

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Forest Hill Park

other names/site number VDHR #127-6027; Holden Rhodes House, Boscobel (VDHR #127-0088)

2. Location

street & number between Riverside Drive and Forest Hill Avenue and between 42nd Street and 34th Street

not for publication N/A

city or town Richmond vicinity N/A

state Virginia code VA county Richmond (Independent City) code 760 zip code 23225

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____ _____	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register other (explain): _____	_____ _____	_____ _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>15</u>	<u>4</u>	structures
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>28</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing (enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing): N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Domestic</u>	Sub: <u>Single dwelling</u>
<u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>Fair; amusement park</u>
<u>Landscape</u>	<u>Park</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

USDI/NRHP Registration Form
Forest Hill Park
Richmond, Virginia

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Landscape Sub: Park

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions):

Mid 19th Century: Greek Revival
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Craftsman

Materials (enter categories from instructions):

foundation STONE: Granite
roof STONE: Slate
walls STONE: Granite
other Brick

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B removed from its original location
- C a birthplace or a grave
- D a cemetery
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F a commemorative property
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Entertainment/Recreation
Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1836-1843
1934-1952

Significant Dates

1843
1934

Significant Person (complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Holden Rhodes

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Ernest R. Gilbert (1934 restoration architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

USDI/NRHP Registration Form
Forest Hill Park
Richmond, Virginia

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 105.187 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
A	<u>18</u>	<u>281208</u>	<u>4155445</u>	C	<u>18</u>	<u>281508</u>	<u>4154749</u>
B	<u>18</u>	<u>281021</u>	<u>4154993</u>	D	<u>18</u>	<u>281859</u>	<u>4155521</u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Monica Rumsey and Debra McClane

organization Friends of Forest Hill Park date March 20, 2002

street & number 1106 West Forty-Third Street telephone 804/233-736

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23225

Additional Documentation

(Submit the following items with the completed form.)

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

USDI/NRHP Registration Form
Forest Hill Park
Richmond, Virginia

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Richmond; Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities

signature Cindy Curtis, Deputy Director

street & number 900 East Broad Street telephone 804/646-5717

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Maintenance facility Noncontributing structure
Section 7 Page 2

Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Forest Hill Park, located on the south side of the City of Richmond, is bounded roughly by Riverside Drive to the north, Forest Hill Avenue to the south, 41st and 42nd streets to the west, and 32nd and 34th streets and Patrick Henry Elementary School on the east. The neighborhood of Woodland Heights is located to the east, with the Forest Hill and Westover Hills neighborhoods to the west. The area's dramatic terrain, which rises to a height of 190 feet above mean sea level and slopes towards the James River, is one of the park's most appealing aspects. Located on the "heights" above the river, the area has been touted in the past for its healthful atmosphere and cooling breezes.

There is only one main paved roadway through the park. Although two large stone piers mark an earlier entrance into the park from Forest Hill Avenue, the modern entrance is from 41st Street. The roadway curves around the north side of the stone house, known as the Holden Rhodes House, then follows the western edge of the park to a parking area where two brick picnic shelters and approximately 13 open stone hearths are located on the highest bluff in the park. A paved walking path leads from the parking area down to the lake in the lower level of the park. Open fields and hillsides characterize the southern end of the park, while wooded slopes are located in the eastern, middle and northern parts of the park. Reedy Creek enters Forest Hill Park on the southern end near Dunston Avenue, feeds into the three-acre lake, rushes across the dam into a large culvert under Riverside Drive, and eventually flows into the James River. A steep ravine and intermittent drainage run east to west through the center of the park and down to the lake. Small perennial flower gardens have been planted along the Forest Hill Avenue, 41st Street, and 42nd Street edges of the park. In 1938, the Forest Hill Garden Club received an award from the National Council of State Garden Clubs citing their accomplishment in establishing a 10-acre tract in Forest Hill Park as a wildflower preserve and bird sanctuary. The project was described as "the most outstanding piece of civic achievement accomplished by a garden club in the nation."¹ The award was noted in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and a bronze plaque commemorating the project was mounted on a boulder near the park fountain. In 1950, an azalea garden, begun with 4,000 cuttings donated by the City of Norfolk, was located in the southeastern corner of the park. The original plantings in the garden suffered from inadequate water supply and shallow soil and many of the plants were moved to Bryan Park, a city park on Richmond's north side. A new effort is underway to restore this element to the park's diverse natural areas.²

