

LAUREL HILL PARK



A LITTLE HISTORY

The land that is now Laurel Hill Park has been public for much of the history of the Town of Stockbridge. For hundreds of years, it was communally used by the Mohicans. In 1737, Indian Town was created by a Royal Charter. In **1750**, the Indian Proprietorship was created, giving tribal members control of the granting of all land. The hill was divided into two Mohican-owned parcels, which were later combined and bought by the Woodbridge family, one of the first colonial families.

In **1834**, the prominent **Sedgwick family** purchased the "**little Hill**" from Joseph E. Woodbridge for \$450, and immediately opened it for the use and benefit of the public. This was the infancy of the land trust movement, popular today. The Sedgwick's were definitely ahead of their time. The National Park Service didn't come into being until 1916.



In August **1853**, **Mary Hopkins Goodrich**, great-granddaughter of the first missionary **John Sergeant**, decided something needed to be done about the appalling conditions of the town sidewalks, streets, cemetery, and more. Notices were posted as a call-to-action for townspeople to meet on Laurel Hill to see about the needed betterments. A village improvement society was formed, named the **Laurel Hill Association**. Its mission: ***To do such things as shall improve the quality of life and of the environment in the town of Stockbridge.***

In **1878**, the Sedgwick family deeded Laurel Hill to the Laurel Hill Association, which had completed its first 25 years. The deed dictates that the premises are "***...dedicated...to the use benefit and pleasure of the public intending that the same be protected and preserved forever for that purpose***".

Today, the Laurel Hill Association continues its mission, with nearly 500 acres of properties and trails for conservation and public enjoyment. It is the nation's oldest whole community village improvement association. Each August, the anniversary of the first meeting is celebrated with the public at Laurel Hill Day here in Laurel Hill Park, the Association's first and namesake property.

Please enjoy your time visiting the Park!

Learn more about LHA at: www.laurelhillassociation.org.



Early descriptions of the Park state that it:

“...had splendid rocks soaring into the air, and a hillside pink with laurel in the Spring.”

The natural amphitheater in front of you showcases a **Wall of dramatic, tall, exposed Rocks**, which extends all along the west side of the hill. A recent restoration project of uncovering these rockfaces from years of obscuring overgrowth was completed with a grant from the Stockbridge Community Preservation Commission.



The **Grassy Glen** is the only open part of the hill. Most of the time it is quiet and serene, but on special occasions voices and music fill the air.

Unfortunately, **Laurel** no longer covers the hillside with pink in the spring. But there are some pockets of old plants scattered about. A recent restoration project of planting new Mountain Laurel was made possible with a generous grant from the Lenox Garden Club.

