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Springing Forth Anew: Progress, Preservation, and Park-Building at Roger Williams
National Memorial

A Thesis Presented

By

SARA ELIZABETH PATTON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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HISTORY

Public History

Springing Forth Anew: Progress, Preservation, and Park-building at Roger Williams
National Memorial

A Thesis Presented

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SARA ELIZABETH PATTON

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DEDICATION

For Joe, who always reminds me “I can even.”

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Thanks are first due to Christine Arato and LuAnn Jones, both mentors and colleagues in the National Park Service before I began the graduate school process. A lunch during the Organization of American Historians Conference in Providence first brought up Roger Williams National Memorial as the topic of an MA thesis project, and without their support for the project and insistence that I really should write an MA thesis, I would not have embarked on this process. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I was fortunate to write under the direction of Marla Miller, Department of History, and Ethan Carr, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. I am deeply appreciative of their willingness to allow me to blend landscape and history and for their critical eyes as editors. Marla Miller's successful bid for UMass to complete the National Register of Historic Places Documentation for Roger Williams National Memorial provided a stipend that allowed more time to focus on this work. Also within the history department, Jon Olsen has shaped my thinking about memory and memorial, which is reflected at critical points in this text. Sigrid Schmalzer also played a crucial role in shaping my writing during my first semester at UMass. At a critical juncture in this project, Serena Zabin reminded me that even as an historian, my past writing need not define my future.

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ABSTRACT

SPRINGING FORTH ANEW: PROGRESS, PRESERVATION, PARKS, AND PARK-BUILDING AT ROGER WILLIAMS NATIONAL MEMORIAL, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2017

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The process of local preservation, urban renewal, and national park building at Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence, Rhode Island, reveals important facets of the urban park idea. In 1958, the Providence Preservation Society and the Providence City Plan Commission jointly released the College Hill Study, which called for renewal of the College Hill neighborhood through preservation of the architecturally significant homes, selective demolition, and the creation of a new National Park Unit dedicated to Providence's founder, Roger Williams. The new park, established in 1965, went through a lengthy planning process before opening in 1984. The planning process revealed concerns about determining historical authenticity, supporting the revitalized historic district of College Hill, and preventing the park from becoming a haven for undesirable people and activities. Since its opening, the park has grown into a mature green space which is an important part of the civic and cultural life of Providence. The success of this park in fulfilling the goals of its planners and continuing to provide a valued green space for residents demonstrates an achievement that has important implications for ongoing urban park building by the National Park Service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER	
1. BRIDGING THE PAST AND PRESENT IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND.....	1
Introduction.....	1
A Lively Experiment: Roger Williams and Rhode Island	2
Urban Renewal In Providence	8
The College Hill Study	12
The National Park Service and the Eastern Parks.....	17
2. LEGISLATING A PARK.....	24
Introduction.....	24
Planning a Park	28
3. DESIGNING ROGER WILLIAMS NATIONAL MEMORIAL	40
Results of the Public Design Survey.....	50
Design Implementation.....	64
4. GROWING INTO THE COMMUNITY	68
5. MEANINGS OF A NATIONAL MEMORIAL	81
What is a National Memorial?	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	95

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Break Down of Design Survey Respondents by Affiliation.....	52

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map Showing Early Settlement in Providence. Courtesy National Park Service, Roger Williams National Memorial	6
2. Cohan Birthplace, 1958.	37
3. Cover of the Environmental Assessment, showing an aerial image of the park site following demolition in 1975.....	42
4. Alternative One, "Rolling Topography"	43
5. Alternative Two, "Granite Wall"	44
6. Alternative Three, "Sculptural Competition"	45
7. Alternative Four, "Lawn Terraces"	46
8. Final Design Schematic, courtesy Veri Waterman Associates.	66

CHAPTER 1

BRIDGING THE PAST AND PRESENT IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Introduction

Minutes away from Interstate 95, bordered on one side by a river and railyard and on the other by busy North Main Street, Roger Williams National Memorial appears as a refuge from the speed and noise of these pathways in and out of Providence, Rhode Island. Pulling into the parking lot, mature trees offer shade and paths and benches welcome a visitor to stay for lunch, walk the dog, or sketch one of the many temporary sculptures within the park. Sitting at the base of the College Hill National Historic District and the edge of downtown, the park serves as an entry point for individuals seeking to experience historic Providence or its modern downtown. Even though the park is small, only 4.5 acres, it is a green oasis for workers and residents seeking a break from the confines of the city.¹

Visitors could be forgiven if they missed the fact that the park is a unit of the National Park system, not a city park. They might also not realize that the park is dedicated specifically to Roger Williams or that the spring on the property is associated with the city's founding. While imposing signs in the parking lot typical of national parks announce that the park is a unit of the National Park system, visitors entering from the city side may wonder what the fanfare is all about as they wander a park with no clear memorial element such as a sculpture to attract their attention and frame their visit. While

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial*, by John Auwaerter and Karen Cowperthwaite, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2010, 1.

the National Park Service (NPS) park has recently updated waysides (permanent outdoor exhibit panels) within the park, which give a good overview of the site's history, there is little else, particularly non-textual material, to alert visitors that the park is dedicated to the memory of Roger Williams and his legacy of religious tolerance. Public programs, which are offered irregularly by the National Park Service, do little to fill this void. Ironically, this state of affairs would have suited the park's early advocates perfectly. They viewed the creation of a park as an essential tool to shape the complex project to renew downtown Providence, one in which urban renewal and preservation worked together, and one that would cement the successes of private preservation dollars for generations to come. The park would also be part of a larger public-private partnership to interpret the history of Providence. The success of this urban national park demonstrated how past and present could work together to create a new urban future, a goal once again *en vogue* today. The story of 4.5 acres in Providence offers insight into the ways urban parks become vital parts of their communities.

A Lively Experiment: Roger Williams and Rhode Island

The present day Roger Williams National Memorial (ROWI) sits on one of the earliest areas developed by Roger Williams and others seeking freedom of conscience in Providence. While many of the details of Williams's life, including his precise birthdate are unclear, there is a wealth of scholarly work on his life. Significant books include Perry Miller's *Roger Williams: His Contributions to the American Tradition*, *Master Roger Williams* by Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *The Gentle Radical: A Biography of Roger Williams* by Cyclone Covey, and *Roger Williams: The Church and the State*, by Edmund

S. Morgan. The most recent and fulsome scholarly biography is by Edwin Gaustad, so I have chosen to rely on his text for this brief biographical sketch.

Born in London in 1603, Williams came of age as the religious differences between the Church of England, Catholics, and other religious groups were particularly pronounced.² As a student studying to be a minister in the Church of England, Williams heard many of these arguments, and along with other students, believed that the Church of England must be purged of any remaining ties to Catholicism.³ His decision to join this group of dissenters—today better known as the Puritans—would set Roger Williams on the path towards even greater religious radicalism. Like many other Puritans, he eventually decided to start fresh in the new colony of Massachusetts Bay, where “taking only the New Testament as their pattern and guide, could fashion a pure, nonpolitical, uncorrupted, noncompromised church.”⁴

In 1630, Roger Williams and his wife, Mary Barnard, departed for the New World, arriving in February 1631. The couple initially proceeded to Boston, where Williams was quickly offered a position as a minister. However, Williams turned down the job offer because the church had not formally renounced ties to the Church of England and, therefore, did not meet Williams’s standards of religious purity.⁵ Moving to nearby Salem, Williams was again offered a position, and this time Boston authorities, perhaps angered by Williams refusal to accept their post, advised against hiring Williams.⁶ Williams next tried Plymouth Colony, where he lived from 1631-1633 when,

² Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

³ *Ibid* 5.

⁴ *Ibid* 4.

⁵ *Ibid* 6.

⁶ *Ibid* 7.

according to Plymouth governor William Brewster, he “began to fall into some strange opinions, and from opinion to practice.”⁷ Brewster failed to elaborate further, but we can imagine that his views probably reflected Williams’s growing concern for the treatment of native tribes and perhaps even nascent ideas about the separation of church and state. Williams’s concern for native tribes probably came from his effort to learn the language of the Narraganset tribe as part of his work to convert them to Christianity. While the conversion efforts were not particularly successful, Williams’s knowledge of their language would prove useful throughout the rest of this life.

Returning to Salem, Williams continued to stir up trouble, entering a variety of local debates about religion. Beyond these smaller matters, Williams, influenced by his contacts with the Narragansets, further inflamed tensions by suggesting that the royal patent granting land to the colony deprived the Narragansets of their land without payment or legal process, a decidedly un-Christian act. Many authorities saw Williams’s view as a direct challenge to the King’s authority. The General Court investigated, and while they did not charge Williams, this controversy marked the beginning of Williams’s consistent trouble with authority. Eventually, the court expelled Williams from the colony, and when he did not leave, the General Court ordered he be placed on a ship back to England, an even more dangerous place for a radical. Hearing of the order, Williams fled before authorities arrived at his home to formally banish him.⁸ Having worn out his welcome in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams left the English settlements, seeking a place where he thought he could establish a new colony for others, like him,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid 13.

“distressed for conscience.”⁹ Away from Massachusetts Bay, Williams encountered members of the Narraganset tribe, with whom in 1636 he negotiated an agreement for use of the land which is today Providence.¹⁰ Others with cause to separate from the Puritan settlement, including Quakers and atheists, soon joined Williams, and the community named Providence began to grow.

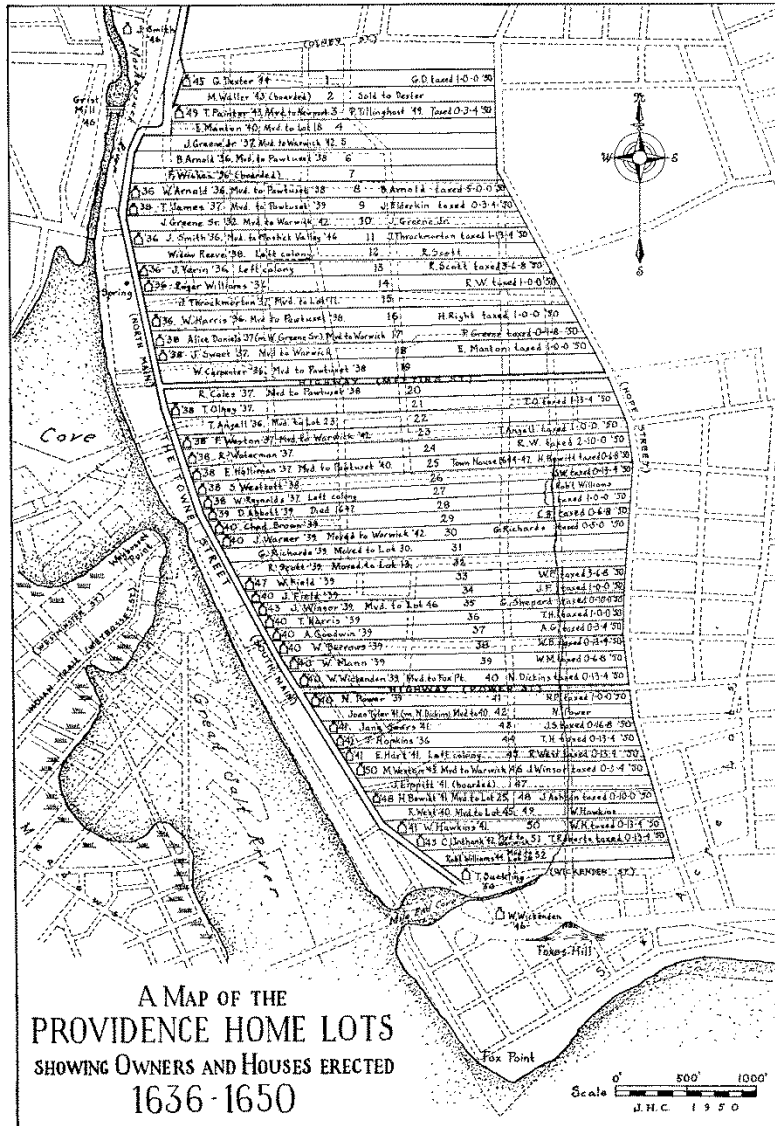
Williams would provide tremendous service to Providence throughout his life. He attempted to negotiate with tribes during King Phillip’s War (less than successful, as the Indians still burned much of Providence) and also traveled to England in 1643 and again in 1651 to negotiate a formal charter for the colony of Rhode Island.¹¹ The 1663 charter termed the new colony a “lively experiment” because it attempted for the first time to develop a government independent of religion, one that separated church and state. While enshrined in the Constitution today, the idea was so radical at the time that most observers expected Williams’s new settlement to quickly descend into immorality and anarchy. Therefore, the success of Providence marked a new chapter in human government and the history of the English colonies.¹² After his death in 1683, Williams became a hero to Rhode Islanders, who continue to pay homage to him today with a wide variety of civic buildings, parks, roads, and other aspects of the city named for him.

⁹ Providence City Plan Commission, *College Hill: A Demonstration Study of Historic Area Renewal* (Providence, 1967), 130.

¹⁰ Gaustad 14.

¹¹ PPS files, Roger Williams: A Brief Biography by Roger Williams Family Association. Statement on RW Park, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹² Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2006), 142.



Dotted lines indicate highway pattern in 1950.

Figure 1: Map Showing Early Settlement in Providence. Courtesy National Park Service, Roger Williams National Memorial

The Providence Williams laid out, however, has little bearing on modern Providence. In keeping with traditional English land-use patterns, Williams divided the lands into long, narrow strips, stretching from the river up the hill. (See Figure 1.) Land down the hill provided access to the river and shipping, while homes were set back from

the main street and associated farms were up the hill.¹³ As Providence did not yet have a church (and would not for many years) to serve as a meeting place, the earliest gatherings probably occurred near the fresh-water spring located on Williams's lot.¹⁴ Local legend suggests that it was this spring that drew Williams to the site that would become Providence in the first place, though the realities are likely more complicated and rooted in what land the Narraganset tribe was willing to grant Williams and was not already claimed by Plymouth Colony.¹⁵ The spring proved an important feature during the early years of Providence as evidenced by deeds requiring public access to the spring, known variously as Scott's Spring (associating the spring with a house lot across from it) or Tripe's Spring (associating the spring with the owner of the lot), must be maintained.¹⁶

As Providence developed, Gabriel Bernon and his descendants built on the spring lot, although the spring remained accessible from the road. In 1834, probably spurred by the approaching bicentennial of Providence, antiquarians and others sought the foundations of Roger Williams's house, which they determined had not survived. At the same time, T.M. Sumner, who had lived for three years as a child in Providence, produced a map showing the location of the spring based on his almost sixty-year-old recollections of the area in 1775.¹⁷ The map situated the spring enclosed in the rear yard of the Dodge house, on the site of Bernon's dwelling; Dodge provided a pump from the

¹³ Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial, 19.

¹⁴ Ibid 17.

¹⁵ Ibid 15.

¹⁶ In their document tracing the history of Roger Williams Spring, PPS assumes that these mentions of springs close to or on Williams's lot must refer to the same spring. However, since these sources are fragmentary, including a reference to the believed content of a lost map, it is difficult to know with any certainty if these references are to same spring. Resume History of the Town Spring Area, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Resume File 1963, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹⁷ Cultural Landscape Report, 31.

spring the road.¹⁸ This map, along with deed records referencing the spring, remain the key, and perhaps only, documents that allow us to trace the history of the spring as Providence grew and modernized. By 1843, local chronicler William R. Staples asserted that the spring was known locally as Roger Williams Spring. In 1875, road widening led the spring to be pumped out to Canal Street for public access, but in 1900 the Commissioner of Public works ordered the pump removed. At that point, public access was lost, and the spring drained into the sewer.¹⁹ After 1900 the spring, if still flowing, was not observable.²⁰ However, the history of the spring location would become an important aspect of the park building process in the 1960s.

Urban Renewal In Providence

Beginning in the 1790s, Providence's growth stemmed more from its industrial potential than from any promise of religious liberty. The primary industries first included textiles and later on, metal processing and jewelry. The 1824 Blackstone Canal offered easy transportation of goods, as did the harbor on the Providence River, and the city also participated in the transatlantic slave trade. Higher education, especially Brown University, also played an important role in shaping the city. While Providence was subject to swings brought about by wars and economic instability, the city was generally profitable from the early industrial period until the end of World War II.²¹ At that point, the decline in manufacturing began to leave some parts of the city filled with derelict

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For the Authentication of the Site of Roger William Spring: Summary of the History of Roger Williams Spring Site, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

²⁰ As the Cultural Landscape Report (128) points out, no study of the hydrology of the area has ever been conducted; however, such a study could resolve some questions relating to the authenticity or existence of the spring.

²¹ Rhode Island State Historical Preservation Commission, *Providence Industrial Sites, Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-6* (Providence, July 1981), 31.

buildings and structures that were vacant or minimally used.²² Meanwhile, residents flowed out of the city to newer, more desirable areas, leaving the downtown vacant and dilapidated.²³ Like many cities, Providence turned to city planning and urban renewal for answers. Urban renewal, while often associated with inner cities in the late 1960s and 1970s, in fact has roots in the Progressive Era, as well as Great Depression and New Deal period programs. Such projects revolved around the concept of “blight” and “slums.”

In his article “Blighting the Way,” historian Colin Gordon attempts to untangle the meaning of blight. Gordon traces the first uses of blight to the Progressive Era and works such as Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*, which raised awareness of the often dreadful conditions within cities. While Progressives tried to mitigate blight through social policy, they generally were not able to gain authority for concerted demolition efforts.²⁴ During the 1930s, blight became somewhat more clearly defined by various states and federal agencies as the agent of slum creation. In 1937 the National Association of Housing Officials defined a slum as “an area in which predominate dwellings that either because of dilapidation, obsolescence, overcrowding, poor arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitary facilities, or a combination of these factors, are detrimental to the safety, health, morals, and comfort of the inhabitants thereof.”²⁵ Their definition is typical and aligns with similar descriptions found in Providence planning documents. Urban renewal did not take off until 1949, however, when federal grants made money available for community redevelopment corporations to

²² Ibid

²³ Francis J. Leazes, Jr., and Mark T. Motte, *Providence, the Renaissance City* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 41.

²⁴ Colin Gordon, “Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 31 (2: 2003), 309.