In addition to the natural features, there are several buildings located within the park. The centerpiece of the park's built environment is the Holden Rhodes House (VDHR #127-0088), also known as Boscobel or the Stone House. Holden Rhodes, a prominent businessman and lawyer, constructed the Greek Revival-style granite house sometime after 1836 when he purchased the surrounding 103 acres. Two granite quarries are documented as having existed on the eastern side of the property (known as "Original Rhodes" and "Rhodes") and interviews with former slaves indicated that the granite had been quarried on the estate.³ The one-and-a-half-story dwelling with raised basement is covered by a slate-covered, side-gable roof featuring three gable dormers on each elevation (north and south). The sides of the dormers are also covered with slate. Historical photographs show that the roof was originally clad with copper and the dormers were sheathed with weatherboards. The principal elevations of the dwelling are symmetrically arranged with centrally located entrances flanked by two, 6/6 sash windows on each. Each entrance is reached by a raised porch set on an arched, brick foundation. The present porches, constructed during the 1930s restoration and featuring ogee arches, do not replicate an earlier, possibly original, porch. The porch seen in historical photographs had simple Tuscan columns and a wooden railing. Adding to the symmetry of the house are the four brick end chimneys, two each on its east and west sides. A

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Section 7 Page 1

Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Forest Hill Park is a 105-acre urban park located in the City of Richmond, Virginia, on the south side of the James River. The park is situated amidst the neighborhoods of Forest Hill, Woodland Heights, and Westover Hills. The park contains a dramatic landscape consisting of steep heights, wooded areas, open spaces, former stone quarries, and streams. In addition to the multitude of natural features, the park contains several notable buildings. During the nineteenth century, Holden Rhodes, a locally prominent businessman, lawyer, and teacher, owned the land now encompassed within the park. Between 1836 and 1843, Rhodes constructed his home, Boscobel, using granite quarried from the land. The one-and-a-half story, granite house, now more commonly referred to as the Stone House, serves as a focal point in Forest Hill Park.

After Rhodes' death, the land passed through several ownerships. In 1890, the property was owned by the Richmond and Manchester Railway Company and served as the terminus of the company's electric streetcar line. An amusement park with rides and other attractions was established in the vicinity of the Stone House, which was altered to house a penny arcade. By the 1920s, the trolley line was no longer in use and the amusement park had been closed. On January 11, 1934, the City of Richmond acquired the parkland. At that time, under the Emergency Relief Administration, the Stone House was remodeled, stone and brick walkways were constructed and picnic shelters and other amenities were erected within the park. Since that time, the park has remained an area of picturesque, natural beauty. The park contains 28 contributing resources: 7 buildings, 4 sites, 15 structures and 2 objects. There are 4 noncontributing structures in the park.

Inventory:

Contributing resources:

Stone House	Contributing building
Maintenance Building	Contributing building
Fountain and spring	Contributing object and contributing site
Gazebo	Contributing building
Warming Hut	Contributing building
Dam	Contributing structure
2 quarries	2 Contributing sites
13 cooking hearths	13 Contributing structures
Picnic Shelter #1	Contributing building
Picnic Shelter #2	Contributing building
Restroom Building	Contributing building
Entrance gate posts	Contributing object
Roads/trails system	Contributing structure
Designed landscape	Contributing site

Noncontributing resources:

3 tennis courts 3 Noncontributing structures

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Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

distinctive spiral stair in the central core of the house leads from the basement level to the second floor.

