



Newport Historical Society

Guide to the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission records, 1919 – 1991

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Descriptive Summary

<i>Collection Identifier</i>	MS.094
<i>Title</i>	Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission records
<i>Creator</i>	Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission
<i>Date</i>	1919 – 1991
<i>Extent</i>	.5 linear feet of textual materials and photographs, and 13 architectural and landscape plans
<i>Language</i>	Material is in English.
<i>Abstract</i>	This collection dates from 1919-1991 and contains minutes and correspondence of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission. The collection also contains photographs and architectural and landscape drawings.

Historical Note

Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission:

The Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission was created in January 1921 to establish an official memorial to those who died in the armed services during World War I. Efforts to create a war memorial began soon after the end of the war. The Committee of Ten, or the Newport War Memorial Committee, was incorporated on July 18, 1919 after the Honorable Clark Burdick, Mayor of Newport, called a meeting to discuss the establishment of a war memorial. Plans were adopted to purchase Miantonomi Hill and create a memorial park.

Prior to European settlement, Miantonomi Hill was the seat of Wampanoag Chieftain, Wanumetonomy, Sachem of Aquidneck Island. As the highest point in Newport, the site offered panoramic views of the island and surrounding bay. During the colonial period, the hill was used for beacons, public gatherings and lookouts. A fortification was built under the command of Colonel Putnam before it was used by the British during their occupation of the island during the Revolutionary War.

The City of Newport purchased Miantonomi Hill and the surrounding area on July 12, 1921 from Helen Phelps Stokes, whose family had owned the property since 1881. Mrs. Stokes specified that the 30 acres be used "for a public park." Architects R. Clipston Sturgis and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. led the landscape design efforts of the park. The Commission dedicated the site as a war memorial on Armistice Day, 1923. The architecture firm McKim, Mead & White was hired to design a memorial tower. This culminated in the dedication of the Memorial Tower on August 29th, 1929.

The Memorial Park was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969. Over the following decade James Edward, then chairman of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission, lead an effort to acquire Sunset Hills, an area adjacent to the park, and add it to the National Register. This undertaking was unsuccessful, despite the support of Antoinette Downing and other preservationists who sought to protect the area from development. Decades later the Aquidneck Land Trust secured a permanent conservation easement for Miantonomi Memorial Park in 2005, and the same was secured for Sunset Hills the following year.

In 1978, the memorial tablets honoring the 56 servicemen from Newport who were killed in World War I were stolen. In 2017, an award was granted by the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, in part, to replace the memorial tablets. New tablets were mounted to the Memorial Tower in 2018.

Sources:

- Aquidneck Land Trust. "Aquidneck Land Trust property map" last modified August 2017. https://ailt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ALT_property_map_Aug2017.pdf
- Flynn, Sean. "Plaques returning to Miantonomi Park" last modified November 8, 2017. <http://www.newportri.com/28b1af53-a68c-5fed-bb03-fd2fac779ae7.html>
- Daily News staff. "Land trust, city OK Miantonomi easement."
- McDermott, Jennifer. "Newport monument among neglected WWI memorials getting spruced up" last modified October 11, 2017. <http://www.providencejournal.com/news/20171011/newport-monument-among-neglected-wwi-memorials-getting-spruced-up>
- Newport Historical Society. "Miantonomi Park" subject file.
- Newport (R.I.) Daily News, May 20, 2005.

James Gibson Edward:

James Gibson Edward (1902-1990) was a correspondent and editor of several Newport newspapers. In 1968 he was nominated to serve as the President of the New England Associated Press News Executives Association for the following year. Around this time he also became Chairman of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission. He resigned from the Commission in 1984.

Before beginning his career at the *Newport Daily News* in 1932, he was a correspondent for the *Newport Herald*, *Time*, *Life*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Fortune* magazines. He was Managing Editor of the *Newport Daily News* from 1936 to 1975. He was a trustee of the Newport Public Library and member of the Redwood Library and Newport Historical Society.

During his tenure as chairman of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission, he oversaw numerous ongoing caretaking and maintenance issues pertaining to the park. He was committed to having Sunset Hills, an area adjacent to the Memorial Park, placed on the National Register of Historic Places and incorporated into the park. This never came to be; however, a conservation easement was placed on Miantonomi Memorial Park in 2005, and the same was secured for Sunset Hills the following year.

