



Cutler Park is on Bay Road, across from the Hamilton post office. The sign originally was erected in 1937, when the park name was changed from Central Park to Cutler Park. Photo, J. Hauck, 2013.

History of

Cutler Park

On Bay Road, between 588 and 598 Bay Rd, and across from the Hamilton post office there is a small public park. It is Cutler Park, which was renamed from Central Park in 1937. At the time, there only was one other park in Hamilton: a park alongside Chebacco Lake.⁶

Long before becoming a park, the land was a parsonage lot. In 1713, Samuel Wigglesworth was the first settled pastor of the Parish's First Congregational Church. Before building his parsonage, the church purchased land next to the meetinghouse from Richard Hubbard in 1720.⁵ Rev. Wigglesworth was the town's pastor and physician for fifty-two years.²²

In 1849, the church divided the parsonage lot into five smaller properties.²⁶

A group of church families* purchased one of the parsonage lots for use as a private cemetery. At the time, the town's only cemetery on Bay Road, across from the meetinghouse, had very little space left for more burial plots.

The new cemetery, named the Wigglesworth Cemetery, was dedicated on Apr. 28, 1850.¹⁰

The cemetery was set off in lots 16 x 28 ft. that stretched back to the low rise overlooking Cutler Pond. There was a path, between the lots, for carriages to pass and for people to visit grave plots. At the front of the cemetery, there was an iron fence.¹⁰

Being a short distance from the meetinghouse, the cemetery owners expected it would become a major burial ground for the town. This did not happen.

When the town cemetery was expanded, most families took lots in it rather than the Wigglesworth Cemetery.² Records do not remain concerning burials in the Wigglesworth Cemetery: it likely never was completely used. About 1885, just thirty-some years after being opened, the Wigglesworth Cemetery became abandoned.¹

* Essex County Registry of Deeds, 473:284: John G. Annable, George Appleton, Arza Brown, Elbridge Dodge, Nathaniel Lovering, George Norris Jr., Daniel Rust, David Tibbetts, Dennison Wallis, Nathaniel Whipple, and John Whittredge.

By the start of the 20th century, the cemetery had become, as reported in an annual town report, an eyesore.

With the aim of acquiring the cemetery land and converting it into a park, Hamilton appointed, in 1907, its first Park Commission. Members were: George K. Knowlton, Chair; Rev. James J. Goodacre; and Frank C. Norton.⁸

The Commission investigated the purchase of the Wigglesworth Cemetery, which had a frontage on Main Street of 84 ft. They contacted the descendants of the original proprietors and nine said they were willing to sell.⁸ The town appropriated \$500 for the purchase of the property from the heirs of the original owners.¹³

In 1911, through the efforts of the Hamilton park commissioners Frank C. Norton and George L. von Meyer, the Massachusetts legislature passed an act authorizing Hamilton's board of park commissioners to take over the 58,790 sq. ft. (1.35 acres) of land, for use as a public park.² (*The final size was 2 ac.*) Cutler Park extends along the eastern edge of Cutler Pond, but this area is wetland.

The act, which was entitled "Chapter 109 An Act Authorizing the Taking of Cemetery" Land for a Public Park in the Town of Hamilton," required the park commissioners to find suitable burial spaces, in another cemetery. Further, it stipulated that no land on the site could be used until all the remains, monuments, headstones had been removed to another recognized burial ground.²⁹

The transfer of interments and gravestones to the town cemetery across from Cutler Rd. was slow, but steady. Youngsters watched the dignified transport of the coffins and headstones by horse-drawn carriages along Bay Road.²

George H. Knowlton, Clarence S. Knowlton and Frank C. Norton, members of the board of park commissioners, at that time, suggested renaming the site Central Park, and the town voted its approval.¹³

The owner of the adjoining land, on the north side, planted a row of pines on his property. This gave a more open space appearance to the park. Grass seed was sown back to the knoll overlooking the pond at the rear of the property.²

A house was first built on the lot to the north of the park (*today 598 Bay Rd.*) circa 1840.⁵ It was not until about 1853, that a house was built on the lot to the south of the park (*today 588 Bay Rd.*)⁵ In 1970, the



house was moved to the back of the lot, overlooking Cutler Pond.⁵

Park Commissioners, in 1914, reported that work on the park was nearly done and suggested that "some settees and perhaps some swings be put in for use by children in the summer."¹⁸

In 1915, the town charged the Tree Warden with the care of the park.²⁸

The Park Commissioners, in 1921, suggested that, "at some future time, a small building, open or closed, may be erected on the high ground overlooking Cutlers Pond."³⁰ Nothing ever came of the idea.