After Rhodes's death in 1857, the property passed through several owners and in 1890 the Stone House housed a penny arcade within an amusement park. Owned by the Richmond & Manchester Railway Company at this time and used as the terminus to one of its popular streetcar lines, several inappropriate additions and alterations were constructed to the dwelling, including a two-story, wraparound porch and a bell tower. As depicted on late 19th and early 20th century Sanborn Company fire insurance maps, numerous other structures were built in the vicinity of the Rhodes' former home to house the various operations of the amusement park and included a bandstand, a merry-go-round, several gaming booths, an "enchanted house," a bowling alley, a dancing pavilion, and a dip-the-dip, or roller coaster. Historical photos indicate that these structures were largely of frame construction. None of these ancillary buildings, which were located north and east of the Stone House, survive. However, traditional neighborhood oral history indicates when the amusement park closed in the early twentieth century, some of the buildings, or parts of the buildings, may have been relocated within the surrounding neighborhoods and converted into dwellings.⁴ The level of current survey within these neighborhoods and initial historical research has not yet confirmed this oral tradition.

In 1934, the City of Richmond acquired the property and commissioned Richmond architect Ernest R. Gilbert to restore much of the house's original appearance⁵ The Richmond City Council appropriated \$4,000 for the remodeling of the house and the cost of the labor was supplemented by \$50,000 from federal funds, under the Emergency Relief Administration. Masons and carpenters working for the City's Department of Public Works found paid employment at a time when work was scarce. Completed in February 1935, the restoration work was accomplished in just 13 months. The Stone House Association, which continues to this day, was responsible for the public operation of the facility. The renovated interior included a small auditorium, a kitchen, and an office and committee room, as well as a branch library and public restrooms (in the basement). The second floor was converted into living space consisting of four rooms and a bathroom, to be used as living quarters for the park keeper, H. B. Edwards, and his family⁶

A brick walkway leads from the north side of the Rhodes House down a ravine to a stone terrace where several open pipes provide drinking water. For many years, this was a spring-fed fountain, but today it is connected to the city's general water supply. Northeast from the Rhodes House, a paved drive leads down to the main park maintenance building, which formerly served as a stable (ca. 1934). This two-story, brick structure is covered by a slate-clad gambrel roof. Two shed roofed dormers and brick fire separation walls with terra cotta coping pierce the roof on each of the main elevations (north and south). The dormers hold six-pane, wooden casement windows, while the lower story has nine-paned, metal industrial type windows. Windows on the eastern end of the building are boarded. An overhead door has been installed near the center of the south façade. A single interior brick chimney with a corbelled cap is located on the rear (north) of the building. The upper floor of the interior, formerly a hayloft, now serves as equipment storage.

In addition, a maintenance facility (noncontributing) composed of two open sided, frame sheds is located east and south of the maintenance building. The sheds feature metal covered roofs and asphalt shingle siding. The sheds and the utility space around them are enclosed by chain link and wooden plank fences.

Two picnic shelters located in the northern half of the park on a high bluff are of similar construction and style (see accompanying measured drawing). A shingle-clad, side-facing gable roof with exposed rafter tails covers these rectangular

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buildings, which are 51' long by 25' deep. The center three bays of the five-bay structure are open, revealing the heavy
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Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

timber framing and king post trusses in the shelters. The end bays feature windowless rectangular openings that are flanked by decorative wooden shutters. The picnic shelter located to the west (Picnic Shelter #1), probably built during the 1930s, is constructed of red brick laid in a six-course American bond. The shelter is set on a stone foundation and the exterior end chimneys are coursed ashlar. The interior features a concrete and stone floor with open brick hearths at the east and west. *Timber picnic tables are provided. Some of the timber supports have been replaced with pressure treated posts.*

The shelter located at the very edge of the bluff to the east (Picnic Shelter #2), built ca. 1950, is of red brick laid in a running bond. Two single-shoulder exterior chimneys, located at the east and west ends of the shelter, are also of brick with small pieces of granite randomly placed within the form. All other features are similar to those found on Picnic Shelter #1.