²⁵ Ibid 310.

purchase blighted areas, demolish the buildings, and sell the land to private developers for redevelopment.²⁶ While the federal government left the definition of blight to the states, Gordon's thorough review of state law indicates that their definition "stopped short of defining blight and instead offered a descriptive catalogue of blighted conditions."²⁷

From these definitions, it is clear that blight applied not only to buildings, but also to the residents, who policymakers suggested could not help but be affected by their surroundings. Given the wretched state of these areas, it is not surprising that residents generally could not afford to live elsewhere, and were usually of low economic status. Therefore, urban renewal is frequently associated with clearance of "slum" residential neighborhoods and displacing the economically least fortunate, often black Americans or new immigrants. The process of demolishing these neighborhoods, often referred to as clearance, was lengthy. First, an area had to be determined blighted by the city, and local city planning efforts, typically called master plans, completed.²⁸ These efforts typically inventoried existing housing stock within the area to demonstrate its inadequacy and surveyed residents' social background and income. Destruction of whole city blocks, as often called for in these schemes, was expensive, and frequently cities applied to the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for assistance. If a project met HUD's criteria and current goals, it might receive federal funding.²⁹ That funding could come in the form of money for planning, demolition, and new construction. The planning process required by HUD, as demonstrated by the 15 three-

²⁶ Ibid 311.

²⁷ Ibid 312.

²⁸ College Hill Study, 101

²⁹ Lawrence J. Vale, *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 120.

ring binders containing the final report for one 1965 project in Providence, was extensive.³⁰ In addition to surveys, community meetings, and legal documentation, a city had to decide how they would accommodate those displaced and what would replace the demolished buildings.³¹ As is well-documented by urban scholars, few residents are able to afford to return to the “renewed” neighborhoods, and even units marked as “affordable” are often priced well above the means of the residents of the blighted area.³² As such, urban renewal projects can fairly be seen as ways to move poor and minority residents out of a city area and replace them with residents of a background and class seen as more appropriate to the area’s future development. For residents displaced, the loss of home and community can be severe and, for many, mean relocation to another slum or marginal area. In some cities, the cycle of urban renewal can be seen to repeat itself within the same grouping of blocks, creating further dislocation.³³

The East Side Urban Renewal Project, undertaken in Providence in 1957, is striking because, at least initially, the project involved relatively little clearance of residential areas.³⁴ Instead, the project’s centerpiece was a novel idea for the period—restoration and preservation of a historic area through private investment of the middle and upper class—to change the character and viability of a neighborhood. By 1956, Providence had already completed a series of master plans focusing on development, traffic, and education.³⁵ These plans were supplemented by several area studies of probable blighted areas. Of these, the College Hill Study was the most influential and

³⁰ East Side Renewal Final Report, City Archives of Providence, RI.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Vale 35.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Proposed Redevelopment Plan for the East Side Project No. RI R-4. Oct. 1965 R213-1, City Archives of Providence, RI.

³⁵ College Hill Study, 101

culminated in the East Side project, which included the College Hill Neighborhood (that is, the residential area that beginning in the 1770s was associated with Brown University) and the present day ROWI, which then contained commercial and light industrial areas. The planning process for urban renewal in this area was unusual, and merits closer study.³⁶

The College Hill Study

The College Hill Neighborhood, which corresponded to the area of earliest settlement and home building in Providence, suffered considerable decline during the boom and bust cycles of Providence industry. Many of the once beautiful eighteenth and early nineteenth century houses had fallen into disrepair or had quickly constructed modern houses built in their backyards.³⁷ By the 1950s, the neighborhood was a mixture of Black families and students attending nearby Brown University. Since most residents had very low incomes, it seemed unlikely that the homes would survive with historical features intact. Residents had little money for maintenance, let alone preservation. Yet at this juncture, Beatrice Chace, a long-time Providence resident with real estate and financial savvy, saw an opportunity to create value within the neighborhood by restoring it to its historic glory.³⁸ Chace began by purchasing and restoring one home and quickly moved on to restoring whole blocks, generally restoring the exteriors and updating wiring and plumbing. Notably, Chace left interior finishes to the new owner, which meant that a purchaser needed to not only be able to afford the home, but also be able to invest a

³⁶ Providence Preservation Society, "The College Hill Study: A PPS Legacy," Providence Preservation Society, <http://www.ppsri.org/60th-anniversary/college-hill-study> (accesses March 29, 2017)

³⁷ Because Providence was burned during King Phillip's War, few dwellings from early Providence survive. Given this, this area formed the largest concentration of the oldest buildings within Providence.

³⁸ Briann Greenfield, "Marketing the Past: Historic Preservation in Providence, Rhode Island," in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, ed. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 170.

significant amount in the new purchase immediately to make it livable. Hence, new purchasers were, at minimum, almost always of the middle class. According to historian Briann Greenfield, Chace sparked a boom in the purchase and restoration of College Hill properties, all of it funded with private initiative and money. Their success caused prices to skyrocket. Many of the previous Black residents were pushed out by rising rents or the allure of a high sale price if they owned their home.³⁹ The result was not only a restoration of a historic neighborhood, but an almost complete turnover in the economic and ethnic background of residents. Since this period of restoration came before government provided financial assistance, this change in racial composition seems most attributable to market forces, not racist agendas.⁴⁰ College Hill was desirable real estate once again but remained perched precariously on the edge of less than desirable areas: a commercial and warehouse district, as well as the Lippett Hill, Fox Point, and Constitution Hill neighborhoods, all eventually designated for traditional urban renewal.⁴¹ Adding to the mix were the three academic institutions—Brown University, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Bryant College—that all saw surging enrollment after World War II and the G.I. bill, and actively sought to expand their campuses to accommodate these students. This building boom included student residences, academic buildings, and parking garages.⁴² By 1957, the College Hill Neighborhood found itself at the intersection of a variety of impulses and interests, which ultimately brought together

³⁹ Wm McKenzie Woodward and Edward F. Sanderson, 61.

⁴⁰ In 1999, the Urban League of Rhode Island presented a workshop entitled “The African American College Hill Experience. The workshop, which drew sixty-five people was more about collecting their memories of College Hill through oral history. A summary of the event was published. The Urban League of Rhode Island. *African Americans of College Hill 1950-1979*. 1999.

⁴¹ Greenfield, 176.

⁴² College Hill Study 167-168.

the universities, businesses, city planners and private preservationists to envision its future.

A key mover to bring these parties to the planning table was the Providence Preservation Society. In 1956—the same year Chace bought her first property on Benefit Street—concerned citizens, including Chace, formed the Providence Preservation Society (PPS) in response to the proposed demolition of eighteenth and nineteenth century homes on College Hill.⁴³ Led by pioneering preservationist Antoinette Downing, the organization quickly became a part of most discussions in the city regarding urban renewal, preservation, and restoration.⁴⁴ Downing approached preservation as a professional; she was trained as an architectural historian at the University of Chicago and Radcliffe College.⁴⁵ Her book, *The Early Homes of Rhode Island*, remains the standard reference work for research on College Hill Properties and is well respected within the field of architectural history. The Providence Preservation Society served as a key planning partner with the city, and together they produced the College Hill Study in 1958. The report lays out the problems facing the area, possible solutions, and the potential long-term economic rewards of incorporating historic preservation and heritage tourism into city planning.

From its release in 1958, preservationists and planners nationwide have considered the College Hill Study a landmark in the field. The study received a citation from the American Institute of Architects in 1960, which stated: “No other city in the

⁴³ Providence Preservation Society, “Who We Are,” Providence Preservation Society, <http://www.ppsri.org/organization/who-we-are> (accessed February 1, 2017)

⁴⁴ Leazes and Motte, 66.

⁴⁵ Judy Klemesrud, “Her Mission is Preserving Providence,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/02/garden/her-mission-is-preserving-providence.html> (accessed March 29, 2017).

United States has presented its historic conservation and rehabilitation problems as clearly, as succinctly or as beautifully.”⁴⁶ Ongoing interest in the study is also reflected in an updated second edition, printed in 1966.⁴⁷ Commissioned by the Providence City Plan Commission and the newly founded Providence Preservation Society and funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the study set out to address the needs of these stakeholders and promised to save the soul and central business district of Providence through a combination of historic preservation supported by the city (creating a tourist gateway to downtown), preservation supported by private investment, university expansion, and slum clearance. An intensely preservation-minded report, the first of its three sections⁴⁸ were dedicated to a summary of preservation efforts in the United States to date, paying particular attention to cities or towns, many within New England, that had successfully retained old buildings and used them as tourist attractions, as well as museums like Old Sturbridge Village. Such “museum villages” typically assemble a variety of old buildings that probably never stood together so the public can experience a recreation of the past.⁴⁹ While planners eventually decided such a model was inappropriate for College Hill, their interest in reviewing both national and local case studies indicates that planners at least initially saw these models as helpful for thinking about how to present and market their own historic district. The second section of the report laid out their methodology for a survey of historic buildings within the College Hill Study area, primarily along Benefit Street. The survey form ranked the building by categories such as historical significance, architectural significance, importance to the

⁴⁶ College Hill Study, front matter to the second edition.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The second edition, published in 1966, included a fourth section which brought the reader up-to-date on the progress and success of implemented the ideas outlined in the original three sections.

⁴⁹ College Hill Study, 8-10.

neighborhood, integrity of original design, and condition.⁵⁰ The ratings for these categories generated a numeric score which allowed all of the buildings to be easily ranked and prioritized. This survey formed the rationale for the recommendations for conservation, restoration, and clearance in each section of College Hill Study area described in the report.

The study also envisioned a new National Park Unit dedicated to Roger Williams and located on the ancient spring associated with Williams and the founding of Providence. College Hill Study authors were clearly familiar with the role of the National Park Service in historic urban areas, and prior to the study's release, were already sending material to the National Park Service, hoping for a positive reception.⁵¹ The new park would serve as a gateway to a revitalized downtown and as the starting point of the imagined Benefit Street Historic Trail. The historic trail would lead visitors up to College Hill to view the restored historic neighborhood and connect visitors to programming offered by the Rhode Island Historical Society (1822), Providence Preservation Society, and the Benefit Street Association, a group of homeowners who, having restored their properties, sought to advocate for further restoration and tourism within the neighborhood. The report imagined an ongoing public-private partnership between the PPS, the Rhode Island Historical Society, residents, the City of Providence, and the

⁵⁰ College Hill Study, 76. The term "desecration" here is telling; repairs and modernization were not seen as the imperative of a modern owner, but rather intentional destruction of a sacred past.

⁵¹ Resume File for Roger Williams Spring Park Through 1960, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

National Park Service. As the basis of the East Side Renewal Project, the College Hill Study is rightfully considered one of the first examples of preservation-led renewal.⁵²

The National Park Service and the Eastern Parks

The plan's proposed new national park brought the National Park Service to Providence as a stakeholder in the project. The National Park Service brought a very different perspective to the considerations in Providence. Founded in 1916, the NPS formalized the care of two iconic western natural places—Yellowstone and Yosemite Valley. The first “rangers” in these parks were army scouts charged with keeping order and protecting the sites from visitors, and sometimes, visitors from the sites.⁵³ The Organic Act (1916), established the NPS as the government agency “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” As the agency grew, primarily in the West, it served to protect these remarkable places, though not often with a modern conservationist mindset. This period saw great development of hotels, concession operations, and other entertainment for tourists that today would be considered inappropriate for wildlife and nature.⁵⁴ As the system grew, so did pressures to bring the park system to the eastern United States. One of the best examples of this impulse to expand the NPS is the 1935 creation of

⁵² Providence Preservation Society, “The College Hill Study: A PPS Legacy,” Providence Preservation Society, <http://www.ppsri.org/60th-anniversary/college-hill-study> (accessed February 1, 2017). See also Heli Melltsner, ed., et al, *Saving Cambridge: Historic Preservation in America's Innovation City* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Historical Society, 2013) which references Cambridge activists use of the College Hill Study.

⁵³ Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 54.

⁵⁴ Meringolo, 55.

Shenandoah National Park, an effort with some notable lessons for understanding the NPS and park creation.

Shenandoah can be described as the culmination of a massive marketing campaign on the part of local business authorities—who hearing of the desire to create an eastern national park to compare with the western parks—offered up large tracts of land in Virginia. Their offer was quickly accepted, and the process of park creation began.⁵⁵ The survey process to determine if the land was appropriate for the park, much as in the case of Roger Williams, had less to do with suitability than with the choices of politically well-connected locals and the desire to create eastern units of the NPS.⁵⁶ More importantly, the creation of the park necessitated the displacement of mountain residents. Such displacement also occurred to Native tribes during the creation of the western national parks, but in the case of Shenandoah, the displacement of white residents was steeped in the language of social uplift.⁵⁷ That is—“backwards” mountain people could come down to the towns and receive better education, healthcare, and opportunities than they otherwise could have accessed. Therefore, their displacement was outweighed not only by the benefit to Americans who could now enjoy a “natural” park free from human intervention, but ultimately by the improved lives of displaced former residents. Hence, park creation was an instrument of social policy that offered social good not only to those who would visit, but to those forced to make way for the creation of the park.⁵⁸ The same rationale, in modified form, is also present in the formation of urban park units including ROWI, the Jefferson Expansion National Memorial, and the Independence

⁵⁵ Katrina M. Powell, *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 28.

⁵⁶ Powell 28.

⁵⁷ Powell 22.

⁵⁸ Powell 29.

National Historical Park. It is notable that park creation regularly involves the displacement of people and change within a landscape to create the desired aesthetic and visitor experience.

The way the NPS viewed the landscapes it managed changed significantly with the addition of historic sites to the NPS beginning in the 1930s. Denise Meringolo in her survey of the earliest history programs within the NPS notes that their inclusion came from the expansionist aims of Director Horace Albright, and also served to begin professionalizing the practice of history within the NPS as it became apparent that more historic sites would become part of the system.⁵⁹ Albright also eventually achieved his goal of transferring War Department historic sites, including battlefields, to the NPS.⁶⁰ These transfers, made via executive orders from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, positioned the NPS as an organization protecting special places, both natural and historical. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 cemented this role for the NPS and established advisory boards to assist in the determination of significant sites.⁶¹ National Historic Sites quickly spread the National Park System across the Eastern United States. The expansion, however, was not without challenges.

Early on, determining the authenticity of historical sites proved a problem. While not unique, the case of George Washington's Birthplace National Historic Site is an excellent example. The site of Washington's birthplace was marked only by a descendant, George Washington Parke Custis, around 1816, and notably, the building

⁵⁹ Meringolo 97-98.

⁶⁰ Ibid 111.

⁶¹ Ibid 123.

itself had burned in 1779.⁶² Relying on local memory, Custis marked what he believed was the area of the home site as part of his efforts to commemorate Washington.⁶³ These commemorative efforts were later taken up with almost equal zeal by the Wakefield National Memorial Association, a women's organization founded to protect and reconstruct Washington's birthplace.⁶⁴ As ably demonstrated by Seth Bruggeman, the NPS had deep reservations about the integrity of the site from their earliest involvement. Archeological work conducted by nearly every superintendent made it quite clear that not only was the reconstruction in the wrong place, but that it reflected a home, based on excavation of foundations, very unlike the probable birthplace.⁶⁵ While it would take years for the NPS to be fully open about the misplacement of the reconstruction and its architectural inaccuracies, the results of the archeology were well-known to those within the agency, and as a result, the NPS became increasingly cautious of historical sites without clearly authenticatable backgrounds. This suspicion explains some of the NPS's responses to the proposed Roger Williams National Park.

ROWI is not the only urban national park that owes much of its present condition to urban renewal. The construction of the St. Louis Arch, Jefferson Expansion National Memorial proceeded in 1939 following clearance of historic 1850s waterfront of St. Louis.⁶⁶ Based on an early urban renewal project, the arch was completed in 1967, but another, also important, part of the city's past vanished beneath it. The sole survivor of

⁶² Seth C. Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 10.

⁶³ *Ibid* 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 112.

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Administrative History: Jefferson Expansion Memorial National Historic Site, 1935-1980*, by Sharon A. Brown, 1984, National Park Service https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/jeff/adhi1-2.htm (accessed February 6, 2017).

the purge, the 1828 courthouse, site of the first two trials of the Dred Scott case, was remodeled into a museum for the NPS.⁶⁷ Likewise, the creation of Independence National Historical Park in the 1950s cleared a significant nineteenth century neighborhood in order to return Independence Hall and other extant buildings closer to their appearance during the era of the American Revolution.⁶⁸ Clearance efforts in both parks radically reshaped the landscapes and the people who felt welcome in them, a pattern that is still clear in these parks today. At Independence, for example, recent research into park visitation suggests that feelings of being unwelcome or out of place are particularly strong among Blacks who do not feel a connection to the story the park tells and, in some cases, were among those displaced to make way for the park.⁶⁹

In some ways, ROWI shares this history, as the majority of the park is land cleared during the urban renewal process. On the other hand, while the creation of Independence and Jefferson Expansion cleared away buildings that arguably possessed architectural significance, ROWI did not.⁷⁰ Since this area was not residential, and therefore clearance did not require removing people from their homes, planners approached the project primarily on the basis of architectural merit. The College Hill Study argued that the area included mostly commercial buildings are warehouses not of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Constance M. Greiff, *Independence: The Creation of a National Park* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 79-87.

⁶⁹ Roger C. Aden, *Upon The Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 49.

⁷⁰ In Saint Louis, several NPS project managers assigned to the site believed that demolition would rob St. Louis of some of its history and made arguments to their superiors. However, they were overruled due to lack of funding, and the courthouse was restored in part to appease these voices. (see Brown, *Administrative History*, 60-64) At Independence, initial Master Planning for the Park between 1952-1954 presented four different plans, one of which would have retained much of the nineteenth century architecture. The plan did have some support, but was ultimately overruled by Director Conrad Wirth's preference for the creation of a "shrine" that featured a few key historic buildings with a cleared landscape around them. (See Greiff, *Independence: The Creation of a National Park* 86-87.)

exceptional (or even secondary) significance.⁷¹ As always in these cases, it is important to remember that our ideas of significance, as Daniel Bluestone points out, evolve, and that a building that may not meet the standards of the preservation guidelines of the day may well be an architectural treasure of tomorrow. Hence, we must be careful asserting that the buildings removed from the site carried no significance.⁷² Still, it is important to note that the example of Independence National Historical Park was at least on the minds of the College Hill Study's authors as they recommended developing a National Park Unit on the spring site. In the "Recommendation Program," the study states,

This proposal...is meant to follow closely the pattern set down in Philadelphia where the National Park Service is currently developing the Independence Hall National Historic Park, the first such park of its type in the nation. This proposal seeks to extend the Park Service's activity in the important area of developing in-city national historic parks for growing urban populations.⁷³

This attitude suggests that planners in Providence were not operating in a vacuum and could already see the demonstrated benefit of urban renewal partnered with preservation in historically significant areas like Philadelphia. Their attention to other efforts in New England to use preservation to generate tourism is also indicative of their interest in using preservation to change the neighborhood and making Providence a tourist destination. It is interesting to note that both Independence and ROWI focused on stories of the founding of the United States and essential principles of freedom. While outside the scope of this study, it is worth considering whether these sites served an important myth-making purpose well beyond urban renewal and historic preservation.