An interesting note about how the park was being used appeared in the 1925 Park Commissioners Report: "the park was being extensively used "as a playground, although it became necessary to prohibit the playing of golf there, since that proved to be a menace to safety."⁹

Another menace addressed in 1931 was shooting guns in the park and surrounding areas. Chapter 131, Section 68 of the Laws of Massachusetts, forbade anyone to gun on Park property. Signs were posted prohibiting gunning Park Commissioners assured people that they could "visit the spot, during the fall months, without fear of being shot."³¹

The commissioners also reported that the grass was mown from the street to the top of the knoll; and the undergrowth cleared away on the slope of the knoll facing Cutler's Pond.⁹

However, they also reported that the park could hardly be distinguished from the adjacent pieces of property. They wanted a hedge and perhaps some shrubbery or a few flowers to be planted to distinguish the park from the adjoining properties.⁹ (*A hedge never has been planted.*)

In 1923, the late Nathan Mathews gave to the Town of Hamilton hundreds of dollars worth of shrubs, rhododendrons, and arborvitae and had them set out at his expense.³³

Also in 1923, the Parks Commission kept mowed from the street to the brow of the hill; and removed the underbrush between the hill and Cutlers Pond. Owing to lack of money, no seats or other fittings could be provided that year.³³

From the time it became a park, Cutler provided, during winter, a way to go ice-skating on Cutler Pond. In 1925, the park commissioners stated that "the pond was the only desirable skating place in this vicinity."¹²

The pond, throughout the year, attracted fishermen seeking to catch various bass, trout, pickerel and perch.

During the peak years of ice harvesting in the greater Wenham-Hamilton area (1890s), ice was taken from the pond.

In 1929, a way was cleared from the top of the hill to the pond and a small pier erected. This was done to aid those who wanted to moor their boats here in the summer and for the convenience of skaters during the winter months.³³

Cutler Pond, with a surface area of about 5 acres, is the headwaters of Black Brook, which flows from the west end of the pond and eventually into the Ipswich River.^{19, 20} An underground spring feeds the pond.

Though not an official name change, the pond was referred to as "Still Pond," in the 1981 obituary for Cornelius Conway Felton, who had lived at 588 Bay Rd.²⁷

No person has ever done more to care for Cutler Park than Francis C. Norton, who died Jan. 20, 1933

(born at Essex, May 29, 1845). He served on the Cemetery Commission for 28 years, and the Park Commission 14 years. It was through his efforts that a movement was started which resulted in the bodies being moved from the Old Graveyard (now part of Cutler Park) to the Town Cemetery across the street. Francis C. Norton³²



Rev. Manasseh Cutler
Photo Robinson Library.com

In 1935, an article in the Salem News described the park as follows: "From the attractive little benches situated at the top of the hill, one may look across this little body of water, where particularly at this time of year, when the shores are full of multi-colored autumn foliage, it presents a delightful picture. It is said that beautiful blue herons used to frequent this spot, but in recent years these odd-appearing, long-necked birds with their long, tapered bills, large wings, bright plumage, and ungainly stork-like legs have not been observed at their usual haunts."²

The 1935 Salem News article also had this to say of the park, "To those, who like to stroll in the attractive pine grove or sit quietly on one of the rough benches, placed at intervals about the grounds, it offers a delightful setting for just such a reverie."² The name change from Central Park to Cutler Park occurred during the 1937 Northwest Territory Celebration in Hamilton.⁶



Cutler Pond, above, as seen from knoll at the back of Cutler Park. At right, the narrow park as seen from Bay Road. Photos, J. Hauck, Apr. 2013.



Cutler Park and part of Cutler Pond are in the Hamilton Historic District.

The park's namesake, Manasseh Cutler (1742-1823), served for 53 years as minister of Hamilton's First Congregational Church (1771 to 1823). To his fellow townsmen, he was pastor and statesman, scientist and teacher.²³

It was Rev. Cutler's vision that led to the first expedition to the Northwest Territory by the Ohio Company of Associates, in 1788,¹¹ and the founding of Marietta, OH.²³

Following 1945, town records have very few references to Cutler Park.

In 1973, when Hamilton established the Historic District, Cutler Park and a portion of Cutler Pond became part of the district.

In 1998, the selectmen had a picnic table moved from behind the town hall to the park. Originally, it was in the middle of the park, near the large maple tree.²⁴

In 2001, Johanna Donovan placed a bench at the front of the park, in memory of her mother Ida M. Casutt, who lived in Florida and often visited. Ida enjoyed walking along Bay Road to the town center, but felt there should have been a bench half way between on which she could rest. The bench plaque reads: "*As you sit and rest your feet, give a thought to Ida sweet.*"²⁹

The Park Commissioners, in 1927, stated, "We believe that it is especially fitting that Central Park, on account of its location on the main highway in the immediate vicinity of the Town Hall and Soldiers Green and places of historical interest, be made as beautiful and attractive as possible.

Only sporadic efforts have followed the 1927 call to beautify Cutler Park.

In 2000, a volunteer from the Boy Scouts of America, John Serafmi, cleared the brush from Cutler Park to make the trail to the pond accessible.³⁵

In 2005, as part of the Regional High School "Give Back Day," high school students raked and cleaned up the park.³⁶

Then, in 2013, the town initiated a program to re-develop Cutler Pond, with help from the community. The town hired former town Planning Coordinator Marcie Ricker as a landscape consultant. Her plan called for creating a stroll garden, with grass and stone walkways in the shape of an infinity symbol. At the back of the 2-acre park,³⁷ overgrown bushes and trees were to be cleared to create a vista overlooking the pond. There also were plans for a butterfly garden, a statue of Rev. Manasseh Cutler and benches placed along the path.²⁵

No action was taken on the plan.

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