About thirteen open cooking hearths constructed of coursed granite are located around the picnic shelters within the grassy edge of the bluff under the tall oak trees. Picnic tables and small, frame picnic stands are also provided. In this area, the low, coursed granite retaining wall encircles the paved drive and parking area, as well as the path leading down to the lake, were constructed during the 1930s.

Only a couple of structures are located on the lower level of the park. A warming hut, constructed of rounded cobblestones, is located on the west side of the lake. The gable-roofed structure, once used by ice skaters and sleds, has a single large chimney at its west end. A stone gazebo, also located lakeside, features a pyramidal roof supported by broad stone arches. Both of these structures were constructed during the 1930s, when the city took ownership of the park.

Other contributing resources within the park include a concrete dam at the northern end of the lake, which serves as a spillway as the creek makes its way to the James River, and a brick maintenance structure located on the upper level parking area, near the picnic shelters. The building is used for equipment storage and also houses restrooms.

Noncontributing resources in the park include the maintenance facility described earlier and the three tennis courts which were built in the 1980s and updated in 1998.

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Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Forest Hill Park in the City of Richmond, Virginia, is a 105-acre landscaped urban park that since 1934 has been a part to the city's park system, a system begun in 1851. The park exhibits a variety of wild natural areas and wetlands in addition to manicured landscapes dotted with large trees. Holden Rhodes (1799- 1857), a prominent and wealthy citizen, farmer, lawyer and successful businessman owed the property from 1836 until 1857. Between 1836 and 1843 he built the Greek Revival-style stone house that stands in the park. In 1889 the Southside Land & Improvement Company bought the property, renamed it Forest Hill Park and began to sell off land east and north of the park in Woodland Heights, a suburb newly connected to the city via an electric streetcar route. Forest Hill Park was one of the assets, in addition to the trolley, cited to promote this early streetcar suburb. For many years, the property served as an amusement park at the terminus of the trolley line. The City of Richmond acquired the park in 1934. Today, Forest Hill Park is surrounded by the neighborhoods of Woodland Heights, Forest Hill and Westover Hills. Rhodes' Stone House serves as a focal point for community activities.

CRITERIA

Forest Hill Park is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the development of the Woodland Heights neighborhood, an early Richmond streetcar suburb, and for its association with the City of Richmond's park system. That system was begun in 1851 and is one of the earliest such systems in the country. The property and its Stone House are also significant under National Register Criterion B for their association with the productive period in the life of a locally prominent citizen, Holden Rhodes (1799- 1857). Rhodes was a wealthy Richmond resident who served as a tutor and a lawyer, and was successful as an astute businessman. The house is believed to have been constructed of granite from Rhodes' quarries on the property. Finally, Forest Hill Park is significant under National Register Criterion C as an example of a passive recreational park, exhibiting both natural areas and manicured landscapes. Such park design, which was rooted in nineteenth-century English gardening traditions, was highly favored by the National Park Service during the early to mid-twentieth century.⁷ The design fulfilled the demands for park development, especially in urban areas, while preserving the natural qualities for which the park had been designated. The park also contains notable architectural resources. The Stone House is an example of a Greek Revival-style building exhibiting the use of granite, a locally abundant material. In addition, the buildings and structures erected in the park during the 1930s are notable as products of the Emergency Relief Administration and as examples of architecture exhibiting Craftsman style influence.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

N.B.: The following historical sketch of the ownership of the property comprising Forest Hill Park is taken largely from descriptions in George and Rumsey (1999).

The property encompassed by Forest Hill Park was held by private landowners from colonial times until the late nineteenth century. The property was part of William Byrd III's vast holdings along the James River until 1767, when Byrd held a lottery to liquidate some of his assets. Bernard Markham, a well-to-do farmer and later a member of the Virginia House of Delegates (1784-1786), purchased 1,730 acres of Byrd's land reaching from Reedy Creek to Powwhite Creek. In 1813, Markham's son sold 152 acres of the property to Fielding Dunstan. This plot included the area that is now contained

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within Forest Hill Park.