⁷¹ College Hill Study, 86.

⁷² Max Page and Marla Miller, eds, *Bending the Future: Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 54.

⁷³ College Hill Study, 186.

Reviewing the College Hill Study makes it clear that Providence residents, planners, and preservations were reflecting on the future of their city at a time favorable to both preservation and urban renewal. The study, funded by HUD, reflects both the idea that blighted urban areas must be remedied, by demolition if necessary, and local desire to replace dilapidation with new construction and open space. At the same time, it was recognized historic value in ways that few previous projects did. It is unlikely that the historic value of these properties would have been recognized through local preservation efforts and advocacy in advance of the study. Planning efforts in Providence also came during the successful development of Independence National Historical Park and at a time when the National Park Service sought to invest in urban areas, making the project appear both possible and attractive. The College Hill Study recognized the rising interest in heritage tourism as evidenced in successes around the United States like Independence National Historical Park, and sought to use Providence's historic past to help transform the city into a tourist destination. Altogether, these factors meant that both local and national governments were very receptive to the ideas presented in the study, and the project moved forward quickly with sustained local interest.

CHAPTER 2

LEGISLATING A PARK

Introduction

While ROWI is a well-integrated part of Providence today, its road to establishment was rough. Following the decision to implement the College Hill Study in 1959 as part of the East Side Renewal Plan, longtime Rhode Island senator, TF Greene (1937-1961), introduced a bill to the Senate to establish the park. The bill initially got little traction but then was passed as a retirement gift of sorts for Greene. Unfortunately, the bill was not taken up by the House of Representatives, and advocating for the park fell Greene's successor, 43-year-old veteran and diplomat Claiborne Pell.⁷⁴ Pell took up the task, and soon found that beyond dealing with his fellow legislators, the site needed at least minimal NPS approval. With some nudging from Pell and the PPS, the site was prominently included in an NPS theme study, probably *Development of the English Colonies 1700-1775*, released in 1960.⁷⁵ The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Site, Buildings and Monuments, which reviewed theme studies and prepared reports to Congress on proposed additions to the National Park System, however, did not recommend the site for inclusion. In September 1961, the Board stated that:

Changed conditions at the spring area...have rendered it unrecognizable as the seventeenth century spring of Roger Williams's time. Under the circumstances it

⁷⁴ Resume File for Roger Williams Spring Park Through 1960, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

⁷⁵ Within the NPS planning structures, theme studies address a specific theme or period in American history and then seek to identify important places that reflect the theme. Resume File for Roger Williams Spring Park Through 1960, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. PPS records do not reference a specific theme study, just the idea of colonization through 1700. A review of the NPS theme studies suggests that that is likely the theme study based on topic and date of publication; however, copies of this study are out of print and could not be obtained by this author.

is our opinion that National Monument status is not appropriate. Moreover, in view of these changed conditions, which destroyed the integrity of the spring area as an historical exhibit, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments has consistently refused to recommend the area for either National Monument or National Historic Site status.⁷⁶

However, the letter recommended that, as National Memorials are chosen by Congress, that such an option might be worth pursuing. Supporters in Rhode Island saw no issue with the change in designation type and pushed the bill back through; this time it received NPS recommendation and passed. The Roger Williams National Memorial was officially designated as of October 25, 1965. Reflecting on this period, it is significant that the designation of National Memorial, as an alternative to a National Historic Site, did not trouble its supporters. Questions of the site's legitimacy seemed to matter little to Rhode Island proponents. A section of the background book—a summation of proposals for the park and about the area put together for congressmen—states,

Another function of the park would be to help stabilize the history residential area now in process of reclamation from near slum conditions. Over a million and a half dollars of private money have been invested in this phase of the college hill program. A good open park at the western edge of the area would be of great benefit to the whole residential complex. It would also open up an impressive vista across to the state house. This park could go far toward securing the historic and residential character of this area permanently.⁷⁷

The park's boosters had big dreams for the area that the establishment of a national park could legitimize; these motives were perhaps more important than memorializing Roger Williams. Like at the Independence National Historical and the Jefferson Expansion National Memorial, park creation not only called attention to important local and national

⁷⁶ Glen A. Carver, Jr., to Wayne N. Aspinall, 25 September 1961, Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

⁷⁷ Background Book: Proposed Roger Williams National Memorial, 89th Congress (1965-66), Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

history but also acted as a tool for urban planning. Therefore, the park had a larger purpose for its boosters and was always about more than Williams.

But the new national park faced a significant problem: none of the necessary demolition had yet occurred, leaving the park instead an industrial, if condemned, area. Despite the creation of the park in October 1965, buildings were not be demolished until early 1975, leaving the park in limbo for almost a decade. Even after the buildings on the park site were demolished, the area remained a graded, unimproved lot, much to the irritation of residents. In the fall of 1975, the NPS planted grass on the area, but it was clear the park Providence advocates envisioned would be longer in coming.⁷⁸ In 1980, on the fifteenth anniversary of the park's establishment, a columnist at the *Providence Journal* published a piece called, "We Should Make Today Fed Up Day."⁷⁹ While the new national memorial, often referred to as Roger Williams Spring Park, remained an empty, if now grassy, lot, the residents of Providence did have other memorial parks to Williams with which they could distract themselves.

Williams's significance to the history of Providence was not lost on later residents. The city is full of buildings, parks, and institutions named for him. Of significance are some of the formal memorial efforts, including Roger Williams Park (1871); Prospect Terrace (1877; statue of Williams added 1939); and Roger Williams Spring Park, also known as the Hahn Memorial (1933). Roger Williams Park on the west side of Providence consists of 102 acres, which today includes a zoo. In 1871, Williams's descendant, Betsey Williams, donated her farm to the city in honor of her great-great-

⁷⁸ Roy Weaver to Files, December 2, 1975, Correspondence 1975, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

⁷⁹ Mark Patinkin, "We Should Make Today Fed Up Day," *Providence Journal*, August 27, 1980.

great-grandfather to create a park with the stipulation that it carry Williams's name and a monument to him.⁸⁰ The monument featured Williams standing on a pedestal holding a book inscribed with the words "soul" and liberty. At the base of the pedestal, Clio, the muse of history, inscribed "Providence 1636" (year of the city's founding) on the pedestal.

Another donation to the city created a pocket park in 1933 on the apparent location of Roger Williams Spring. Renamed the Hahn Memorial by the NPS following acquisition of the park from the city in 1974, the formally landscaped park designed by Norman Isham was set below grade and was designed to nestle between buildings on either side of the site. It commemorates Isaac Hahn, the first Jewish resident elected to public office and was funded by his son, Jerome Hahn, one of the first Jewish judges in Rhode Island. Hahn believed that his success would not have been possible without Williams's religious tolerance.⁸¹ Hence the park served as a monument to his success and to Williams's vision.

Nearby Roger Williams Spring Park, there is also a large sculptural memorial to Williams, constructed in 1939, on a hill opposite the State House, known as Prospect Terrace. The statue of Williams changed the park, previously just a terrace built in the 1870s looking over the city; the memorial also coincided with the reinterment of Williams's remains at the base of the terrace. Planning for the new national memorial centered around Roger Williams Spring Park, which in 1975 stood as one of three

⁸⁰ Roger Williams Park Zoo, "History of Roger Williams Park Zoo," Roger Williams Park Zoo <http://www.rwpzoo.org/103/history-roger-williams-park-zoo> (accessed February 2, 2017) and Cultural Landscape Report, 32.

⁸¹ National Park Service, "Hahn Memorial" National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/rowi/learn/historyculture/hahnmemorial.htm> (accessed January 30, 2017)

remaining features (the Antram-Gray House and Bernon Grove were the others), on the vacant lot. As the NPS began to think about what shape the new memorial could take beyond a grassy field, the status of the spring site would remain a key consideration.

Planning a Park

As the park took shape, the NPS, the PPS, and the City of Providence as well as concerned citizens discussed a variety of schemes to develop the park. As might be expected, the purpose of the park, and thus the design it should have, was different for each of these stakeholders. Detailed records from the PPS, the NPS, and the City of Providence document this process. Included in these records are transcripts of public meetings, notes from community meetings, and opinion sheets collected from residents and stakeholders. These documents reveal the challenges of the urban park building and make clear the purposes urban parks for their constituents.

As described previously, the urban renewal process requires significant city planning, surveying, and consultation with residents, though the degree to which planners' takes their concern varies significantly depending on the power and connections of the group raising them. Within these records, we see the earliest discussion of park design. While many community meetings took place, the public hearing of the Committee on Urban Renewal, Redevelopment, and Planning of the City of Providence City Council held on August 31, 1966, is the best documented. As part of the legally required planning and documentation process, the meeting was recorded by a short hand transcriptionist.⁸² The transcript reveals a contentious hearing, probably made

⁸² In the meeting transcript, Stanley Bernstein, head of the PRA in fact alludes to meetings, many which happened in the Fox Point auditorium, which shaped the redevelopment plan to the point of the meeting for approval. Notes from these meetings do not appear to be extant. East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing,

worse by early evening August heat, and is one of the few archival sources where we can hear residents discussing the plan. At the time of the meeting in 1966, the College Hill Study had evolved into a larger plan of action called the East Side Project, which encompassed more land than the initial study recommended. The East Side Project was bordered by downtown Providence to the west, Lippett Hill to the north, Brown University to the east and to the south by the water front and Fox Point neighborhood. ROWI's site was primarily bordered by downtown Providence and the interior section of the College Hill neighborhood not slated for clearance. Thus, ROWI was of little concern for many of the attendees who did not share a border with the proposed part but still sought to affect the character of the project which would reshape their neighborhoods.⁸³

The meeting took place at Fox Point Elementary School, within the bounds of the East Side Project, and one of the neighborhoods slated for at least partial clearance. Fox Point, located at the south end of College Hill, was initially identified as a "peripheral area" in the College Hill Study, which notes that some of the housing was in good condition, while some showed signs of blight. College Hill was also bordered to the north by Lippett Hill, already undergoing urban renewal planning and was cleared before the start of the College Hill project. Therefore, Lippett Hill served as a negative point of reference on urban renewal for meeting attendees. As the College Hill Study morphed into the East Side project, Fox Point was folded into the project, much to the consternation of some residents who had witnessed the clearance of Lippett Hill which

November 1966, page 28, East Side Renewal Project No. RI R-4: Part II Local Approval Data, Binder 10, City Archives of Providence, RI.

⁸³ College Hill Study, 89

remained under redevelopment.⁸⁴ These tensions are evident within the meeting transcript.

Throughout the meeting, attendees became increasingly acquainted with a man, eventually identified as Mr. Dias, who was a strong advocate for the Fox Point neighborhood. His comments show concern that residents did not fully understand the legal basis for clearance, as he asked the chairman to read aloud the city ordinance, known as the Redevelopment Act of 1956:

I want to thank you for enlightening all these people. Since 1948 this is what you are talking about. How many people here knew what you were talking about? Even though you live there, this is your property. You are the people.⁸⁵

This interaction suggests that Mr. Dias believed that many property owners in the neighborhoods designated for clearance did not understand their rights. Dias's assertion is borne out in later comments from several other residents stating that they did not know the details of the process.⁸⁶ Fox Point did have some deteriorating housing stock and was frequently described as a Portuguese immigrant neighborhood, although many other groups also lived in the area.⁸⁷ This characterization of the Fox Hill neighborhood may have led to the plan being communicated poorly, if at all, to these residents.⁸⁸

While Congress had legally created the park in 1965, buildings still occupied the park area, and no plans for park design were under consideration. Perhaps because of this

⁸⁴ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, August 31, 1966, 47.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁷ Wm McKenzie Woodward and Edward F. Sanderson, *Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources* (Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986), 17.

⁸⁸ Second Fox Point Community Congress, May 20, 1973, page 6, Fox Point Community Organization, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

ambiguity, even with the park settled as a matter of law, park advocates spoke up. William Slater Allan, an attorney, resident of the Benefit Street area and, along with his wife, very active in the PPS, spoke on behalf of the PPS and the Benefit Street Association, the most prominent of the College Hill neighborhood associations. His remarks centered on the success of private preservation and sought to draw attention to the considerable investments already made in the homes. Addressing a key concern of these groups, he requested a change in the current rehabilitation language, which suggested that if improvements were made after a fixed survey date, a property might still be cleared even though it had been rehabilitated.⁸⁹ These remarks reveal that preservation was a strong value for residents on Benefit Street, but so was protecting the considerable investment they had made in preserving the homes. As would become evident in park design discussions, the East Side Renewal project was also about cementing College Hill as a highly desirable middle and upper class neighborhood.

PPS President Washington Irving underscored this concern by addressing proposed zoning changes. Current plans proposed changing the zoning for the Benefit Street area from R-4 to R-2. R-4 zoning allowed for multifamily residences, in this case often “rooming houses” that catered to students and were viewed by residents as symptomatic of slum landlords and decline. By contrast, R-2 zoning allowed for, at most, a duplex type arrangement for two families.⁹⁰ Changing the zoning in this way would exclude some groups like newer immigrants, Blacks, and students from the neighborhood, as it was beyond their price point. A zoning change would forcibly alter

⁸⁹ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, August 31, 1966, page 55.

⁹⁰ Official Redevelopment Plan for the East Side Project No. RI R-4, November 7 1966, East Side Renewal Project No. RI R-4: Part II Local Approval Data, Binder 10, City Archives of Providence, RI.11-15.

the character of the neighborhood by placing strict limits on the types of housing. Thus, by placing the full support of his organization behind zoning changes, Irving was explicitly advocating for a specific type of resident and actively seeking to shape the neighborhood to safeguard private investments, just as Slater-Allan had done.

Having established the desired character of the renewed College Hill neighborhood, Irving presented his concerns that ROWI would not improve the quality of the College Hill neighborhood because the highway design for Interstate 95 would make the park “impossible to develop attractively.”⁹¹ Questions of design were also clearly evidenced in the remarks of Joseph K. Ott, president of the Benefit Street Association, which centered on concerns about the need for parking, traffic reduction, and stronger zoning specifically targeting institutional growth and high-rises to protect the area.⁹² Several other residents also spoke up to address their concerns about parking and completion of the park. Of note, none of these statements expressed strong discontent with the proposals, merely suggesting small changes, and many of them explicitly stated that they or their organization wished to go on record as supporters.⁹³ Of course, at the time of this meeting, resistance must have appeared futile, since the legislation creating ROWI had been signed into law the previous year. Still, residents seized on the opportunity to direct the future of the as-yet unbuilt park.

These comments at the public meeting reveal several important things. First, they suggest that the basic redevelopment of Benefit Street was considered *fait accompli* by 1966. So much had already occurred that what remained was codifying these gains with

⁹¹ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, August 31, 1966, page 58.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, page 74.

zoning regulations and the installation of historically appropriate services (underground wiring) and fixtures (benches and lighting).⁹⁴ Second, they suggest that this part of the East Side Plan was only an issue for residents of the Benefit Street area; the only non-resident to speak on the plan was Mr. Dias who, unsurprisingly, demanded the hearing return to the question of Fox Point. Dias's demands emphasize the sense that the College Hill aspects of the plan were a done deal, and that residents of other areas felt they had little to gain or to lose from that part of the plan and, therefore, focused their attention on concerns very literally closer to home. Finally, the comments clearly speak to the power of private preservation dollars and their ability to create a de facto historic area, as noted by the resident describing "dozens of buses emptying thousands of visitors... They come to look at the old 18th and 19th century house and feel the charm of College Hill."⁹⁵ In short, zoning or no, Roger Williams Spring Park developed, or not, College Hill was already a historic tourist attraction.

These preservation successes are important to contrast with one of the final topics covered in the August hearing: George M. Cohan's birthplace. Born on the Fourth of July, 1878, in Providence, Rhode Island, George M. Cohan grew up to be a musical theatre and popular song giant.⁹⁶ He is best known for composing the patriotic mega hits "You're a Grand Old Flag" and "Over There," along with many other hits and Broadway productions; President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded Cohan the Congressional Medal of

⁹⁴ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, November 1966, page 73.

⁹⁵ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, November 1966, page 62.

⁹⁶ While he claimed to have been born on July Fourth, this was likely a publicity stunt, and most biographers concur with the city record which records his birth as the third. The New York Times, "George M. Cohan, 64, Dies at Home Here," *New York Times*, November 6, 1942, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0703.html#note> (accessed Feb. 9, 2017).

Honor in 1940 for “Over There.”⁹⁷ Cohan grew up in the Fox Point neighborhood, living there until he was about eight years old when he began his acting career by joining traveling productions along with his parents.⁹⁸ Cohan died in New York City in 1942, and that same year Cohan was memorialized in Providence when the city installed a plaque on his birthplace.⁹⁹ In 1959, he was remembered by New York City with a sculpture on Broadway.¹⁰⁰

Near the close of the meeting, Katherine Tucker rose on behalf of several veterans’ organizations to advocate for preserving Cohan’s birthplace at 536 Washington Street in Fox Point. Tucker was a long-time advocate for the home, outlined Cohan’s impressive career and early life in Fox Point, and she recited the variety of honors the city had already bestowed on Cohan, including an ordinance stipulating that his music always be played in appropriate places in the Fourth of July. Based on this history, she argued strongly for the preservation of his birth place, located near a proposed new location for the Boy’s Club.¹⁰¹ Several other veterans rose to discuss the importance of instilling patriotism in young people and how the birthplace would be an effective location for teaching history and patriotism which might even be incorporated in some form into the Boy’s Club.¹⁰² However, the discussion quickly turned back to demands

⁹⁷ PBS, “Broadway: The American Musical: The Stars: George M. Cohan,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/george-m-cohan/> (accessed Feb. 9, 2017).

⁹⁸ Ibid. It is worth noting that throughout his life, Cohan displayed little attachment to Rhode Island or Fox Point, perhaps because many memories centered around difficulties in school and an extended family he did not like. Certainly, efforts to memorialize him in Rhode Island did not come from Cohen.