Sources:

- Aquidneck Land Trust. "Aquidneck Land Trust property map" last modified August 2017.
https://ailt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ALT_property_map_Aug2017.pdf
- Daily News staff. "Land trust, city OK Miantonomi easement."
- Newport (R.I.) Daily News, May 20, 2005.

Scope and Content

This collection contains meeting minutes, correspondence, financial records, photographs, architectural and landscape plans pertaining to the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission. The earliest records of the collection lead up to and encompass the establishment of the Commission in 1921 and dedication of the Memorial Tower in 1929. Meeting minutes continue until 1938. Later records from the second half of the 20th century pertain to the park being added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1969, along with correspondence regarding ongoing maintenance of the park and tower through the 1980s.

There is also correspondence regarding efforts made to place Sunset Hills, an area adjacent to Miantonomi Memorial Park, on the National Register of Historic Places. The correspondence offers a first-hand account of the efforts required to place a park or building on the National Register of Historic Places.

This collection contains plans and correspondence from several noted architectural and landscape design firms. R. Clipston Sturgis and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. collaborated on landscape design soon after the site was acquired. Architectural blueprints from the New York firm McKim, Mead & White outlining the design of the Memorial Tower are also included.

Several photographs from the August 29th, 1929 dedication ceremony of the Memorial Tower are also included. Many have extensive descriptions on the back of each photograph. Names of the people in

the photographs are also noted.

Correspondence, financial records and commemorative pamphlets throughout the collection give insight and detail into the history of the Miantonomi Hill site and development of the park and tower.

Organization

This collection is organized into six series:

- I. Meeting minutes, 1919-1938
- II. Correspondence, 1921-1984
- III. Financial documents, 1929-1975
- IV. Architectural and landscape plans, 1921-ca. 1965
- V. Photographs, 1928-1965
- VI. Pamphlets and clippings, ca.1921-1991

Subject Access

People

Downing, Antionette Forrester
Edward, James Gibson, 1902-1990
Elliott, Maud Howe, 1854-1948
Olmsted, Frederick Law, 1870-1957
Sims, Anne Hitchcock, 1875-1960
Sims, William Sowden, 1858-1936
Sturgis, R. Clipston (Richard Clipston), 1860-1951

Organizations

McKim, Mead & White
Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission
Olmsted Brothers
Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

Subjects

Architecture
Landscape design
Memorials--Rhode Island

Parks--Public use
Rhode Island--History
Soldiers' monuments
World War, 1914-1918

Form/Genre

architectural drawings (visual works)
clippings (information artifacts)
correspondence
financial records
minutes (administrative records)
negatives (photographs)
pamphlets
photographs
tax records

Separated Material

Series IV: Architectural plans and surveys, 1921-ca. 1965 was separated from the collection due to its size. The plans and surveys were placed in oversize folders in flat file drawers.

Series V: Photographs, 1928-1965 was separated from the collection and placed in media storage.

Access and Use

Physical Access

This collection is housed on site at the Newport Historical Society. Researchers can be seen by appointment during operating hours.

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Citation Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission records, MS.094, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island

Administrative Information

<i>Processor</i>	Processed by Kerry McAuliffe, May 1 2018.
<i>Descriptive Rules</i>	Finding aid based on <i>Describing Archives: A Content Standard</i> (DACS)
<i>Processing Note</i>	Several items, such as photographs and clippings, are glued to the pages of the meeting minutes in Series I, so they were not separated from the minutes. It was also determined that keeping these items within the minutes was important to maintain their context and original order.
<i>Accession Info</i>	The Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission records were a gift of the City of Newport in 2017.

Accession Number: 2017.015

Inventory

Series 01: Meeting minutes, 1919 – 1938

This series contains meeting minutes pertaining to the efforts of planning and improving Miantonomi Memorial Park along with the construction of the Memorial Tower. Some historical context of Miantonomi Hill is documented as well. Several photographs, pamphlets, clippings and other documentation are included within the meeting minutes.

Material is arranged chronologically.

File 01.001: Meeting minutes, 1919 – 1926

These minutes pertain to the founding of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission in 1919 and dedication of the park as a memorial in 1923.