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Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

In 1836, Holden Rhodes, a tutor and lawyer, purchased 103 acres from Dunstan and constructed a stone dwelling on the property sometime between 1836 and 1843. Rhodes named his new estate "Boscobel," from the Italian *bosco bello*, or "beautiful woods." Rhodes was an astute lawyer and businessman and in 1836, he was named the first president of the Richmond & Petersburg Railroad Company. He was also one of four charter members of the Coal Working Company of Richmond & Manchester, and one of the founders of the Manchester Manufacturing Company and Manchester Cotton and Wool Manufacturing Company. Rhodes was also a successful farmer. Agricultural records show that of the nearly 2,000 acres he had acquired around Boscobel, 460 acres were improved and the farm produced wheat, Indian corn, oats, potatoes, and hay. Livestock was also raised on the farm, including milk cattle. Like most plantations of the time, the farm was run with slave labor and by the time of his death in 1857, Rhodes held 59 slaves. Rhodes was buried near the house, although the exact location is unknown. It is believed that an unmarked graveyard may still exist within the park east of the Rhodes House.

From the time of Rhodes' death until 1889, the property passed through several owners until the South Side Land and Improvement Company purchased the land from owners in New York. The company renamed the property "Forest Hill Park," what most consider to be a descriptive moniker referring to the natural features and general aspect of the land. The Richmond-based company, members of which included John C. Robertson and Joseph Bryan, was interested in developing real estate and trolley car operations in the city. In one year, the company sold the property, the power plant it had constructed, the trolley car line, and equipment to the Richmond & Manchester Railway Company.

Richmond's acquisition of park lands dates to the mid-nineteenth century when the City acquired land for "open space."

In 1851, land for three parks— not given official names until 1859— was purchased. These areas were Jefferson Square (now Libby Hill), Madison Square (Gamble's Hill), and Western Square (now Monroe Park).¹⁴ The latter was used for many years for the Virginia Agricultural Society's annual fair and so was also known as the Fair Grounds. Several other parks in the city were privately developed by trolley companies.

During the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, several Richmond-based trolley companies purchased land in what were then suburban areas and began to develop as residential neighborhoods the lands that were serviced by their lines. At the end of the lines, the companies often developed picnic sites and amusement parks. Such parks included Reservoir Park (present-day Byrd Park), Jefferson Park, Gamble's Hill Park, Lakeside Park, Westhampton Park, and Forest Hill Park. The Richmond & Manchester Railway Company set its terminus at the former Rhodes estate, where it constructed an amusement park on the grounds and converted the former dwelling into a penny arcade with the addition of a bell tower and a two-story, wraparound porch. Sanborn Company fire insurance maps from 1919 show the area consisting of a bandstand, a merry-go-round, several booths, an "enchanted house," a bowling alley, a dancing pavilion, and a dip-the-dip, or roller coaster. For the most part, these structures were located north and east of the dwelling.

The Richmond, Manchester and Woodland Heights line brought residents and visitors to the park.⁸ Together, the trolley line and the presence of the park served as major catalysts in the development of the Woodland Heights neighborhood. In 1888, the Southside Land & Improvement Co. was incorporated and began buying land east and south of the park.⁹ With the extension of the trolley line to 41st Street, the area flourished as a "streetcar suburb." Beginning in 1815, nationwide changes in transportation technology provided a means for people to live at greater distances from the center of the city. The advent of the streetcar in the late 1800s, however, proved the greatest impetus to the development of

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suburbs.