⁹⁹ Gerard H. Heroux, “The Rhody Colossus,” Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame Historical Archive, <http://www.ripopmusic.org/musical-artists/composers/george-m-cohan/> (accessed Feb. 9, 2017).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, November 1966, page 111.

¹⁰² East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, November 1966, page 117.

that those displaced be guaranteed housing in the new developments built after demolition. Cohan's birthplace then disappears from the record.

So, what happened to the birthplace? By all accounts, while the Boy's Club was relocated, Cohan's birthplace appears to have been eventually demolished.¹⁰³ On face value, this seems like an odd conclusion. As Seth Bruggeman demonstrates in *Born in the USA*, Americans generally view birthplaces as highly formative to an individual's character. After the individual achieves greatness, birthplaces can be viewed as places which inculcated them with the values that led to their success.¹⁰⁴ Birthplaces can also become places important to contemporary economies and indicators of civic health. At the same time since the specifics of the birth home have typically faded or been effaced or demolished, their creation or recreation reflects what people believe about the great individual at the time, not necessarily historical truth. In other words, birthplaces are where mythmaking begins.¹⁰⁵ And, in visiting these places, which often become shrine-like or essential travel for the individual's supporters, we see the further development of the great individual's character and elevation of his or her status within larger narratives of American history. Given that Cohan had died relatively recently, had strong meaning for those in the audience (and, evidently, for at least some for Providence residents based on earlier memorialization efforts), and historic preservation was at the heart of the College Hill Study, why did Benefit Street survive and Cohan's birthplace disappear?

¹⁰³ A 1958 article notes that the Boy's Club was moved; however, the house does not stand today, though an exact demolition date is unknown. Kiki Scotti, "Grand Old Flag Will Fly Over Cohan Homestead," *The Providence Journal*, November 10, 1966.

¹⁰⁴ Seth C. Bruggeman, *Born in the USA: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

The demolition of the Cohan house demonstrates the limits of preservation in urban renewal and also the limits of Providence's belief in the greatness of Cohan. Cohan's birthplace was recognized as potentially significant and formally evaluated during the College Hill Study in 1958. However, in a special report to Mayor Reynolds, reviewers concluded that the building, described as "late modified Greek Revival Type," which could be found throughout the city, did not possess significant architectural merit of its own. A 1958 newspaper article also emphasized its non-descript character and described it as "a trim two-and-a-half-story apartment building."¹⁰⁶ (See Figure 2.) Further, reviewers felt that its location would not attract visitors if it was made into a museum; instead, the reviewers thought that the street named for Cohan, the marker on his birthplace, and the memorabilia in local special collections was monument enough. The lack of support from organized preservation groups likely dissuaded the Fox Point Community Organization from taking further action.

¹⁰⁶ "Geo. M. Cohan Shrine Urged in Providence," *The Evening Bulletin*, January 18, 1958. Image of the home (figure two) accompanied the article.



Figure 2: Cohan Birthplace, 1958.

A Fox Point Community Organization did spring up in January 1972. The group created a Fox Point Congress, and included delegates from other important citizen organizations in the city, including the PPS, which has retained some of the records related to the Fox Point organization.¹⁰⁷ These records clearly show that the Fox Point neighborhood did have problems. Two of the top concerns were removing junk from yards and persuading the police to resume regular patrols of the area.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, part of the organization's mission was similar to that of Benefit Street: to encourage the purchase and restoration of historic homes. However, this idea never gained much

¹⁰⁷ Fox Point Community Organization to Mr. Chase, January 13, 1972, Fox Point Community Organization, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹⁰⁸ Summary of Resolutions to be Submitted by Resolutions Committee on the Floor of the Congress, Fox Point Community Congress, April 16, 1972, Fox Point Community Organization, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

traction in practice, although it is clear that residents sought to improve their homes and actively challenged slum lords, sometimes going as far as to stage public complaints in their offices.¹⁰⁹ The fate of the George M. Cohan Birthplace does not appear in discussions or resolutions from the group, suggesting that the negative report to the mayor made by College Hill planners may have sealed the home's fate. Even if some viewed it as important, they did not see it as a solution to deeper neighborhood problems. Notably, the special report's first conclusion stated:

Architecturally, the Cohan birthplace does not particularly rate special preservation action. Its style is mediocre and represents an era not customarily associated with the famous man whose home it once was.¹¹⁰

This line, though crossed out in the digitized report by some later reader, reminds us that at his birth, Cohan and his family were living in a marginal, Irish-dominated neighborhood.

Perhaps Cohan, while memorialized, remained a slightly marginal character, coming from a transitory theatre family and not of unimpeachable character. When Cohan was born, the home was a rooming house owned by his mother's cousin Mary Ann O'Hearn. As she had with George's older sister, Josephine, Helen Cohan chose to give birth at her cousin's home. She left George in the care of her relatives, returning to performing with her husband, until George joined them on the road at the age of eight.

¹⁰⁹ Fox Pointers were often zealous in their efforts. An open letter to Mr. Ben Weiss, a property owner, in 1972 outlines how Mr. Weiss was invited to appear before the organization to explain the poor conditions of his properties, known to be infested with pests including roaches, mice, and rats. When Weiss did not appear, the organization organized a bus tour of his properties, and then invited him back. When Weiss again did not appear, members went to his home, where his brother drove them off the property with a gun and assaulted a photographer. Still undeterred, the members tried to meet with Weiss at his office; again, his brother drove them off. Seeing no other recourse, they resorted to an open letter. An Open Letter to Mr. Ben Weiss from Fox Point Community Organization, 1972, Fox Point Community Organization, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Note that the second sentence, stating that the home was mediocre, was crossed out by a later reader of the report.

Along with his sister, they performed as “The Four Cohans.”¹¹¹ Through the lens of urban renewal, which views residents as taking on the negative characteristics of their blighted neighborhood, it may have been impossible to see Cohan’s early upbringing as anything positive that should be preserved as a lesson to future generations. This example reveals the complexities of historic preservation; only when significant financing and community support can be generated, can preservation appear as an effective solution to blight.¹¹² Cohan’s supporters, evidently, could not muster enough of either.

¹¹¹ Gerard H. Heroux, “The Rhody Colossus,” Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame Historical Archive, <http://www.riopmusic.org/musical-artists/composers/george-m-cohan/> (accessed Feb. 9, 2017).

¹¹² Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 207-209.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGNING ROGER WILLIAMS NATIONAL MEMORIAL

The historic preservation impulse and organizing principles are only so effective in preventing demolition, and even Benefit Street residents worried about the impact of renewal on their growing historic neighborhood. Their responses to ROWI's development reveal that they saw the design of the park as a key moment in the neighborhood's future. In 1975, demolition of the area designated as Roger Williams National Memorial was complete. Left behind was a minimally graded lot—in some cases barely covering the cellar-holes and foundations left from demolition—along with the Hahn Memorial; Bernon Grove, a memorial grove established about the same time as the Hahn Memorial; and the Antram-Gray Watchshop. There was now open space for a park, owned by the NPS, but what should the park look like? The area was a blank canvas, or at least the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts certainly thought so. In an undated proposal extant in both the PPS and NPS files, the State Council on the Arts proposed a design competition to create a sculptural and landscape design for the park.¹¹³ Based on its placement in both organizations' files, the undated proposal probably came in early 1975, around the time the buildings on site were demolished.

Copies of the design competition outline with notes from both ROWI and the PPS illuminate the contrasting priorities of the two organizations. Notes on the PPS copy show a consistent preoccupation with compensating the jury and financing awards.¹¹⁴ The

¹¹³ Draft Proposal for Park Design Competition, Roger Williams National Park Committee, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. Draft Proposal for Park Design Competition, Park Design Competition, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹¹⁴ Draft Proposal for Park Design Competition, Providence Preservation Society Papers.

NPS marginalia instead focused on the rules and composition of the jury, putting particular emphasis on the competition, which as framed in the document required the selection of a design even if the jury did not like any of the submissions. Perhaps worst of all from the perspective of the federal agency, the NPS would only have one seat on the jury and, therefore, have little control over the outcome.¹¹⁵ This last aspect was the final straw for the NPS; the competition was scrapped shortly thereafter, and the design process delegated to the NPS's Denver Service Center, the central design and planning arm of the agency. While these notes offer imperfect insight into each organization, they do suggest that the NPS had strong concerns about the direction of the park. By turning over the design to the Denver Service Center, the design process was moved not only out of town but across the country. The NPS sought to assert control over the design directions for the park before seeking extensive public comment.

Founded in 1972, The Denver Service Center serves as a centralized design and planning center for the National Park Service. Teams of architects, park planners, landscape architects and designers create solutions for NPS units nationwide. Tasked with providing some design alternatives for ROWI, the Denver Service Center undertook an Environmental Assessment. In NPS terms, an Environmental Assessment reviews the site's legislated purpose; outlines the community the site is located, including population, parking, and flora and fauna; and provides a context or base line that will be used to determine the impact, essentially the pros and cons, of each of the design proposals.¹¹⁶ The completed assessment also becomes part of the early park documentation that in turn

¹¹⁵ Park Design Competition, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Environmental Assessment of Development Concept Alternatives, Roger Williams National Memorial, Providence Rhode Island, 1977*, i.

informs the General Management Planning (GMP) process. The GMP sets out a park's significance and purpose and how it will be managed to achieve this goal.¹¹⁷ Hence, the decisions made from the environmental assessment inform the continued park planning process. (See Figure 3).

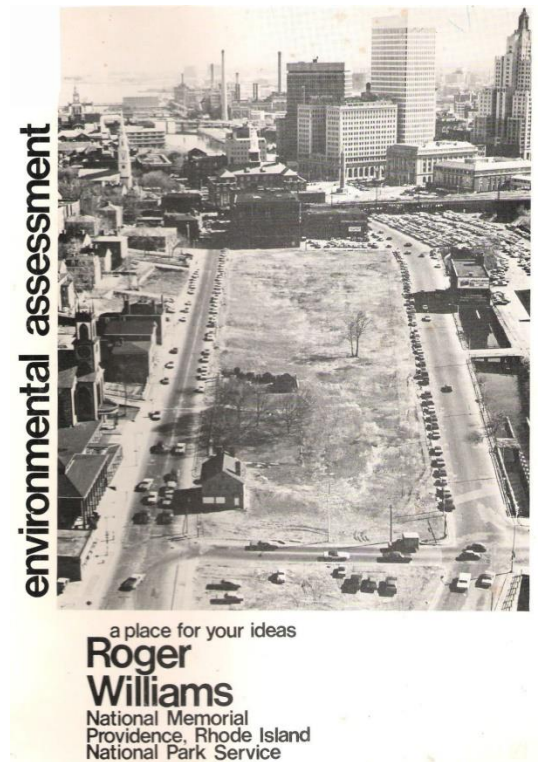


Figure 3: Cover of the Environmental Assessment, showing an aerial image of the park site following demolition in 1975.

Typical of NPS planning, the Environmental Assessment identified several alternatives, including an option of taking no action, and then presented these possibilities to the public for evaluation. For ROWI, since previous planning dictated refurbishing and maintaining the Hahn Memorial and Bernon Grove, NPS planners came up with five alternatives for park design and three alternatives for an interpretive center. These designs seem to have been shared via targeted public meetings, direct mailings, and

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

partnership with Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), each of which provided often very explicit feedback following the release of the plan (itself based on initial community hearings) from February 25, 1977 to April 12, 1977.

Alternative One, called “Rolling Topography,” created a series of earth mounds that would differentiate the park from the city and provide screening from the surrounding roads. (See Figure four.)

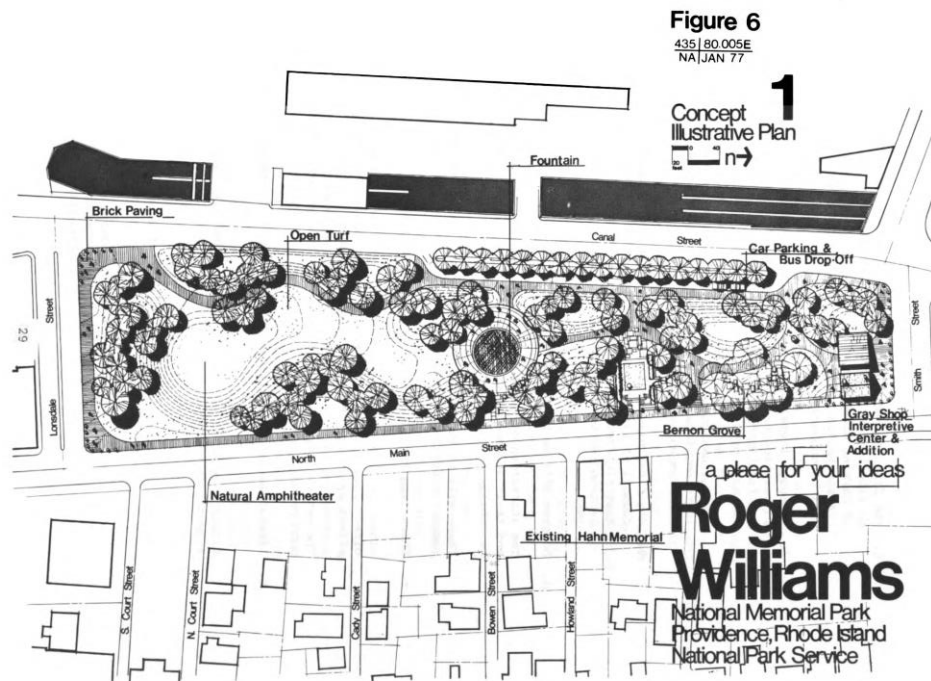


Figure 4: Alternative One, "Rolling Topography"

These mounds would also create an amphitheater-like bowl surrounded by a sloping lawn. Near the center of the park would be a simple water feature, likely water continuously circulating over a textured surface, to evoke the original spring. Twenty parallel parking spaces were provided along Canal Street.¹¹⁸ Alternative Two, “Granite

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

Wall,” built a granite wall on the axis of the Old State House, connecting the two major features of the design, a turf hill and an amphitheater. The plan also incorporated a small group meeting place within a refurbished Bernon Grove. Parking for twenty cars was provided by a lot on Canal Street that did not use any park land.¹¹⁹ (See Figure 5)

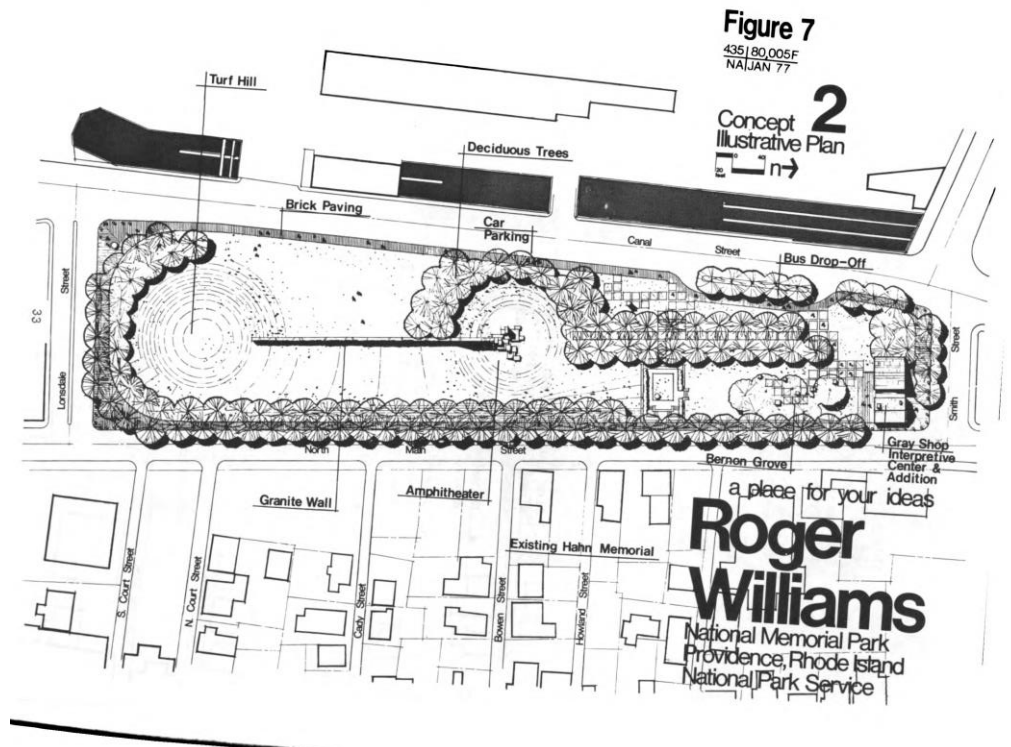


Figure 5: Alternative Two, "Granite Wall"

Alternative Three, “Sculptural Competition,” resurrected the earlier plans from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, developing a relatively flat area on the north part of the site with formal plantings while leaving the rest unplanned until the results of the sculptural competition were determined. This plan provided for diagonal parking for twenty cars along Canal Street.¹²⁰ (See Figure 6.)

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 32.

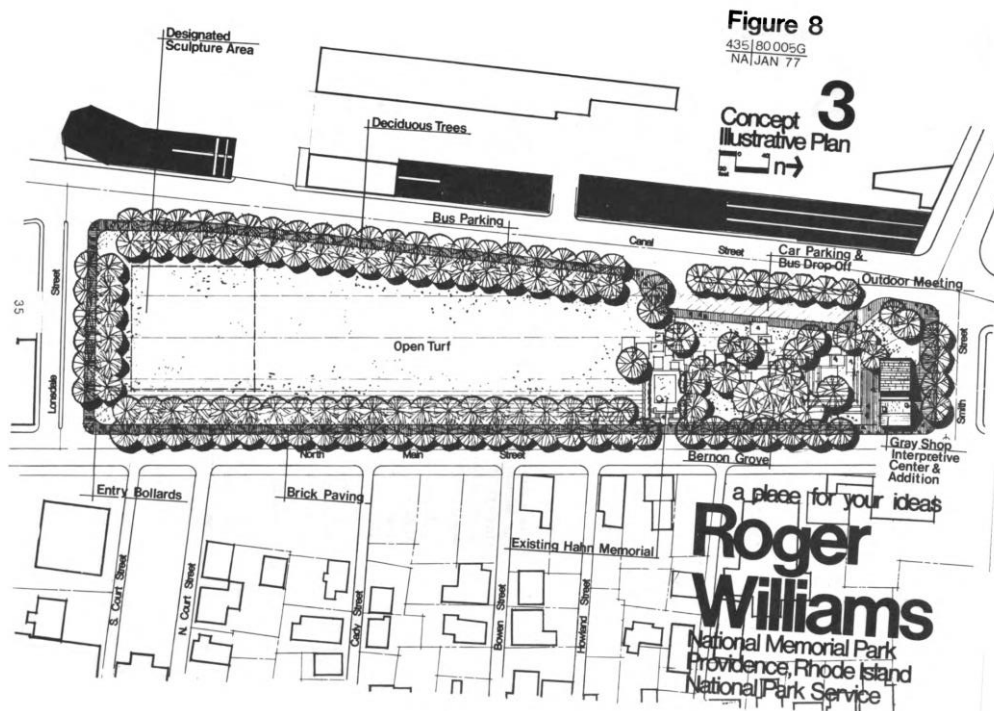


Figure 6: Alternative Three, "Sculptural Competition"

Alternative Four, "Lawn Terraces," was a symbolic recreation of the "river floodplain and rocky hillside" that likely characterized the landscape as Williams knew it. The terraces would also serve to create small gathering places and seating areas; an amphitheater would be created by the terraces in the south end of the park. Visitors would

park diagonally on Canal Street.¹²¹ (See Figure 7.)