File 01.002: Meeting minutes, 1927 – 1929

Meeting minutes corresponding to the planning and construction efforts of the Memorial Tower, culminating in the dedication ceremony in 1929.

File 01.003: Meeting minutes, 1930 – 1938

With the Memorial Tower in place, these minutes correspond to the plans for additional improvements to the park itself as well as costs and issues surrounding the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the park.

Series 02: Correspondence, 1921 – 1984

This series contains correspondence to and from the Commission and its members. Letters from R. Clipston Sturgis focus on the early improvement plans to the park in 1921. Correspondence to and from James G. Edward chronicles the ongoing maintenance, planning and upkeep for the park for numerous years. Efforts to add Sunset Hills to the National Register of Historic Places are also documented.

File 02.001: R. Clipston Sturgis correspondence, 1921

R. Clipston Sturgis, Architect, letters and invoices regarding the landscape and design of Miantonomi Memorial Park. Letters appear to correspond to some of the blueprints found in Series IV. Letter detailing improvements suggested and agreed upon by Mr. Sturgis and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. is included.

File 02.002: James G. Edward correspondence, 1956 – 1984

These letters are to and from James G. Edward, former president of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission. Correspondence mainly pertains to the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the park. Letters detail some historical information on the park and commission as well.

File 02.003: National Register nomination correspondence, 1968 – 1980

These letters mostly discuss the efforts made to add Sunset Hills (a park adjacent to Miantonomi Memorial Park) to the National Register of Historic Places. Correspondence from various government and historical entities are included, namely the United States Department of the Interior, Providence Preservation Society, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Correspondence to Mrs. Antoinette Downing, then Chairman of the Historical Preservation Commission is also included.

Series 03: Financial documents, 1929 – 1975

This series contains financial and tax records of the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission.

File 03.001: Checks, balance sheets, and miscellaneous expense items, 1929 – 1975

Balance sheets, checks and invoices are located within this folder. The earliest document is a bank book for an account with the Aquidneck National Exchange Bank. Account statements and appropriation sheets from the 1946 to the 1957 are also included. Substantiating documentation is provided for some years. Miscellaneous invoices and other financial documentation close out the folder.

File 03.002: IRS Form 990s, 1945 – 1969

This folder contains IRS Form 990 annual returns for the Miantonomi Memorial Park Commission. Every year from 1945 to 1969 is represented. Returns provide information such as the names of the Secretary and or Treasurer for the corresponding year.

Series 04: Architectural and landscape plans, 1921 – circa 1965 (bulk 1923 – 1938)

This series contains thirteen architectural and landscape blueprints of Miantonomi Memorial Park and Tower. Architect R. Clipston Sturgis collaborated with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. on the landscape plans. The New York firm McKim, Mead & White drew up the architectural drawings for the Memorial Tower and tablets.

File 04.001: Miantonomi Memorial Park landscape surveys and designs, 1921 – circa 1965

Landscape drawings from R. Clipston Sturgis with input from Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. There are a few anonymous survey drawings that may be of a later date as well. The drawings detail the landscape plans of the park.

File 04.002: Architectural plans of Memorial Tower, 1923 – 1929

Plans drawn up for the design and construction of the Memorial Tower and tablets by the architectural firm, McKim, Mead & White.

Series 05: Photographs, 1928 – 1965 (bulk 1929)

Photographs within this series primarily pertain to the Memorial Tower dedication ceremony on August 29th, 1929.

File 05.001: Miantonomi Memorial Park photographs, 1928 – 1965 (bulk 1929)

Many photographs have descriptive details and names written on the back. Most of the photographs are from the 1929 dedication ceremony. There are a few additional photographs of the Memorial Tower from the first commission, depictions of the site in later years, along with other Newport area monuments.

Series 06: Pamphlets and clippings, circa 1921 – 1991

This series contains pamphlets and newspaper clippings pertaining to Miantonomi Memorial Park.

File 06.001: Pamphlets and clippings, circa 1921 – 1991

Folder includes a pamphlet from the initial dedication of the park in 1923. Newspaper clippings from the 1920s detail the fundraising efforts of the park. An obituary for former James G. Edward is also included.