



Town of Greenwich
Department of Parks & Recreation
Town Hall - 101 Field Point Road - Greenwich, CT 06836-2540
Phone: (203) 622-7814 – Fax: (203) 622-6494

BINNEY PARK

DIRECTIONS:

US 1 to Sound Beach Avenue. Turn onto Sound Beach Avenue, go under I-95 bridge, continue about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, park starts on right, keep right at rotary, continue to entrance, next right, Wesskum Wood Road.

Binney Park is located between Sound Beach Avenue and Arch Street in Old Greenwich. Parking is available along the interior roadway east of the tennis courts reached from Sound Beach Avenue via Wesskum Wood Road.

The park is comprised of a northern landscaped section with pond, lawn, trees, paved paths and a southern section for more active recreation, with four tennis courts, two baseball diamonds, swings and a sheltered playground area. Permits are required for the use of the baseball diamonds. Please call the Recreation Division at 622-7830 for fees and availability.

The property known today as Binney Park was once a lush flood plain salt-meadow with a stream wandering through it on its way to Greenwich Cove. The wild flowers were said to be beautiful, especially the Joe-Pye-weed and Canada lilies. However, in the late 1920's, the ecological importance of flood plains was little understood and numerous houses were planned for the swampy site. Two sisters, Mary Davey and Helen Kitchel, proposed to their father, Edwin Binney, the idea of creating a park from the threatened meadow and donating it to the Town. He agreed that if they would arrange the purchase, he would plan and landscape the area and give it to the Town.

During the construction, Cider Mill Brook was diverted from its course north of Sound Beach Avenue to enter the park near Arch Street and join Laddins Brook well inside the park. A pond was dredged, but not so deeply as to endanger future skaters. Fill was brought in to raise the lawn level above the high tide line. (It does flood during storms, nonetheless). Ably assisted by family members plus Patsy Crucitti of the Bertolf Nursery, Mr. Binney supervised all details of the park's evolution.

Binney Park was dedicated on September 28, 1933. One of the speakers at the ceremony was Dr. Albert Austin, health officer and local resident. When asked why he had come to Old Greenwich (then Sound Beach) 28 years earlier, he replied: "I walked from Adams Corner in order to see some of the community. The first thing that gave me encouragement and decided me to stay were these large acres of salt marsh that harbored millions of mosquitoes. I hoped to make a living from the malaria that came from these marshes."

Today, the visions of a malaria-breeding swamp seem far distant to the countless bridal parties who gather to pose for wedding photographs at the site of the former marshland. Every Memorial Day, the parade through Old Greenwich ends next to the pond at Memorial Rock dedicated in 1955 to the memory of servicemen and women of Old Greenwich. Riverside and North Mianus who gave their lives for their country. The Town run 4th of July fireworks, the model sailboat regatta, sponsored by the OGRCC, plus wintertime skating and summertime concerts all attest to the park's importance to the community. Area residents as well as visitors are treated to the view of well-maintained trees, shrubs and bright clumps of yellow flag iris thriving at the water's edge along with Canada Geese and Mallards. The picturesque willows and white birch are enhanced by a small grove of crabapple trees planted by the Garden Club of Old Greenwich just west of the Wesskum Wood bridge. The southern half of Binney Park

beyond the tennis courts is largely open field used by the softball and baseball teams as well as by the spring and fall dog obedience classes. Adjacent to the Field House is a particularly handsome copper beech tree. The stream on the east side is said to boast turtles of considerable size. In 1935, the Hillside Annex, a steep, rocky but wooded two acres across Arch Street was added to the Binney Park complex. A climb up the slope reveals a panoramic view of the park below and of the First Congregational Church in the distance. A little later, the corner property on the south side of Harding Road at Sound Beach Avenue was given to the Town, being envisioned as an outdoor reading room for the Perrot Library across the street.

In 1939, ten acres along the north side of Harding Road between Laddins Rock Road and Brownhouse Road were purchased and deeded to the Town by Mrs. Binney, Mrs. Kitchel and Mr. Dan Wade, an Old Greenwich architect and designer of the Perrot Library. Today, informal paths crisscross Natural Park. What appears in spring and summer to be impenetrable green cover of wild grape, honeysuckle and blackberry bushes readily yields to the walker entering the heavily vegetated area. The lowlands near Laddins Rock Road are damp, if not muddy with tiny tributaries of Laddins Brook. At a slightly higher elevation to the east are mature specimens of sweet gum, sycamore and beech trees. At the highest elevation above Brownhouse Road are several majestic white pines. This tract of land, rectangular in shape, serves as a vital link for Town-owned property between Laddins Rock Sanctuary, Binney Park and Greenwich Cove.

Barbara Girdler

NATURAL FEATURES:

Binney Park is a picturesque park with its ponds, lawns, gazebo and wooden and stone bridges. A variety of trees and shrubs are planted throughout the park. These include pines, fir, oak, maple, birches and willows. The fruits of crabapple and cherry trees serve as food for many small birds. Mature rhododendron and azalea bushes are grouped gracefully at the edges of the park. Ducks, geese and gulls float on the ponds which are bordered by clumps of iris. A cattail swamp is in the southeast corner of the park.

The Binney Park Annex, located on the west side of Arch Streets has a short nature trail through its small, naturally wooded area.

PARK DEVELOPMENT:

The land now known as Binney Park was a swamp before the original twelve acres were purchased for a park and developed by Edwin Binney. From 1928 when the gift was given until his death in 1934, Binney personally supervised the park's construction. The swamp was dug to form a lake and trees and bushes planted to create a park for the Town's residents.

In 1932 additional property was purchased on the opposite side of Owenoke Way to serve the purpose of active recreation. The improvements of grading, seeding and the construction of the tennis courts and ball fields were carried on as part of an unemployment relief program.

The pond was a popular swimming site until 1940.

RECREATIONAL USES:

Binney Park is the focal point of activity for the residents of Old Greenwich and Riverside. There are three ball fields for softball and hardball. Teams are organized by the Town for men, women, boys and girls. Four tennis courts are available to residents of the Town. Residents must have a tennis card purchased at Town Hall and reserve courts by telephone.

Many enjoy jogging, walking, and picnicking in the park. When the pond freezes in the winter, skaters flock to the pond. The Department of Parks and Recreation has supervised skating. Please call 618-7650 for pond skating information.

Swings and playground equipment are available for the younger set. The highlight of summer activities is the annual Fourth of July fireworks display sponsored by the OGRCC with community contributions. Residents arrive early for a picnic dinner on the lawn accompanied by musical entertainment. The OGRCC sponsors a model sail boat race on the pond in October. Many people find Binney Park is a lovely place to have a bag lunch or read a book, while sitting on a bench surrounding the pond in the warmer months.