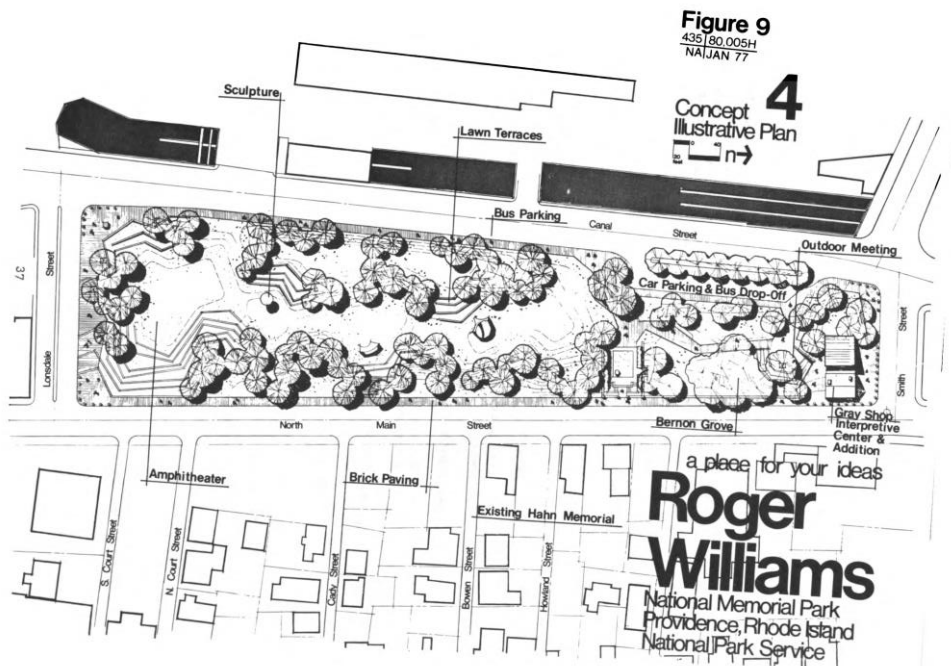


Figure 7: Alternative Four, "Lawn Terraces"

Alternative Five took no action: “the National Memorial would continue to exist as basically a vacant lot with only a superintendent for staff.”¹²²

Next, the plan turned to the “interpretive center.” This structure, the NPS and the PPS agreed, would serve to orient visitors to the site and particularly to historic Providence and College Hill. At this point, the two organizations diverged. For the NPS, the creation of a visitor center to house interpretive multimedia, visitor programs, and a small museum was of paramount importance, particularly given agency priorities in this period. In 1956, the NPS announced an ambitious program to develop National Parks in

¹²¹ Ibid., 36.

¹²² Ibid., 38.

time for the fiftieth anniversary of the agency in 1966. Called Mission 66, the hallmark of the program was the creation of the visitor center, an approach that remained the bedrock of NPS planning for years to come. Visitor centers were built specially and developed a distinct architecture of their own.¹²³ Leaving a park without a visitor center was therefore almost incomprehensible to the NPS planners at the time. At ROWI, they favored building a new building for interpretation and maintenance, while also using the existing historic house onsite, the Antram Gray Watchshop. The NPS viewed such a visitor center as vital to introducing national and international visitors to Roger Williams and his legacy, as well as offering space for education programs for local schools.

The PPS had worked to save the circa 1730 Antram Gray Watchshop, a structure of some historic significance, from the demolition that created ROWI. The building was included in College Hill National Historic District in 1970. The PPS did not seek to restore the interior of the home, but as with the properties on College Hill, believed its historic exterior should be preserved.¹²⁴ The house faced immediate danger from the proposed widening of Smith Street which would literally go through it. Once the agency acquired the house in 1974, the NPS immediately moved the house 40 feet south of its original location.¹²⁵ This investment likely ensured it would survive the 1975 demolition and become a part of the new park. For the PPS, ROWI was intended to serve as a gateway to their primary interest, College Hill, not as an attraction in its own right.

¹²³ Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 12-14.

¹²⁴ Providence Preservation Society's Recommendations for the Roger Williams National Memorial Sent the National Park Service, folder National Park Service 1973-74-75, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹²⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. *Historic Structure Report, The Antram-Gray House Roger Williams National Memorial*, by Andrea M. Gilmore. Boston: North Atlantic Preservation Center, North Atlantic Region, 1981. 2

Hence, combined with their efforts to save the Antram-Gray house, they favored gutting the interior of Antram-Gray and using it to create a small visitor center for the National Memorial. The PPS supporters believed Roger Williams needed little explanation or introduction for local residents because of Williams's centrality to Rhode Island and particularly Providence. And, because they consistently viewed the park as a place for local residents, not national visitors, they deemed a larger interpretive center unnecessary, if not excessive.¹²⁶ This was a tremendous point of divergence from the views of the NPS planners. The PPS also had some interest in creating a small scale historical village. The idea of a historical village, like Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, was profiled in the College Hill Study. As noted earlier, while such plans were deemed inappropriate for College Hill, there was some interest in placing a "stone-ender," typical of the type of house Williams would have owned in the seventeenth century, in the new park.

The interest in offering visitors a home like the one Roger Williams lived in stemmed from several factors. First, one such house was available. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), today Historic New England, owned the Thomas Clemence house (today the Clemence-Irons House), located far enough away from other attractions in Providence that it received limited visitation and attracted frequent vandalism. SPNEA was willing to transfer the property, endowment included, to the NPS for ROWI. Records of the PPS show that various estimates for moving the structure were completed, though the topic suddenly disappears from the record in

¹²⁶ Providence Preservation Society's Recommendations for the Roger Williams National Memorial Sent the National Park Service, folder National Park Service 1973-74-75, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

1965.¹²⁷ While neither PPS nor NPS records document the reason, an letter declining the donation of another house noted that it was against NPS policy to relocate historic structures or create reconstructions of historic structures.¹²⁸ Given the state of history policy in the NPS at this time, such a response makes sense, and it seems reasonable to conclude that a similar letter likely derailed the acquisition of the Clemence house. However, as Anne Mitchell Wishnant ably demonstrates in her study of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the passage of National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 made the NPS very aware of its role as stewards.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, this did little to dissuade them from restoring a building to a specific look that matched their interpretive goals for an area.¹³⁰ This suggests that the NPS might have also turned down the house because it did not fit with their intention to focus their interpretation Williams's ideas of religious freedom, not aspects of his daily life.¹³¹ Clearly, the question of the Clemence House was moot by the time of the Environmental Assessment in 1977, but it demonstrates how the PPS's priorities of architectural preservation and local tourism differed from NPS goals of educating a wide public about Roger Williams on their own terms and in their own style.

By 1977, in part because of vociferous protest against the removal of the Antram-Gray shop, the NPS developed the following alternatives for the interpretive center.

¹²⁷ Letters 1964, Box 7, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹²⁸ Denis P. Galvin to George H. Waterman III, January 30, 1976, Mott House, Box 7, Providence Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹²⁹ Anne Mitchell Wishnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 247.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 255-257.

¹³¹ Undated park planning document identified as "Early Planning Document" describes the park philosophy as freedom of religion and tolerance; these concepts are reiterated in a first draft of the Interpretive Prospectus. Undated Park Planning Document, Park Planning File, Roger Williams National Memorial Site Archive, Providence, Rhode Island. Interpretive Prospectus, Roger Williams National Memorial, First Draft 1979, Interpretive Planning File, Roger Williams National Memorial Site Archive, Providence, Rhode Island.

Alternative One, “No Action,” called for the use of the rehabilitated Antram-Gray house only. This plan placed all of the interpretive operations on the first floor of the home, interpretive and management operations on the second floor, and maintenance in the basement and attached shed.¹³² Alternative Two, “Antram-Gray House Plus New Structure,” used Antram-Gray house in the same capacity as Alternative One, but also constructed a new structure “sympathetic to, but not copy [sic], the surrounding historic structures.” This building would house interpretive operations, a library, and an audio-visual area capable of seating 50 people.¹³³ Alternative Three, “New Structure Only,” noted that “Preservation of the Antram-Gray Shop has been a primary assumption in this phase of the planning for Roger Williams Memorial largely due to pressure from local residents.”¹³⁴ However, given ongoing conflict over the treatment of the building, this alternative proposed relocating the Antram Gray shop somewhere else where it could be preserved and developed under private ownership. The NPS would build a new structure, similar to but larger than the one outlined in Alternative Two, to meet its needs. Faced with all these options, superintendent Roy Weaver then called a series of community meetings and circulated the report to a wide variety of community members. These meeting notes and survey forms filled out by residents survive and provide a unique insight into the choices that shaped the patch of grass that would become ROWI.

Results of the Public Design Survey

The NPS went to considerable lengths to distribute the survey. The memo describing the survey results and process stated:

¹³² Environmental Assessment, Roger Williams National Memorial, 46.

¹³³ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 48.

Four hundred twenty-five copies of the Environmental Assessment were sent to interested groups and individuals including all state legislators, all Providence City Councilors, various city and state agencies, the State Clearinghouse, and the State Historic Preservation Officer. Over 50 additional copies were handed out upon request by individuals. . . . Twenty local newspaper and television stations were notified. Two newspapers and one television station ran feature articles on the Environmental Assessment and the Memorial.¹³⁵

This distribution yielded 75 responses, which provide a good view into what respondents did and did not want. In addition to this file, seventeen additional responses were submitted by students at the University of Rhode Island enrolled in a history department course called Administration of Museums and Historical Societies and taught by Professor Klyberg.¹³⁶ The student assignments, which respond to assigned class reading about park planning as well as the *Environmental Assessment*, were given to the park, although it is not clear when they were given or if they were included in decision making process. Within the group of 75, thirteen responses come from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) students, evaluating the proposed park plans are part of a design studio. Combined with the others who also responded, including neighbors, preservation advocates, and local business owners, these records provide a window into a wide spectrum of perspectives on the proposed designs.

¹³⁵ Memo, Superintendent Roger Williams National Memorial to Regional Director, North Atlantic Region, Sept 2 1977, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹³⁶ Student Essays for Administration of Museums and Historical Societies, in Response to Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

Table 1: Break down of respondents by affiliation

Group	Number of Responses
University Faculty	3
Professional Association or Business	5
Clubs, including church and historical groups	13
RISD	13
Neighbors	11
Professionals, including architects	2
City Government	3
Elected Representative	2
Roger Williams Family Association	1
None Given	11

Respondents were primarily neighbors, clubs, and respondents who did not cite an affiliation. (See Table 1.) A closer review establishes that many who did indicate affiliation viewed themselves as holding multiple affiliations, most often as PPS members, neighbors, and East Side Association, or Benefit Street Association members. Notable also are the four responses from members of historical societies outside of Providence. Of those who did not list an affiliation, it is likely that among them were neighbors or interested citizens.¹³⁷

The number of individuals who did not list an affiliation is significant. While it is tempting to think that the PPS spoke for most of the preservation-minded citizens and residents of College Hill, that affiliation does not dominate the survey responses. These responses do suggest, however, that while the PPS was certainly making strong efforts to create the park, the organization was not as monolithic within local thought as might be expected. The responses also suggest that many citizens interested in shaping a park that

¹³⁷ Where respondents provided addresses within the College Hill area, I have grouped them as neighbors.

would be part of their community did not identify with any one preservation or neighborhood group. Taken together, this information shows that the public comment process was not dominated by one group and that the overlap of their responses suggests larger shared concerns about the shape of the park.

In addition to these forms, Superintendent Roy Weaver held meetings with a wide variety of community groups to discuss the various proposals with their members and record their responses.¹³⁸ Weaver's minimal notes and memoranda to the park file written to document his work also support the conclusions drawn from the survey forms.¹³⁹ This process demonstrates the high value placed on public opinion by the NPS and how it would shape the park. A memorandum concluding the project reminded the reader of its implications:

It should be understood that this Environmental Review bears directly upon the selection of a development concept alternative concerning the physical design of the park. In the preparation of the General Management Plan, this Environmental Assessment and Review will be further utilized.¹⁴⁰

Recognizing their feedback would be honored, recipients voiced their opinions, which reveal strong consensus on the role and look of the new park within the community.

The majority of respondents preferred a natural park, developed through plantings and trees, rather than a park focused around sculptural or structural elements such as the granite wall. Over half—52 percent—favored Alternative One, “Rolling Topography,”

¹³⁸ Memo, Superintendent Roger Williams National Memorial to Regional Director, North Atlantic Region, Sept 2 1977, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹³⁹ Memos, Superintendent Roger Williams National Memorial to North Atlantic Regional Director, Correspondence 1976, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁴⁰ Memo, Superintendent Roger Williams National Memorial to Regional Director, North Atlantic Region, Sept 2 1977, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

and 28 percent favored Alternative Four, “Lawn Terraces.” Both designs offered green spaces and grading to create natural-seeming divisions in the park landscape to informally partition the park for different uses. The strong preference for a natural landscape is also demonstrated by the low favorability—3 percent—for Alternative Two, the granite wall, and only slightly higher—10 percent—for Alternative three, the sculptural competition. Critically, no respondents favored Alternative Five, “No Action.”

In addition, five respondents offered designs of their own.¹⁴¹ These citizen-generated designs typically blended aspects of two or three of the proposed designs, or in a few cases, offered their own novel ideas about design and parking. Their careful submissions, some even including sketches, indicate strong community investment in the process. Lester Levine, in his incredibly thorough study of citizen submissions to the 9-11 Memorial design competition reveals that the citizens who submitted designs were deeply affected by events and strongly invested in shaping the memorial. This demonstrates that many people view memorial creation as an opportunity to express their sense of the past and their role within it.¹⁴² Edward Linenthal in his study of American battlefields also reveals that Americans are deeply invested in their care and memorial features because they believe that these sites reflect their sense of the past which in turn shapes their identity as Americans.¹⁴³ Returning to ROWI, these five submissions suggest that the park already had become an important place to show pride in Providence’s history of tolerance, and boded well for the park becoming a part of civic life within the city.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Lester J. Levine, *9/11 Memorial Visions: Innovative Concepts from the 2003 World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016), 15.

¹⁴³ Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, 2nd ed (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 217.

Eight responses specifically allude to the potential for vandalism within in the new park. Some of the responses were explicit in referencing vandalism; others simply referred to the need to keep the park well-maintained. Typical are these two statements, the first from a landscape architect respondent, and the second from site neighbors: “Also like most all recreation facilities the proof of the pudding is in continued maintenance of the park,” and “We like the large, simple fountain more or less in the center but it must be kept clean of debris.”¹⁴⁴ While neither of these statements reference vandalism, both make clear that maintenance of the park beyond simply keeping leaves out of the fountain will be necessary. This insistence on proactive management suggests that residents felt the park had to be cared for to be successful. Otherwise, it might fall into decay and hardly be an improvement over the deteriorating warehouses it replaced. And, if deteriorated and less used, it might invite vandalism. Another response from a Cranston, Rhode Island, resident was more explicit, stating simply, “The National Memorial should either be protected by a fence or trees (as in #3) in order to protect the area from vandalism.”¹⁴⁵ These responses suggest that for at least some of the individuals, this section of the city was easily identifiable as prone to vandalism.

The hesitation about erecting a formal monument is also present in this comment from a neighbor and member of the Society of Colonial Dames:

I hope that if Alternative IV is decided upon there will be a walk to the monument in Bernon Grove. Otherwise the grass will be abused.-I wonder if any kind of statue erected is a wise move considering the vandalism done to the Roger Williams Statue at Prospect Terrace. I would like to see

¹⁴⁴ Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

the statue planned for but not completed and erected until a time in the future when the temper of the times changes in respect to vandalism.¹⁴⁶

This comment suggests that in that time and neighborhood, not even the grass was safe from park goers. This alludes to a proscription of behavior of park goers through design which I will address in more detail below. The concern about vandalism even pervaded efforts to offer a space for free speech, both verbal and written. A local professor and Roger Williams scholar responded with an impassioned letter that public assembly and “haranguing” was not Williams’s style, and therefore not appropriate for the park. Other attempts to bring free speech into the park were also unacceptable; he wrote: “In any case, I suspect the graffiti board would soon encourage obscenities, and an overflow to buildings, walls, etc. in spray-can style.”¹⁴⁷ These worries reflect a sense that the urban renewal project might not be successful at fully discouraging individuals intent on vandalizing the new park.

Yet, did these concerns express residents’ worst fears or neighborhood realities? Their fears, at least in part, do seem to have had some basis. In addition to the vandalism mentioned at Prospect Terrace, Superintendent Weaver wrote a memo to the park files in late 1975 describing a recent public meeting.

We discussed the potential for law enforcement and vandalism problems at the Memorial. Previous to this meeting some residents of the memorial area expressed some concern about muggings, drug use, etc. within the park. Lt. Clark outlined previous problems in the area. He stated that they were public nuisance rather than criminal type problems. These problems were due to the fact that a discoteque was located adjacent to the Hahn Park served as an attraction drawing the nuisance element to the park. Lt. Clark feels that this problem no longer exists because there is no longer that type of attraction to draw the nuisance element to the area. The design of the park could encourage some types of misuse such as vandalism but

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

criminal problems do not seem eminent for this neighborhood. Sporadic vandalism could be a problem with the colleges so close. In this regard he recommends limiting windows, exterior lighting of buildings and grounds and exterior signs, displays benches etc to be made of vandal proof design and construction.¹⁴⁸

Despite the probable realities, the residents' concerns demonstrate a preoccupation about the kinds of people who would feel welcome in the park. Residents also sought to advance designs that might offer them some control over the kinds of people and activities pursued in the new park that could bring a variety of people beyond tourists into their neighborhood. These efforts reveal themselves in a desire for designs that were proscriptive about the kinds of behavior that would be acceptable within the park.

