

The History of the Bartlet Mall

The Bartlet Mall, located in Newburyport, Mass., is a beautiful 7.3 acre park featuring a large recreational and ornamental pond. It was first shaped thousands of years ago by a huge chunk of ice which broke off a retreating glacier. When the ice finally melted, it left a steep - sided pit that geologists call the kettle hole. In 1645 the first settlers from England named the water at the bottom of the kettle hole Frog Pond. Here they watered thousands of their sheep, which grazed on the ridge above.



The commonland around Frog Pond was dug out for its sand and gravel. It also became the site of a windmill (the millstone lies near the path along the south rim) and the long wooden shed of a ropewalk bordering High Street. In 1744 the southerly side was leveled to form a Trayning Field for the militia companies which soon would fight in the Revolutionary War. After the ropewalk was torn down, Nathaniel Tracy, merchant and privateer owner, was authorized in 1779 to plant shade trees on the vacant site. The shift of gravel pit to park continued in 1800. Captain Edmund Bartlet and friends undertook to fill an unsightly gully. They also converted the ropewalk site into a promenade, patterned after London's famous Pall Mall. It was named "Bartlet Mall".



In 1805 the Superior Court House, designed by the renowned architect Charles Bullfinch, was built. In 1834 volunteer workers extended the walkway around the western rim above the pond. They also implanted turf in the embankments above and below the path. Professional landscaping (plans by Charles Eliot) was sponsored in 1889 by Mall improvements Society, which left the paths and lawns much like you see them now. Charles Eliot was an internationally famous, early seminal figure in the field of landscape architecture, and partnered with Frederick Law

Olmsted before his untimely death in 1897. The National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official listing of cultural resources most worthy of preservation, includes the Bartlet Mall and Superior Courthouse.

Today, the City Improvement Society, the Bartlet Mall Commission and other citizens continue to keep an eye on the area and to offer a helping hand. For two centuries the Mall has been a place

for special activities skating, sliding on snowy slopes, picnicking, community celebrations, festivity, quiet contemplation.



In 1988, Briggs Sculpture was commissioned to put a triple swan ornament on the top of the central fountain. This 6' masterpiece is the center piece of the entire park.

Bartlet Mall is pronounced Bartlet Maal (mäl). In England, the term referred to wide lanes or alleys or a public park where the game of pall-mall was played. This involved striking a ball with a large, heavy mallet. Pall-mall actually derives its root word from **maul** (môl) which was the heavy hammer or mallet, often of wood for driving stakes and wedges into the ground. It is derived from the old Middle English, malle which came from Old French, maile which in itself was derived from the Latin, malleus. (Where we get the word, malleable).



I know that is giving you too much information but **let it suffice, we can tell who's a local and who's a carpetbagger or visitor. So, just keep in mind to pronounce it correctly!**

-P. Preservationist

For a more technical analysis of recent restoration efforts, please consult the technical paper by C.S. Edwards.