic walking tour for my Gold Award project because I was interested in learning more about the history of the neighborhood, and I wanted other members of the community to be able to experience the rich history of the neighborhood and feel connected to it.

### About the Girl Scout Gold Award

The Girl Scout Gold Award is the highest level award a Girl Scout can earn. It requires a minimum of 80 leadership hours toward the completion of a project to better the community. The Gold Award allows a girl scout to develop leadership skills, be seen as a role model, master time management skills, and make the world a better place.

### Acknowledgements

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### Questions? Comments?

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