Many responses alluded to the people who might be attracted to the park, but two were particularly clear about the sorts of people they worried might come to the park. The first comes from a neighbor:

Regarding the Roger Williams Memorial Park, my sister and I are in full agreement with the Preservation Society and the Roger Williams Association. We hope the place will be kept very simple and in excellent taste, so the right type of people will be attracted. There are plenty of ball parks and play grounds. This site in our estimation should be kept as a quiet, peaceful retreat for meditation.¹⁴⁹

The second, from an individual affiliated with RISD, reads:

The success or failure of this plan will rely on maintenance and security of the park. The same informal, intimate spaces that I find appealing in this

¹⁴⁸ Superintendent Roy Weaver to Park Files, November 1975, Correspondence 1975, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁴⁹ Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

plan could easily turn into small night-time havens for undesirable factions that could damage the parks reputation and physical character.¹⁵⁰

These responses hint at two important concerns. First, both responses focused on the type of people that come to the park and what activities they will engage in. Second, the responses demonstrated a particular interest in activities that might mar the park, and by extension, the reputation of the neighborhood. With the history of ROWI's creation, particularly the College Hill Study, in mind, these responses show that residents still intended the park to anchor their fledgling historic district and growing middle and upper class enclave of College Hill. While urban renewal was an ongoing process in Providence, many saw ROWI as a way to solidify the value of the historic neighborhood they had created with their own investment. However, if the park was created badly, not only would they personally suffer from the activities of people of the wrong type; they also stood to lose financially. Hence, picking a design that would proscribe behavior in the park and regulating it once the park opened became a key issue.

Perhaps few were as vocal in their concerns as a neighbor, James Raleigh, who sent a series of letters complaining about the park between 1976 and 1980. Raleigh evidently did not have much confidence in local government or the NPS, as following his first letter in 1976 to Superintendent Weaver, he addressed all of his complaints to his US Senators, who obligingly passed his letters along to others for a response. Raleigh's first letter in 1976 concerns development of the park:

...I hope that some of things you plan are not carried out. For example, the outdoor concerts and folk festival could be nothing but a horrible nuisance to the residents in the immediate vicinity. I am not a devotee of parks since I have seen how they can become defiled. I had hoped that the Roger

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Williams area would be developed only with trees and grass and left as a pleasant green space. All the activities you describe can be annoying and clutter up the neighborhood. The longer the area is left undeveloped the happier I will be.¹⁵¹

Raleigh took his complaints to Senator John H. Chafee in 1977, this time about the lack of progress on building the park. Evidently leaving the space barren had become more of an annoyance to Raleigh than its potential misuse. Chafee directed his letter to NPS Regional Director Jack Stark for response. Stark provided him with an overview of the plans and timeline.¹⁵² In 1980, however, it appeared all of Raleigh's concerns had come to pass, as he wrote this time to Senator Pell:

The so-called Florentine Faire¹⁵³ is going to be held again this year on 2 different occasions at the Roger Williams National Memorial... When the park was begin planned, the neighbors were assured that the primary use would be to inform visitors about Roger Williams and no large and/or noisy groups would be permitted. The Faire has been held over a single week-end in the past, is unreasonably noisy and cause numerous problems to the residents in the neighborhood, of whom I am one, where so many of the old, run down houses have been restored. ... All the neighbors object to the use of an amplifier since the noise is continuous while the Faire is open. It is as unpleasant inside a house as outside since the weather is usually warm and the windows and doors are open. I have spoken with Mr. Roy Weaver, the ranger in charge of the park, and he informs me that he cannot tell the Fair people they are not permitted to use an amplifier. This is contrary to the stated purpose for the park and is tantamount to giving one group a license to create a neighborhood nuisance. ... I cannot go away and ignore the Faire since there are so many trespassers and drivers who try to park their cars on my land...¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ James C. Raleigh to Superintendent Roy Weaver, June 7, 1976. Correspondence Files, 1976, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁵² James C. Raleigh to John H. Chafee, April 9, 1979. Correspondence file 1979, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁵³ The Florentine Faire was a local institution with the flavor of a Renaissance Fair that served to spotlight local artists. The Faire also featured music and dance performances, food vendors, and others. The Faire continued at ROWI until around 1980, until it relocated elsewhere in Providence, and no longer occurs today. John McNiff, conversation with the author, February 17, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ James C. Raleigh to Claiborne Pell, August 20, 1980, Correspondence File 1980, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

It is easy to dismiss Raleigh as a crank, but his letters are not out of step with the rest of the neighborhood. While the letters from neighbors he mentions as attached are not extant, he voiced, albeit in stronger terms, the same frustrations about parking as almost all of the neighbors who responded to the design survey, and almost all of the correspondence between the Benefit Street Association and the NPS from this period relate to parking problems and the use of loudspeakers on park property.¹⁵⁵ Hence, while things may not have been quite as dark as Raleigh might have us believe, his anger was based in real grievances.

What is notable about his complaints is the sense of class tension. Raleigh's complaints about people parking in his yard are strikingly reminiscent of complaints recorded in early nineteenth century Worcester, Massachusetts on the Fourth of July, and documented by Roy Rosenweig in his study *Eight Hours for What We Will*. While separated by century, Rosenweig describes a middle class that, unable to move far outside the city, felt forced to remain at home for the Fourth of July holiday and protect their property from the rowdy encroachment of the working class on one of their few holidays.¹⁵⁶ The subtext of Raleigh's letter is that he was bothered not just by what people were doing, but by the *kind* of people doing it. Hence, in respect to park management, Raleigh saw proper management as a way of regaining social control over a neighborhood that he thought had become safely middle class based on his own investment and that of other property owners. Raleigh's angry epistles combined with the survey responses show that for many residents, the creation of the park seemed like a way

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Benefit Street Association (Jane Parker, president) to Superintendent Roy Weaver, June 17, 1977, Correspondence File 1977, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁵⁶ Rosenzweig, Roy, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 154.

to clear out an undesirable warehouse district and businesses like the discoteque, and thereby solidify their neighborhood as a renewed, middle class area. Through zoning and housing prices, Benefit Street residents were successful in keeping out what they viewed as undesirable people. However, the park was perhaps more than they bargained for because, as a public park, it was open to all. Hence, design and management complaints became a way for some residents to try to reassert control of the people entering the historic area.

Like Raleigh, many residents had strong feelings about what sort of activities were permissible in the park, which can also be seen in terms of class-based ideas about appropriate leisure activities and the use of parks. Here are two typical examples from respondents who identified as neighbors:

We much prefer Concept 1 because the plantings have broken up the large open spaces. We see this as a park for contemplation and passive pursuits rather than anything active.¹⁵⁷

Let us avoid any use of this memorial for the use of any sports activity which would create a nuisance by a few at the expense of the most!¹⁵⁸

These responses reveal a desire to not only regulate the park, but by extension, their own neighborhood. While most residents were not close enough to get a baseball through their window, they were close enough to hear the noise of a baseball game, and their streets and driveways were certainly close enough to offer attractive free parking. Parking was not a new concern for residents who often had trouble finding space for their own cars, and speeding and/or detouring through the area to avoid crowded main streets was also a

¹⁵⁷ Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

common complaint.¹⁵⁹ Thus, residents viewed any park design that brought more traffic to the area with suspicion.

Sports activities typically require a group for play and could bring large groups of young people and others to the park. Based on its location and the lack of closer green space for organized play, such young people might come from Fox Point or similar ethnically diverse and lower income neighborhoods. The subtext of neighbors' complaints was that such groups could not be trusted to comport themselves respectfully. Notably, Providence remained ninety percent white in 1970, though whites had declined steadily since a high of nearly ninety-eight percent in 1930.¹⁶⁰ While it seems more likely that residents' concerns were class, not race, based, it also seems reasonable that they may have correctly perceived some change in demographics and reacted accordingly by attempting to codify behavior and use of public spaces. This is clear within ROWI; contemplation, their preferred activity, is by its very nature a quiet and often solitary pursuit, and therefore much more appropriate to residents' goals for the park. This also suggested that the park should only serve those wishing to reflect on Williams, which likely required at least some education and a view of leisure time as one for education or self-betterment, again implying a preferred type of park visitor. College Hill residents wanted people like them (or at least willing to conform to their values) as park visitors. The park was the final piece in their establishment of dominance over the area and truly converting it from a slum to a desirable neighborhood.

¹⁵⁹ East Side Renewal Project Public Hearing, November 1966, page 57.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States," by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Population Division: Working Paper number 76, February 2005, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington, D.C.), <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.pdf>.

This desire for local social control is also evident in the number of respondents who clearly stated that local needs should come before national tourists. Three examples typical of the responses follow; the first two come from students at RISD, the third provided no identification:

I dislike 3 intensely! The idea of a mass of hard concrete/granite/whatever in a city park, a park to which one goes to escape the environment of hard, repulses me. The answer to the previous statement would be, well, what about non-regional visitors? My answer is that the majority of people visiting the park will be local city-dwellers and in a democracy, the majority rules.¹⁶¹

I believe that the most important thing from the designers to keep in mind is the urban location of this park, which requires a meaningful space for Providence people, not just the usual tourist trappings. Give them a reason to visit this park more than once!¹⁶²

I would love to see a park that benefits the residents of Providence first, rather than one geared to a National patronage. . . . I would suggest a low key center but if you're going to have a National Park, you might as well build something for people to come for.¹⁶³

These sentiments are also echoed in newspaper coverage of the debate. Notable is an article from the *Providence Journal* in 1975, in which Superintendent Weaver promises to respond to residents' design concerns, but also states that the park mandate requires it to serve a national audience.¹⁶⁴ Taken together, all of these responses show that ROWI was viewed by locals as a tool to reshape their neighborhood and generate positive

¹⁶¹ Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁶² Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁶³ Opinion Worksheet: Development Concepts, Roger Williams National Memorial, February 1977, Environmental Assessment, 1976-77, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁶⁴ John Sekeres, "Hearing Slated by Park Service," *Providence Bulletin-Journal*, December 1, 1975.

heritage tourism within Providence. The park was never about Roger Williams, though residents no doubt respected his legacy, but about leveraging Williams's association with the area to further their own goals of gentrification and historic preservation.

Design Implementation

The final design for the park and visitor center did reflect many of the NPS's priorities, though notably the NPS did choose to simply add a lean-to onto the Antram-Gray shop, rather than construct another building. For the park, the design closely followed Alternative One, though it did remove the water feature residents disliked. It is possible to read these choices as related to budget shortfalls. It is also possible to read these choices as a response to the many neighbors who were ambivalent or against these aspects of the plan. Regardless of the reason, the outcome meant that neighbors had achieved an important goal: a radically scaled down visitor center. This meant that the NPS's education mission and effort to serve out-of-town visitors would be shrunk considerably. These decisions had significant impact on how the park became part of its community, even before the building process began.

Even with a design in hand, Senator Pell would have to shepherd an additional funding request through Congress, as well as lobby those within the NPS to divert time and resources to completing the park. Progress remained slow, as a letter to the Secretary of the Interior vividly suggests:

As an abutter developer on two sides (North & South) of the Roger Williams Park on North Main Street in Providence, RI, I am writing to urge faster action relative

to park completion. We are all delighted that something will be done but, in the meantime, we have a site that resembles Berlin in 1945.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Henry E. Kates to Cecil B. Andrus (sec interior), July 3, 1980, Correspondence File (Pell), 1980, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

Work on the Antram-Gray house went more quickly, and by 1979, the NPS formally opened the memorial to the public.¹⁶⁶ The landscape, however, lagged behind the building. Well-aware of local annoyance, Pell worked hard to move completion up the NPS's priority list.¹⁶⁷ In 1977, the NPS contracted with local landscape architect, Albert Veri, to implement the design from the Denver Service Center.¹⁶⁸ Veri revised the design but kept the general idea of the Denver Service Center design (Alternative One, Rolling Topography), and the new design was approved by the NPS in September of 1977.¹⁶⁹ (See Figure 8.)



Figure 8: Final Design Schematic, courtesy Veri | Waterman Associates.

¹⁶⁶ Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial, 61.

¹⁶⁷ “Secretary of Interior overrules delay on Roger Williams National Park”, Providence Journal, September 11, 1980.

¹⁶⁸ Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial, 61.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 62.

However, implementation of the design did not begin until 1980, and required additional funding from Congress.¹⁷⁰ Divided into three phases, park construction concluded in 1982.¹⁷¹ Over twenty years after it was first proposed, Roger Williams was finally a park people could see not just on paper, but visit and enjoy.

¹⁷⁰ Memo, Regional Director North Atlantic Region to Chairman Program Action Board, WASO, June 18, 1979. Folder development/budget increase 1980, Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

¹⁷¹ Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial, 67.

CHAPTER 4

GROWING INTO THE COMMUNITY

In an event that almost escaped fanfare, Senator Pell finally dedicated the national memorial in a small ceremony on October 4, 1984. *Providence Journal* reports indicate that Pell, “using a sound system that didn't work, and with his voice sometimes drowned out by passing trains,” spoke to the challenges of creating the park and how he had continually kept it from the “chopping block.”¹⁷² Two local religious leaders—Rev. Donald Rasmussen, president of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island and Rev. William S. Anthony, of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John—also spoke. Reverend Anthony, whose cathedral was directly opposite the memorial “prayed aloud that the park would serve as a place where people could come together, and where children would be always be able to roll down grassy hills and slide down snowy slopes.” Current superintendent Lawrence Nash, who had replaced Roy Weaver (reassigned to Thomas Edison National Historical Park), spoke to the challenges of keeping the park planning process at ROWI moving forward to completion. The event closed with light refreshments in the visitor center, as attendees reflected on the transformation from a weedy lot to a National Park. Yet much about the park remained to be determined. Now that it was built, who would come? Were the recreational uses mentioned by Reverend Anthony in need of a prayer based on the strong feelings of the Benefit Association against any kind of active pursuits in the park? What was the purpose of a national memorial beyond local uses? Did the challenges of creating an urban national park offer any lessons for other American cities?

¹⁷² Richard C. Dujardin, “Senator Pell Leads Ceremony to Dedicate N. Main St. Park Roger Williams National Memorial,” *Providence Journal*, October 9, 1984.

The possible answers to these questions were constrained by the park's design, and a deeper examination of the final design and its implementation reveal how the park developed once it was formally landscaped and open to the public. First, it is important to consider why a modified Alternative One, "Rolling Topography," was selected. Unquestionably, the decision was strongly influenced by the fact that most respondents to the Environmental Assessment selected Alternative One, and the revised Alternative One was also most in line with the general comments provided by residents in formal responses as well as public meetings. Given that the initial meetings between residents and Denver Service Center planners went very poorly, in fact sending the planners back to the drawing board, it is likely that the National Park Service was ready to complete the design process without any further community kerfuffle.¹⁷³ However, there may be another reason why the NPS approved a design that basically created a pleasant city park and did little to interpret Williams. From the earliest NPS memoranda relating to the site, it is clear that despite PPS's lengthy chain of title proving that the spring was located within park boundaries, the NPS found these arguments unpersuasive. Indeed, the project may have become something of a political necessity; as the NPS pointed out, while they

¹⁷³ As the captain of the Denver Service Center dryly noted: "The general public consensus regarding the planning alternatives was one of skepticism. Frequently expressed comments included the following: planners were unfamiliar with the "mood" of the site; all planning alternatives included too many facilities and structures; Park Service plans would attract visitation which many individuals viewed as undesirables; the site should be a local park with no provisions for national visitors; a little grass and trees are all that is needed; and some would like to see the site returned to the conditions which existed when Roger Williams established the colony. There appear to be little interest in or knowledge of the legislated mandate to commemorate the ideas and contributions of Roger Williams." Chief of planning, Denver Service Center, to Team Captain, re: Roger Williams Master planning activities, January 19, 1976. Correspondence, January-April 1976. Roger Williams National Memorial Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

could (and did) object to a National Historic Site designation, a national memorial designation was wholly Congress's business.¹⁷⁴

That the NPS might have sought to continue to bury this issue of significance now that the site had national memorial status is suggested by their treatment of the area known as the Hahn Memorial today. As dedicated, and in records prior to the establishment of the National Memorial, the pocket park was known as "Roger Williams Spring Park." As the park's Cultural Landscape Report notes, the NPS decision to call the area the Hahn Memorial confuses visitors as to the historical association and significance of the area it commemorates.¹⁷⁵ I also suggest that this may have been a tactical decision by the NPS. By shifting the name of the site away from Roger Williams or the spring, they deflected discussion about Williams's actual association with the site or the existence of the spring, and instead focused the discussion on the legacy of Williams's call for religious tolerance, as evidenced by the achievements of the Hahn family. While this reason for the name change is not clear within the record, it nonetheless introduces an intriguing possibility into the NPS's efforts to avoid questions of significance, and this interaction with the established landscape suggests this as a goal. If we return to the initial plans in the Environmental Assessment, these can also be viewed as an effort to use the designed landscape to direct conversation away from the significance of the actual site and to the larger legacy of Williams, as evidenced in the NPS's preferred design for constructing a visitor center in addition to the Antram-Gray House, and the

¹⁷⁴ Glen A. Carver, Jr., to Wayne N. Aspinall, 25 September 1961, Preservation Society Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹⁷⁵ Roger Williams National Memorial Cultural Landscape Report, 110. The CLR also notes as it was published in 2010, the park was making an effort to refer to the area as Roger Williams Spring as opposed to the Hahn Memorial. However, it is hard to tell to what extent this is happening or changing interpretation, since as we will see, very little formal interpretation goes on at the site.

landscape plans that created structural elements to evoke Williams rather than using existing elements of the site or its purported history to do so. In short then, is reasonable to conclude that the NPS selected the design not only because it pleased their stakeholders, but also because it allowed the NPS to avoid addressing already uncomfortable questions of significance within the park.