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Forest Hill Park
City of Richmond, VA

Richmond was the first city to have a successful major electrical streetcar system. Placed into operation by Franklin J. Sprague, this system allowed convenient urban transportation to numerous suburban developments, many of which flourished with the presence of the streetcars.¹⁰

A.J. Bradley & Co., a real estate agency in Manchester, used Forest Hill Park's amenities as a lure to potential buyers. "This is not properly a park in the general accepted idea of parks. It is more properly a fragment of the widest mountain scenery...one of the most beautiful and picturesque bits of earth to be found anywhere."¹¹ The pamphlet went on to highlight two main features of the subdivision. The suburb was touted as highly accessible both by automobile, via the wide, tree-lined Semmes Avenue, and by the trolley line. The second asset of the subdivision was the presence of the park, which provided not only open spaces and recreational advantages, but a healthful environment of pure air and fresh breezes.

On May 24, 1890, the Southside Land & Improvement Co. held its "Grand Auction of Beautiful Suburban Lots in Woodland Heights, Virginia" at which the first lots in the neighborhood were sold.¹² Lots were advertised as 31' x 148' with rear alleyways. The subdivision encompassed the area from West 22nd Street on the east, to 34th Street and Forest Hill Park on the west, and from Bainbridge Street and Forest Hill Avenue on the south to Riverside Drive, the Richmond and Danville Railroad line, and the James River on the north. The "sylvan woods" of Forest Hill Park, then still located within the boundaries of Chesterfield County, were well known to Richmonders, Manchester residents, and others and the sale was well attended. By 1914, about 10 percent of the area was built and by 1920, nearly 40 percent was built.¹³ Many of the pre-1914 houses erected in the area are still standing, helping to retain the park's integrity of setting, association, and feeling.

Conveniently reached by the trolley, the park became a popular year-round entertainment destination. In the summer, outdoor movies were shown and the lake featured swimming and fishing areas. The lake was used in the winter for ice skating and, when snow fell, the hills of the park were quickly filled with sledgers. Although swimming and fishing are no longer allowed in the park, sledgers still flock to its steep hills during winter snows.

The trolley and park in Forest Hill continued in operation until the late 1920s. As the automobile gained popularity, the trolley lines lost ridership. By 1914, both old Manchester and the area of Forest Hill had been annexed by the City of Richmond. In 1925, the Virginia Electric and Power Co. (VEPCO) owned Forest Hill Park, but the amusement park was aging and in 1932, the park was closed and the rides and booths were dismantled. The property had been sold to VEPCO with the restriction that it remain "a park in perpetuity." The City of Richmond recognized an opportunity to obtain the land and provide its citizens with a beautiful place for residents to rest and relax. The city acquired the park's 97 acres from VEPCO at no cost on January 11, 1934.

The city undertook the restoration of the Rhodes House, using federal Civil Works Administration funds through the Emergency Relief Act. Ernest R. Gilbert, a local Richmond architect, was contracted to conduct the restoration, which included removing the wraparound porch and restoring handrails to the steps. A picnic shelter, a maintenance building, and the stone gazebo were built during this period. At the completion of the 1930s restoration, a bronze plaque was placed

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on the house by the Mayor of Richmond, J. Fulmer Bright, and Marie L. Rhodes, grandniece of Holden Rhodes. The inscription reads: "This tablet placed here in honor of Holden Rhodes, 1799-1857. Planter, Tutor, Jurist, Philanthropist. He erected this house in 1836."

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The Rhodes House became home to the park keeper, who lived on the upper floors. Beginning in 1936, the basement of the house was used by the Forest Hill Community Library, which formerly had been housed in the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church. By 1943, the library was made a branch of the *Richmond Public Library*, and in 1959, the branch moved to its own building on Westover Hills Boulevard.

Maintenance of the park and the development of the grounds continued through the second half of the twentieth century. Twenty-six "ornamental electric lights" were installed along the paths and round the lake and tennis courts were constructed near the Stone House. In the 1950s, the park's cobblestone roads were paved and the parking area near the picnic shelter was created. A second picnic shelter, additional stone walls, picnic tables, and water fountains were also added to the park during the 1950s. However, as southside neighborhoods declined and residents moved, the park was less used. A revitalization of the area began in the 1980s and more residents took interest in the neighborhood gem. The Friends of Forest Hill Park was organized in 1998 and sponsored the addition of a new playground and "tot lot" to the park's facilities. This was the first addition to the park in more than 25 years.