Around 1977, the National Park Service contracted local landscape architect Albert Veri to finish and implement the design created by the Denver Service Center, a common practice.¹⁷⁶ Trained at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Veri's selection was a sensible choice, as he had participated in the park planning process, was a local resident, and had experience designing local parks in Providence, including India Point Park, Kennedy Plaza, and a park on Benefit Street.¹⁷⁷ Once contracted, Veri made several design choices that changed the look, though not the overall design intent, of the Denver Service Center plan. The Denver Service Center design sought to provide a green space within the city that would connect various points of historical interest using the park's designed landscape and information center. Veri's revisions informally divided the park into two sections. The southern part remained an "idealized rural landscape of rolling topography, winding walks, and groves of trees centered around a bowl-shaped open space referred to as the amphitheater," as in the initial designs.¹⁷⁸ In addition, Veri placed a platform above the amphitheater which could serve as a stage and provided a view of the Rhode Island capitol building. He also added an allee on the axis of the Old State House, providing a visual connection to the historic site, and adjusted the paths to evoke the street layout prior to demolition. The effort to show traces of the old urban

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 61. Ethan Carr, discussion with author, March 1, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Roger Williams National Memorial Cultural Landscape Report, 62.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

street layout was more evident in the north end of the park, where Veri changed the winding paths to rectilinear ones that reflected the layout of the buildings and streets formerly on the site.¹⁷⁹

In the northern section, home to Bernon Grove, Antram-Gray House and the Hahn Memorial, Veri made additional changes to fold these existing elements into his new design. In Bernon Grove, Veri left uncovered the old foundation walls to serve as a retaining wall, again highlighting the urban landscape the park replaced. To provide universal access, he added a series of ramps. Finally, Veri proposed the replanting of the Hahn Memorial, as its plantings were overgrown or in poor condition. The planting scheme generally followed previous ones, and closed the memorial with Arborvitae on the west side where a building had once stood. This retained some of the character of Ishram's design as a pocket park. A new walkway connected the memorial to the park, and Veri developed the Katz lot, left undeveloped during the Great Depression, into a brick terrace.¹⁸⁰ These changes were approved by the Denver Service Center and construction began in 1980. Although not a change in design, an accident in implementation also changed the feel of the park; the allee of elm trees designed to create a vista to the Old State House were planted out of line, impairing the vista.¹⁸¹ As completed, the design sought to emphasize the historic character of Providence by visually connecting historic features and reveal its evolution towards a modern city through links to the site's urban past while still offering a pleasant green space well-suited for multiple uses, as evidenced from the formal gathering spaces of the north part of the park and the amphitheater.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 66.

These multiple uses are evident in records of park use since its dedication. A review of nearly 800 articles in the *Providence Journal* relating to Roger Williams National Memorial demonstrate that ROWI remained newsworthy for a variety of reasons. These articles can be divided into four general categories: special events or festivals, political uses, profiles/human interest stories about park rangers, and hour listings. This last category, hour listings, was by far the most common type of article and simply posted the National Memorial's hours and location in different columns of the paper such as "things to do" or "museums." The consistency of these listings from 1981 to present shows that the park continues to be a legitimate destination for locals and is not solely a tourist attraction. These listings also reveal a consistency in National Park Service management, which has kept the park open regularly and encouraged community visitation. A similar series of articles, profiles of park rangers, also speaks to the public's interest in interacting with the park and a fascination for (or at least curiosity about) the National Park Service and the uniformed rangers onsite. Articles like "They Ride a Mini-Range" chronicled the job and thoughts of the rangers, often seeking to legitimize the place of National Park in the city, something the editors, if not residents of Providence, appear to have found somewhat incongruous.¹⁸² These articles also emphasize the importance of history at the park, sometimes even referring to the rangers as ranger-historians. At the same time, these pieces sought to show that the park had value and was not a waste of federal funds or overstaffed, a contention of a least one article published before the dedication of the park. This article praised Roy Weaver's work, but suggested that his high salary, access to a government vehicle, and other perks were simply too

¹⁸² Arthur Bridgeforth Jr., "They Ride A Mini-Range In Providence," *Providence Journal*, September 10, 1987.

much compensation for managing four and a half acres in the city.¹⁸³ The park and its managers were clearly still finding its place within Providence's larger landscape.

The National Memorial has also proved, perhaps to the chagrin of some Benefit Street residents, a welcoming place for festivals and special events, particularly those in the performing arts. Newspaper announcements document many theatre performances, ranging from professional Shakespeare companies to school groups and amateur productions. In recent years, the park has become a music destination as the city has sponsored a series of evening concerts, Downtown Sundown, in the park. In addition to these performances, the park has hosted Powwows for a number of years, along with art festivals and folk music festivals. These events capitalize on the centrality of the park to downtown and flexible space within the park for performance. The park has also served as a starting point, ending point, and water/aid station for a variety of road races in Providence, ranging from marathons to charity five-kilometer races. While most of these events seem to have proceeded without a much public complaint, one of the only tense exchanges in the "letters" section relates to the Providence Marathon in 1994.

The first letter came from a concerned citizen who was also a member of a local running club. He alleged that the NPS had prevented the running club from setting up a water station in the parking lot, torn up no parking signs, and been exceptionally discourteous.¹⁸⁴ The following week, a letter from the acting superintendent, Kathy Tevyaw, stated simply that the park sought to be a resource for the community and requested that organizers contact the park next year so they could volunteer.¹⁸⁵ Tevyaw's response, while not apologizing for the interaction, suggests that the issue was a probably

¹⁸³ Martha Smith, "Sure It's A Park. All 4 ½ Acres of It," *Providence Journal*, January 1, 1980.

¹⁸⁴ Letters, "Park Rangers: Hiss], " *Providence Journal*, January 19, 1994.

¹⁸⁵ Letters, "Park Rangers: Bravo], " *Providence Journal*, March 21, 1994.

related to a lack of a permit and some misunderstandings. The exchange ended there and later coverage does not indicate if ROWI became a more supportive player in the marathon. Still, the exchange is noteworthy because in over twenty years of newspaper records this was one of the few tensions between the park and the community. This offers strong evidence that the park has had a generally good relationship with its community who likewise see the park as a valuable place for these types of community events and celebrations.

Visitor use beyond special events like the festivals, protests, and political announcements described above, are difficult to measure. Still, several articles from the *Providence Journal* with titles like “Oasis in the City” and “Once Grimy Area of Decay is Fast becoming a City Showplace” showed that residents were beginning to view the site as a valued part of city green space apart from its associations with Roger Williams.¹⁸⁶ The park’s perceived value is evident from several articles that noted it was a model for planting parks in the city and that its standards of upkeep should be adopted by all city parks.¹⁸⁷ Beyond serving as a showplace, ROWI also retains an important function as a center of tourism information in Rhode Island, as evidenced by two articles about its status as an information center. In 1995, the state asked the NPS to reinstate weekend hours for the visitor center.

The schedule expansion means that, as a practical matter, the city once again will have a tourist visitor center on weekends – something most observers agreed is sorely needed if Providence is to get into the big leagues of tourism.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Sara Ellen Amster, “Roger Williams Memorial an Oasis in the City,” *Providence Journal*, August 31, 1988. “Once Grimy area of decay is fast becoming a city showplace,” *Providence Bulletin*, March 24, 1980.

¹⁸⁷ Bill Patenaude, “Capital Center's Beauty Requires Upkeep,” *Providence Journal*, November 10, 1993.

¹⁸⁸ Art Turgeon, “Providence Regains Weekend Tourist Center,” *Providence Journal*, May 15, 1995.

The NPS also agreed to pay for highway signs to direct visitors to the site. In 2000, the city began developing a fledging visitor center of its own, but that article was also quick to point out the importance that the NPS Visitor Center served for tourism in the city.¹⁸⁹ Today, the visitor center still serves that purpose, with full support of its front line and supervisory staff.

Notably, the NPS was not heavily engaged in interpretation. An article from 1995 notes a new walking tour connecting historic sites in Providence, a long-held hope of the College Hill Study, yet the walking tour was designed by the Rhode Island Historical Society, not the NPS.¹⁹⁰ Conversations with long-serving park ranger and Providence native John McNiff reveal that formal interpretation as it is traditionally done in the NPS has never been particularly successful or a priority at ROWI.¹⁹¹ McNiff recalls that with each change of senior leadership at the park, the new leadership would insist on a daily interpretive program at the park, which McNiff says were duly implemented with routine failure. He attributes this failure to ROWI's visitors—they are generally there on their way to someplace else and unlikely to plan around a program or stick around for one. Instead, McNiff says staff focuses on informal contacts with visitors in the park, getting to know regulars including homeless individuals, which he believes has helped create a very strong culture of stewardship for the park—so strong, in fact, that when the park tried to offer a formal program on archaeology that included placing some “historic” trash in the park, park regulars had cleaned it all up before the program could even begin.

¹⁸⁹ Gregory Smith, “Visitors Center Extending its Welcome,” *Providence Journal*, March 2, 2000.

¹⁹⁰ Katherine Imbrie, “A Providence Promenade Heritage Trail is a Civilized Stroll through the City, Past and Present,” *Providence Journal*, March 31, 1995.

¹⁹¹ John McNiff (park ranger, Roger Williams National Memorial), oral history interview with the author, March 22, 2017, tape available at Roger Williams National Memorial Site Archive, Providence Rhode Island.

Interestingly, McNiff, like many early stakeholders, sees the role of the park as a place for contemplation, or as McNiff is fond of saying, “a place for ideas.” For him, the park’s strength is that people passing through learn about Roger Williams’s ideas, which McNiff believes they take with them and reflect upon in meaningful ways after they leave the park. In other words, ROWI’s role is to serve as a place for the community to gather for cultural events, political protest, and reflection, and also remind them of Providence’s rich heritage of freedom and toleration. Perhaps because of this focus, the park installed new exhibits in 1996 and again in 2017.¹⁹² These exhibits make ROWI a center for the founding ideas of Providence, which retain their value today.

The park has clearly been adopted by the state as an important place to tell the story of the founding of Rhode Island during important anniversaries. During the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Rhode Island, opening ceremonies took place at the park, perhaps an easy choice as it is located in the area of early settlement and has views on both the Old State House and the present capitol building, reflecting old and new.¹⁹³ Similarly, Roger Williams’s descendants gathered to celebrate his legacy at the park in 2003.¹⁹⁴ Citizenship ceremonies, which are occasionally held at ROWI, make implicit use of Roger Williams’s ideas of religious tolerance and Rhode Island as a haven for the persecuted, to demonstrate welcome as well as benefits and responsibilities of American citizenship.¹⁹⁵ Besides these historical and celebratory uses, the park, with its associations with Williams, has been frequently used as a backdrop for political

¹⁹² Richard C. Dujardin, “Artifacts of Religious Freedom’s Start,” *Providence Journal*, October 5, 1996. Jacqueline Tempera, “*On Exhibit-Providential Timing for New Roger Williams Show*,” *Providence Journal*, February 19, 2017.

¹⁹³ Lisa Foderaro, “R.I.’s 350th Birthday Bash Begins,” *Providence Journal*, June 1, 1984.

¹⁹⁴ Louisa Handle, “Roger Williams: His family Remembers,” *Providence Journal*, June 8, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ “Newest Americans,” *Providence Journal*, September 22, 2011.

announcements and protests. In some of these cases, it is clear that the users sought to draw on the setting and perceived historical ties to Williams to help make their case. In other cases, it is less clear whether ROWI simply offered a convenient place to assemble, or if organizers saw it as useful to their message.

Some events made clear reference to Roger Williams as part of their modern political statement. In 2004, people gathered to celebrate the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts, and following the Supreme Court decision upholding the legalization of gay marriage, they also gathered in the park to celebrate where they had earlier protested for its legalization.¹⁹⁶ Interviews with attendees clearly showed that they viewed gay marriage as an aspect of the tolerance and religious freedom that Roger Williams had championed in the 1600s.¹⁹⁷ Others, such as the Family Values Bus Tour stop in 2011, took a less liberal view as to what tolerance and freedom of religion meant, but nonetheless saw ROWI as an important backdrop for their argument.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps one of the most overt political uses of the park was when Rhode Island's Strategic Development Commission announced a highly controversial \$750 million development proposal known as the Greenhouse Plan to revitalize Rhode Island's economy in 1983.¹⁹⁹ The choice of location seemed to be an effort to align the commission with the founder of Rhode Island and therefore place the weight of leadership and history behind his proposals. Two decades later, in 2001, residents and political allies gathered in the park

¹⁹⁶ "Wedding Day-Across the Bay State, Same-Sex Couples say 'I Do'," *Providence Journal*, May 18, 2004; and "Providence - Not a protest, but a Celebration - Dozens descend upon the Roger Williams National Memorial, a Shrine to Freedom, to Mark History," *Providence Journal*, June 27, 2015.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Tatiana Pina, "Diversity-Values Voter Bus Stop Defends Traditional Family," *Providence Journal*, October 13, 2011.

¹⁹⁹ "7-year Program Seeks to Boost R.I.'s economy, The Greenhouse Compact: A Special Section", *Providence Journal*, October 18, 1983.

to protest against Mayor “Buddy” Cianci, who was facing corruption charges from the Operation Plunder Dome investigation.²⁰⁰ These actions show that residents strongly identified the park as an important civic area that also carried the added weight of being an important historic site. The use also shows that Williams’s legacy, as perceived by local and national politicians, remains an important rallying point for citizens in Rhode Island, if not nationally.

Other sponsors of events are less clear as to the extent that they make use of the sites association with Williams. In the recent past, a drug addiction recovery group has held a concert and rally at the site.²⁰¹ The group’s mission is to destigmatize drug addiction and recovery, but it is unclear whether they view Williams as champion for tolerance that transcends religion. Powwows also take place yearly at ROWI, although articles written about them do not always reveal Williams’s close connections to the Narragansets in the 1600s.²⁰² Likewise, demonstrations for affordable housing and against homelessness use the park more for its closeness to downtown, although several articles also noted that after dark, the park becomes a haven for homeless people, and one homeless man was killed early one morning when he sought to cross the street near the park and was hit by a car.²⁰³ Protests against the high cost of prescription drugs were also held at ROWI in 2000.²⁰⁴ Even though these events did not make explicit use of Roger

²⁰⁰ “Common Cause Initiates Program to Fight Government Corruption,” *Providence Journal*, August 1, 2001.

²⁰¹ Mark Reynolds, “Former Users Converge on City to Celebrate Sobriety,” *Providence Journal*, September 22, 2013.

²⁰² “Fall Festivals-A party of Three in Providence - Big Drum Powwow, Oktoberfest, Peace Fest Fill City with Celebration,” *Providence Journal*, September 25, 2016.

²⁰³ “Advocacy Group to Build House, Try to Raise \$250,000 this Year,” *Providence Journal*, September 2, 1988.

²⁰⁴ Christopher Rowland, “CAMPAIGN 2000 - High Drug Costs a Pivotal Issue in Congressional Races,” *Providence Journal*, July 10, 2000.

William's legacy of tolerance or the historical setting, they nonetheless reveal that the park had become a vital part of the local landscape for civic discussion and dissent.

Finally, ROWI is currently engaged in a challenge to religious freedom within its boundaries which makes clear political use of the park as a monument to religious tolerance. A religious group, the Healing Church, which believes that marijuana is an important aspect of Christianity based on the images of what they believe are marijuana leaves in early paintings of the Virgin Mary, continues to test religious freedom on the site by holding religious services including marijuana use at ROWI.²⁰⁵ Because the park is federal land and marijuana use or possession is illegal under federal law, the stricter federal law is enforced despite a more lenient local law. However, ROWI has consistently permitted the group, although it has formally noted in their permits that actual use of marijuana was not permitted.²⁰⁶ The continued efforts of this group to make their actions a test case for religious freedom by choosing a provocative location for their services demonstrates that they view ROWI as having symbolic significance. While at this writing, local and federal officials have refused to arrest members to create a test case for their actions at ROWI, several of the leaders are facing drug charges by failing to comply with Rhode Island's medical marijuana law. A story still in progress, it may eventually become an important part of the story of tolerance in the United States and the limits or flexibility of Williams's legacy.

²⁰⁵ Tom Mooney, "Marijuana Ministry-Cannabis, Catholicism Clash in West Greenwich," *Providence Journal*, November 27, 2016.

²⁰⁶ "Courts- Judge Dismisses Church Leaders' Complaint Against U.S. Officials," *Providence Journal*, December 8, 2015.

CHAPTER 5

MEANINGS OF A NATIONAL MEMORIAL

What is a National Memorial?

National Memorials are properties managed by the NPS, but what they mean and how they should serve visitors is often more complex than in other types of NPS units. This section will first examine how the NPS defines National Memorials, and examine other examples of their creation and meaning. The management challenges faced by other superintendents at national memorials bring into focus ROWI superintendent Roy Weaver's struggles to explain the meaning of the national memorial to the people of Providence. As Weaver began to establish the park, the final design choice offers insights into the meaning of memorial and how ROWI fits into a larger literature about the creation and meaning of memorials. Finally, this section will offer some ideas about how ROWI, national memorials, and urban parks offer lessons for park building in the future.

Initially, national parks always referred to large natural areas in the West, but as the system expanded, the location and variety of properties created a range of new designations. Reflecting this evolution of site genres, the NPS refers to each property within the system with the more encompassing term, "unit," which includes 26 different designations. All of these are defined and designated by Congressional action. The exception is National Monuments, which are designated by the President under the authority of the 1906 Antiquities Act. Generally, designations come only after research and approval of the new unit by the NPS, but National Parks remain intensely political in their creation and maintenance. By some estimations, the system has become a favorite way for members of Congress to reward communities or punish non-cooperators by

saddling them with historic designations their communities are against.²⁰⁷ National memorials are particularly interesting in this context, because Congress, not the NPS generally supplies the significance of site. Sites that the NPS may not consider of national significance or historical integrity can still become a unit if Congress believes the site is worthy of National Memorial status. For this sort of commemorative place, the NPS stipulates that:

The title national memorial is most often used for areas that are primarily commemorative. They need not be sites or structures historically associated with their subjects. For example, the home of Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, Ill., is a national historic site, but the Lincoln Memorial in the District of Columbia is a national memorial.²⁰⁸

At this writing, of the 17 units currently in the national park system, 31 are listed as National Memorials or Memorials.²⁰⁹ The group is eclectic, ranging from imposing sculptural memorials such as Mount Rushmore, structural recreations such as Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, sites recognizing tragedy and terrorism such as Oklahoma National Memorial and Flight 93 National Memorial, and park-like settings such as the Wright Brothers National Memorial, which combines the area where they achieved flight

²⁰⁷ Probably the best example of this is the 2016 report by Senator Ted Coburn. Coburn wrote that Congress was failing the National Park System by using it as pork and political capital to reward supporters or punish non-compliant party members. See Coburn, Tom D, *Parked! How Congresses Misplaced Priorities are Trashing our National Treasures*, epublication, October 2013. Published when Coburn was serving as US Senator, the report was hosted on his senate webpage, which is no longer available or archived. An archived copy of the report is available at

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUK EwitmMqbahUKEwitmMqbqfnSAhVCYyYKHav&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.landrights.org%2FActionAlerts%2Fsen%2520CCobur%2520Report%2520on%2520NPS-Parked-1029131a.pdf&usg=AFQjCNE_Ly6OUlmeWUEq-Tbyh21OtvwtgQ&sig2=GcDhBMh62zf2JucTOmg9Ig&bvm=bv.150729734,d.eWE which quotes one senator as saying he will turn a potential opponent's whole town into a national park as punishment.