Since its acquisition by the city, Forest Hill Park has provided open space, recreational facilities, and a quiet retreat to the citizens of Richmond. The Rhodes House, now more often referred to as the Stone House, has become a focal point for community activities such as the Azalea Festival Parade, and it provides meeting place for various civic groups, such as the Forest Hill Garden Club.

ENDNOTES

1. Virginia Rives Rowe, "Forest Hill Garden Club Wins National Award for Wild Flower Preserve and Bird Sanctuary." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 21 May 1938, 11.
2. Lynne Ann George and Monica S. Rumsey, *An Illustrated History of Forest Hill Park* (Richmond, Virginia: Friends of Forest Hill Park, 1999), 20.
3. George and Rumsey, 4-5.
4. Mimi Sadler Whitehead and Camden Whitehead, Woodland Heights residents. 2002. Personal communication.
5. Gilbert (born 1901) was a native Richmonder who studied at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Richmond, the Richmond Professional Institute, and the University of Virginia. After working with Louis P. Smithy in Roanoke, Gilbert established his own office in Richmond in 1935. During 1947-1955, he worked in the Richmond offices of Merrill C. Lee and Marcellus E. Wright, Sr. In 1955, Gilbert became the architect for the Richmond public school system. John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects: 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1997).

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6. George and Rumsey, 17.

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7. Linda Flint McClelland, *Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service, 1916 to 1942* (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office, 1993), 1.
 8. Marie Tyler-McGraw, *At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, and its People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 203.
 9. Virginia Department of Historic Resources Site File #127-0830, Woodland Heights. Undated, typed manuscript on file in archives of Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond.
 10. Martha J. Bianco, "Streetcar Suburbs" in *Encyclopedia of Urban America: The Cities and Suburbs*. Neil Larry Shumsky, ed. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1988), 746-747.
 11. A.J. Bradley & Co., *Woodland Heights, Virginia*. (New York: The South Publishing Company), 13.
 12. Virginia Department of Historic Resources Site File #127-0830.
 13. Virginia Department of Historic Resources Site File #127-0830.
 14. Virginius Dabney, *Richmond: The Story of a City* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1990), 153.

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- George, Lynne Ann and Monica S. Rumsey. 1999. *An Illustrated History of Forest Hill Park*. Richmond: Friends of Forest Hill Park.
- Shumsky, Neil Larry, ed. 1988. *Encyclopedia of Urban America: The Cities and Suburbs*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.
- Tyler-McGraw, Marie. 1994. *At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, and Its People*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton. 1997. *The Virginia Architects: 1835-1955*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

All that property currently designated by the City of Richmond as Forest Hill Park, which is identified in the City of Richmond Tax Records as parcel S0000-2314/001 and consists of 105.187 acres.