²⁰⁸ US National Park Service, "Nomenclature of Park System Areas," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/npshistory/nomenclature.html> (accessed March 28, 2017)

²⁰⁹ US National Park Service, "Frequently Asked Questions," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/faqs.htm>. (accessed March 28, 2017) This accounting depends upon whether you include sites that are memorials, for example, the World War II Memorial in Washington DC which is administered by the NPS in addition to the areas with the formal designation of National Memorial.

as well as reconstructed historic buildings and formal memorial sculpture. As the definition notes, the site does not have to have an association with the person or event, yet most contain formal elements of memorial such as sculpture or a building that functions as a memorial. In many ways, ROWI fits into this group well because many national memorials may have higher local than national significance. This is not to say that the events honored are not nationally significant or viewed that way, but that often these memorials probably have a stronger local than national following. A case in point would be the David Berger National Memorial in Ohio, situated on the grounds of a Jewish community center and not actively staffed by the NPS.²¹⁰ The sculpture commemorates Berger, an American citizen competing for Israel in the 1972 Munich Olympics when he was killed. The sculpture was privately funded by a group of eight donors, all friends or family members. As Ohio Senator Howard Metzenbaum was a family friend, he initiated successful legislation to make the sculpture a National Memorial.²¹¹ The David Berger National Memorial is an extreme case, but it does clearly demonstrate the necessity of strong support from well-connected community members to move the necessary legislation through Congress. It also demonstrates that, as a rule, National Memorials are more preoccupied with ideas and ideals related to the United States, and therefore mark sites that combine help shape or recall important aspects of American identity and the makers of American history, social landscape, and technological prowess.

²¹⁰ National Park Service, "Schedule of Events," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/dabe/planyourvisit/events.htm> (accessed April 8, 2017)

²¹¹ National Park Service, "David Berger Sculpture," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/dabe/learn/historyculture/david-berger-sculpture.htm> (accessed April 8, 2017)

The designation of ROWI as a national memorial was clearly problematic as Superintendent Roy Weaver began his tenure in August 1975, ten years after the site became a National Memorial.²¹² People generally expect historic sites to educate a visitor about a person or event and recreation areas to offer recreational opportunities, but the national memorial designation does not conjure up such easy associations. Specifically, Weaver struggled to explain to the community what a national memorial would look like in terms of design and memorial features and the multiple roles it could serve, including education, recreation, and as a community gathering place. Of all the NPS designations, national memorials most clearly hold multiple roles as places of education, reflection, and recreation within their landscaped surrounds that set them apart from their host community. In Providence, this multiplicity of indemnity proved challenging for residents and staff alike. As noted during the design process, many citizens wanted the national memorial to become a nicely landscaped park for the city, and some resisted the idea of welcoming national visitors and actively sharing the story of Roger Williams and early Providence. Weaver turned to his colleagues, writing a letter sent to nearly every superintendent of a national memorial in 1976, asking for help, particularly slides that he could share with the public to demonstrate how visitors used national memorials and what the development looked like.²¹³

Their responses—in the end about ten superintendents responded—indicate that Weaver was not alone in the challenge. Franklin G. Smith, the Superintendent of Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas began, “Welcome to the nether world of National Memorials! This has proved to be so different that sometimes people wonder

²¹² John Hanlon, “Ranger Rides to Aid of Roger’s Spring,” *Providence Journal*, October 10, 1975.

²¹³ Roy Weaver to National Memorial Superintents, various dates, 1976. Correspondence files. Roger Williams National Memorial Site Achieve, Providence Rhode Island.

whether Chamizal is actually in the Service or not.”²¹⁴ The superintendent of Arkansas Post National Memorial, D.L. Huggins, opened his letter

“Welcome to the club! We are in the final stages of fighting off a determined effort by the Masons to put a plaque memorializing the Masons in the Park! We had to call in Region and the Washington Office to quash it, but we are afraid the man in charge won’t accept it.”²¹⁵

The confusion of purpose was also clear to Richard Hite at De Soto National Memorial:

I too, can sympathize with your situation and assessments. Many of the local people here, believe, that De Soto National Memorial is a cemetery, and if we call on the telephone and announce that we are with De Soto National Memorial we get a curt reply of “no thanks, I don’t want a cemetery lot.”²¹⁶

The perceptive superintendent of Coronado National Memorial, Laurel Dale, offered the root of the problem: “Coronado National Memorial has suffered for years from the same stereotyped idea of what a memorial is supposed to be: “either a brass plaque on a tall (low) oak tree or an imposing piece of statuary.”²¹⁷ Defining what a national memorial actually does is apparently an old problem, and one that ROWI has been grappling with since it prepared to open to the public.

Despite being a National Memorial, there is no strong memorial feature within the site. ROWI is somewhat unusual in its lack of formal memorial; most memorials possess at least some abstract quality—without prior knowledge of events memorialized or additional educational text interpreting the memorial, they do not have a strong instructional character. ROWI is abstract even by memorial standards, as there is no physical reference to Williams or religious freedom within the landscape; as noted

²¹⁴ Franklin G. Smith to Roy Weaver, May 6, 1976. Correspondence files. Roger Williams National Memorial Site Achieve, Providence Rhode Island.

²¹⁵ D.L. Huggins to Roy Weaver, May 11, 1976. Correspondence files. Roger Williams National Memorial Site Achieve, Providence Rhode Island.

²¹⁶ Richard F. Hite to Roy Weaver, May 7, 1976. Correspondence files. Roger Williams National Memorial Site Achieve, Providence Rhode Island.

²¹⁷ Laurel W. Dale to Roy Weaver, May 27, 1976. Correspondence files. Roger Williams National Memorial Site Achieve, Providence Rhode Island.

earlier, the spring well is dry, making it difficult for visitors to uncover its meaning and what it memorializes. The Antram-Gray house is not presented as a historic house or significant for any particular history; rather it is a place to visit to learn about Williams. Notably, the reconstruction of Williams's house or a display of a similar building was decided against in the planning process, in part because of the NPS's strong feelings against reconstructions, and in part because of local disinterest in adding buildings to the site. As already discussed, stakeholders opposed adding any kind of sculptural or structural element evoking Williams or his legacy within the park. While the Hahn Memorial does serve as a formal element dedicated to Williams, its name actually detracts from its role as a memorial to Williams. Perhaps most problematic is that the memorial does not provide sufficient direction for viewers. Unless visitors read the textual interpretive displays, there is no indication that the area is more than a pleasant park landscape. Even if visitors read the panels, there are multiple narratives. Several waysides primarily focus on the history of Providence, while others consider the use of the area by native tribes; neither provide significant information on Roger Williams.²¹⁸ Combined with a dry spring that is often filled with trash, the landscape does little to help visitors understand what they are seeing, let alone invite contemplation of Williams or his legacy.

Because it lacks this strong memorial feature, Roger Williams National Memorial does not fit comfortably into the current historiography of memorial. James Young, generally considered an authority on memorial sites and artwork, discusses Holocaust memorials, reflecting on counter memorials, ruins, formal memorial, and unfinished

²¹⁸ Cultural Landscape Report, 129.

landscapes.²¹⁹ In most of these spaces, the memorial sits on the site of what it memorializes. However, several memorials, such as Austria's "Street-Washing Jew" and Hamburg's *Monument Against Fascism*, are located within public space not associated with key events of the Holocaust, but rather to serve as public reminders against the repetition of the events of the Holocaust.²²⁰ ROWI falls between these categories. The park is clearly situated on land that once belonged to Williams, probably one of the only remaining sites or objects with a direct connection to Williams within Providence. Yet, while the value of the spring site has been continuously marked since 1900 with a plaque and there was some public concern about the loss of the spring site, memorialization activities were clearly focused on Roger Williams Park and Prospect Terrace. Memorialization of the spring seems to have been lost in the creation of ROWI in the sense that it has been obscured by the Hahn Memorial.

In her monumental study of the current "memorial mania," Erika Doss divides memorial impulses into those characterized by grief, fear, gratitude, shame, and anger. Most useful to this study is her definition of "gratitude," characterized by the National World War II Memorial. These memorials speak to later generations' sense of "social consensus and political obligation," to remember sacrifice.²²¹ The impulse for gratitude is more clearly viewed in the construction of Roger Williams Park or the statue of Williams placed on Prospect Terrace, than at ROWI. However, gratitude, interestingly enough, is clearly present in the construction of the Hahn Memorial, as Hahn firmly believed he needed to recognize the Williams's contributions to history that made his own successes

²¹⁹ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993)

²²⁰ Young 28 (Monument Against Fascism) and 104 (Street-Washing Jew).

²²¹ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 195.

possible. As reviewed previously, a strong interest in remembering Williams or sense of gratitude is not readily apparent in the park building process. Hence, this framework, while helpful in interpreting the Hahn Memorial, does little to unpack the rest of the National Memorial.

This lack of a clear memorial element is somewhat ironic since the Hahn Memorial was designed to mark the spring. As shown above, ROWI's memorial features are poorly defined and explicated, and thus the impact of the memorial is difficult to determine. While ROWI could be considered a memorial of absence like the counter memorials and voids discussed by Young, examples of these memorials typically direct the viewer to contemplate the void or markers of explanation. These types of memorials are best suited to marking absence or traumatic events like the Holocaust or terrorist attacks that cause inexplicable loss. Counter memorials are also purposeful, and it is clear that Isham was not designing a counter memorial; he was designing a pocket park. In addition, none of the events typically memorialized by voids are present within the expanded park, ROWI; rather, the site seeks to recognize the fullness added to our society by Roger Williams's determination to create a place of tolerance. A memorial of absence also seems inappropriate for most interpretations of the site; the spring marks new life, formation of a colony, and the formation of the ideal of separation of church and state and religious tolerance held dear by at least some Americans today. Even though civil liberties are always at risk, even in a democracy, ROWI's memorial feature is more likely to be a celebration of success not unlike many other national memorials that mark exploration or achievement.

ROWI fits better in a framework of memorial proposed by Martha Norkunas in *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts*. While the work predominately examines how the story of women has been told through memorial and an examination of the author's family in Lowell, her observations about the role of city and memorial are useful. Norkunas argues that memorials cannot be taken outside the context of their landscape and the distinct character of their community.²²² In her exhaustive documentation of memorial sites within Lowell, Norkunas also discovers that these memorials evolve over time in their meaning, and in some cases, even crumble and are replaced with something entirely different.²²³ Therefore, memorials can be read as a fluid expression of a community and its identity. This interpretation is well-suited to ROWI and suggests that we should read the creation of the park as more indicative of the character of Providence than the character of Williams or the important history of toleration he represents. Finally, Norkunas makes an interesting point about trees as memorial, stating, "The tree contains within it both life and death as the living outer layers surround the "dead" wood of its core. It represents both...the past and immediate present." While Norkunas applies this argument to memorials constructed for loss, trees are central to ROWI, and this connection may help evoke the sense that the park is a space for reflection on past and present. In this way, ROWI does fulfill some aspects of a memorial site. Still, within these frameworks of memorial then, ROWI appears to be an outlier. Given this, it is more productive to look at ROWI within a framework of urban parks growing up alongside it in the 1960s and the new generation of old and new urban parks being rebuilt or revitalized today.

²²² Martha Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 11.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 185.

In 2016, the NPS celebrated the agency's centennial. Within the organization, the moment was one for much soul-searching, as evidenced by the 39-point plan called *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*, first published in 2011 as part of the lead up to the 2016 celebrations. The 50th anniversary of the establishment of the NPS in 1966 was marked by a strong re-tooling and reinvestment in the infrastructure of the system and the construction of additional visitor facilities. "Mission 66" imagined, and for the most part produced, a revitalized NPS system ready for the growing numbers of mobile Americans seeking to experience their national parks for the first time.²²⁴ Fifty years later, the NPS was in a similar situation with some commonalities and some striking differences. Once again, the question of if the parks were being "loved to death" was paramount, highlighted by the well-publicized NPS deferred maintenance backlog, estimated at some \$11.9 billion.²²⁵ Clearly, the celebration of the 100th anniversary, like the 50th, needed to include efforts to reduce the maintenance backlog and make parks welcoming places. At the same time, parks were not experiencing the same kind of growing visitation they had in the 1960s. While people continue to visit the National Parks, often in large numbers as evidenced by overwhelming traffic and use at parks like Arches in Utah, these visitors remained largely older and white, a demographic not representative of the majority of the US population.²²⁶ Additionally, Americans live increasingly in cities and the millennial generations, by some accounts, are less likely to favorably view outdoor recreation.²²⁷

²²⁴ Carr, 3.

²²⁵ US National Park Service, "News Release: National Parks Maintenance Backlog Reaches \$11.9 Billion," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/release.htm?id=1780> (accessed March 28, 2017)

²²⁶ Brian Maffly, "Traffic Jams at Arches Have Managers Thinking About Requiring Reservations," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 23, 2015. Accessed online at <http://www.sltrib.com/home/2758894-155/traffic->

Viewing these potentially grim statistics for the future of the National Park Service, the *Call to Action* report sought to prepare the agency to meet needs of a changing American population. An important outgrowth of the report was a separate report entitled, *Urban Agenda: A Call to Action Initiative*. The *Urban Agenda* established ten model cities, nine of which had National Park Units within them already. At the heart of this initiative was a recognition that many Americans might not have the interest or ability to visit a western National Park like Yellowstone or Yosemite within their lifetime, but were likely very close to both natural and historic resources within their own cities. Using these ten model cities, the NPS sought to change the way it manages parks. Instead of separating from partner organizations and foundations, the report called for new partnership efforts and a particularly strong commitment to engaging racially diverse youth in parks through education programs, fun, and work or internship opportunities.²²⁸ The *Urban Agenda* drew on early urban efforts in the 1960s, which it characterized in the following way:

A tremendous amount of innovation and political will went into the establishment of what are considered to be early models for how the NPS responded to America's growing urban needs for parks, open space and community revitalization. The traditional park model was twisted and rewired in the 1960s-70s into places like San Francisco's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Los Angeles' Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Massachusetts' Lowell National Historical Park and Atlanta's Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area.²²⁹

jams-at-arches-have-managers See also, US National Park Service, National Park Service Stewardship Institute, *Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative*, March 2015, 6.

²²⁷ *Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative*, 16.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Notably, these parks were coming of age at the same time as ROWI. While ROWI does not make the list of sites that offer strong models of urban park building, it does share some similarities with Lowell, a park created with a mission of economic recovery via heritage tourism and with the recreation areas designed to give city dwellers access to open space. Hence, an examination of ROWI's development is important as the NPS reexamines their role as park managers in urban centers. The impulses that shaped ROWI may also shape urban parks today, and ROWI's success as an urban NPS unit, albeit a very small one, may shed some light on how urban parks are used and how design matters.

As the NPS reflects on the design, construction, and peopling of urban parks, the stories of urban renewal that are present in many of these urban parks suggest closer study. ROWI is not alone in having strong roots in the urban development process. The creation of the St. Louis Arch, Jefferson Expansion National Memorial, Independence National Historical Park, Lowell National Historical Park and others can all trace their genesis back to a desire to use the past to clean up the present. In these parks, urban renewal swept away buildings and neighborhoods at least as historic (to present-day eyes) as the ones that they sought to restore to attract visitors. In some cases, these parks seem to be about shoring up America's national myths and foundational principles: liberty, freedom of religion, opportunity, and western expansion. While this thesis does not have the scope to fully investigate these similarities, I suggest that they indicate that we need to view urban renewal based park building as part of a larger effort to retell the American story so that it conforms to important ideals embodied by the constitution and westward expansion, regardless of the execution or truth of these ideals or the directly contradictory

actions, like displacing comparatively poor and powerless citizens to create these places. And, as Andrew Hurley notes in his incisive work, *Beyond Preservation*, all too often urban renewal combined with historic preservation prices the poor out of their own neighborhoods and destroys the important sense of place within the neighborhood.²³⁰ However, Hurley also suggests that with “public interpretation at the grassroots,” communities within inner cities can turn their neighborhoods into successful historic districts and points of community pride.²³¹

It is worth comparing what planners envisioned versus what the park has grown into. Long-time Providence resident and 20-year veteran ranger John McNiff, has watched the park transform from a rundown shopping and warehouse district, to a vacant lot, to a fledgling park with immature plantings, to the shady oasis of mature trees that it is today.²³² He traces the parks development as being akin to the trees that now shade it: the park has grown into itself. Planners aspired to create a space that would create a new gateway to the city for tourism (previously not something many people did in Providence), link historic and current aspects of the city, educate people about Roger Williams and encourage visitors to explore the historic districts up the hill. While planners were not as specific about the day-to-day uses of the park, it is clear that the park has accomplished their larger economic, education, and civic goals and, more impressively, that those goals have effectively revitalized Providence and created a steady stream of heritage tourism. Their plan was not only implemented but has been undeniably successful. While it is hard to say how the College Hill Study authors and

²³⁰ Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), x.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

²³² John McNiff, interview with the author.

stakeholders would view the expanded uses of the park for concerts and theatre, those uses have continued to gain the park an important place in the civic and cultural life of Providence. Even if we consider ROWI to be a tiny example of urban park building compared to Lowell, Gateway National Recreation Area, or Golden Gate National Recreation Area, it should be noted that ROWI has been highly successful in achieving goals shared by many urban parks, the goalsof creating a community place where people can escape the city, enjoy life, and maybe even learn a little more about history.²³³ While size matters in how plans can be implemented, the tremendous success of ROWI should offer a promising case-study for other small urban parks in how preservation, community engagement, and green space can form a coalition within a city to create lasting good.

²³³ The National Park Service does engage in active evaluation or survey of visitors, in part due to federal regulations. The annual surveys that are completed speak more to visitor satisfaction than learning. The assertion that visitors learn history at the site is purely anecdotal, based on conversations with park rangers at the site.

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