Boundary Justification

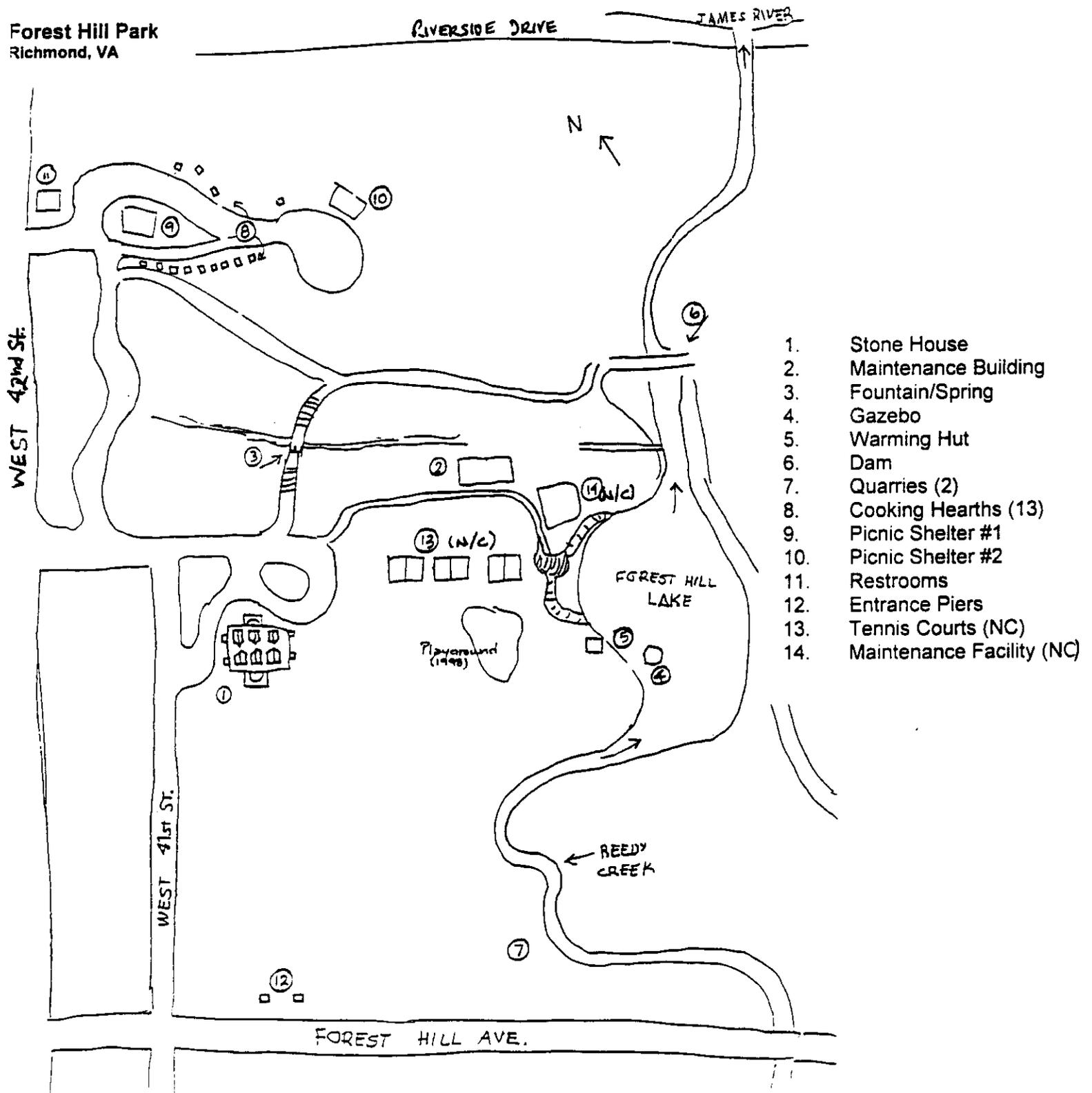
The boundary includes the property comprising the parcel listed above and generally described as that land between Riverside Drive on the north, Forest Hill Avenue on the south, 42nd Street on the west, and 34th Street on the east. This property has been the site of Forest Hill Park since its acquisition by the City of Richmond in 1934.

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Section Sketch Map Page 13

Forest Hill Park
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Forest Hill Park
 Richmond, VA
 Zone 18
 A: 281208E
 4155445 N
 B: 281021E
 4154993 N
 C: 281508E
 4154749 N
 D: 281859E
 4155521 N

430 000
 FEET
 POWHATAN 2 1/2 MI
 MIDLOTHIAN 9 MI

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
 Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and City of Richmond
 Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
 taken 1931. Topography by planetable surveys 1933-34. Revised 1964
 Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Virginia coordinate
 system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue
 1927 North American Datum (NAD 27)
 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks
 The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute
 intersections are given in USGS Bulletin 1875
 There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
 the National or State reservations shown on this map
 Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

(CHESTERFIELD)
 5458 1 NE