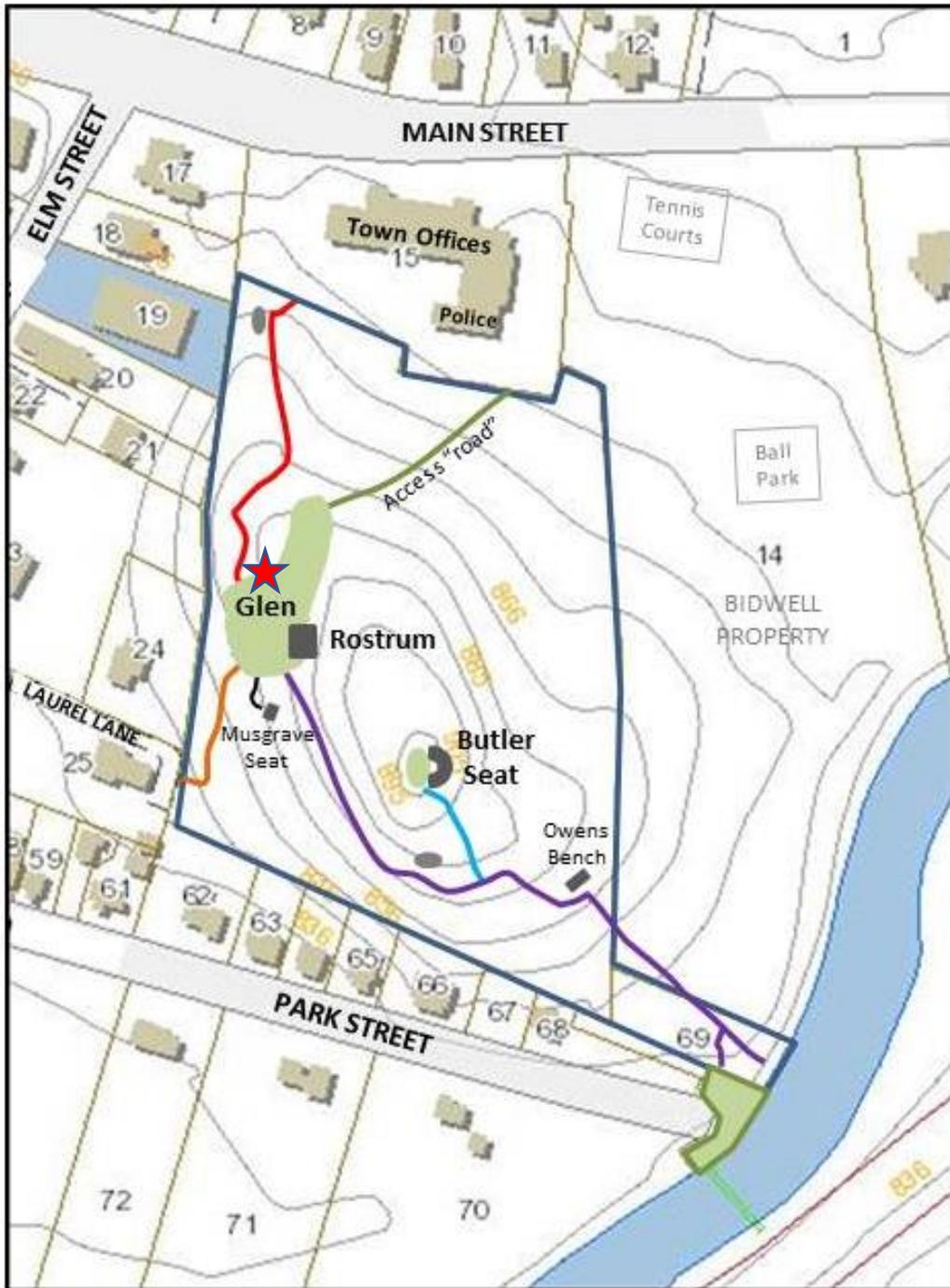
Grand old **Oak Trees** can be seen throughout the park. Their thick trunks thrust branches high into the canopy.

Tenacious **Hemlock Trees** are widespread. As shown in the picture on the right, some large specimens can be seen growing miraculously on top of solid rock.

Stately **Pine Trees** stretch straight and tall amid the oak and hemlock.



Recently, a first-time visitor walked into the grassy glen and was heard to exclaim: “What is this magic place?!” We hope you’ve had the same reaction to these natural wonders!



★ = You are here, in the Glen

RED (Sedgwick Path) Between the Town Offices west parking area and the Glen

BLACK Between the Glen and the Musgrave Seat

ORANGE (Lane Path) Between the Glen and Laurel Lane

GREEN (Access Way) Between the Police parking area and the Glen

PURPLE (Adams Path) Between the Glen and the Park Street cul-de-sac

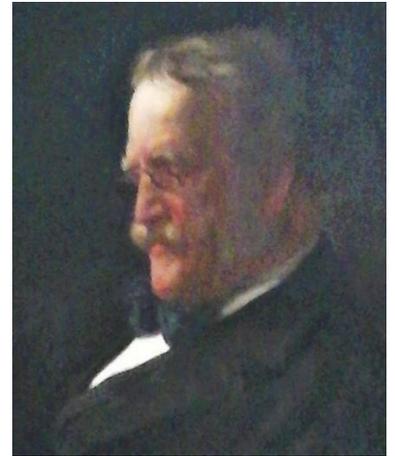
BLUE (Summit Path) Between the **Adams Path** and the Butler Seat



The stone **Rostrum** ahead of you in the open glen was designed by famed sculptor Daniel Chester French (Lincoln Memorial), built by sculptor Augustus Lukeman (Stone Mountain in GA), and dedicated in 1905 to **Henry Dwight Sedgwick**, president of the Association 1881-1904.



The **Desk** has two bronze **Arms** to hold a laurel swag for Laurel Hill Day observances. There is a memorial bronze **Plaque** to Henry D. Sedgwick on the front skirt of the stone platform.



The **Sedgwick Seat** at the rear of the Rostrum is also dedicated to H. D. Sedgwick. The inscription reads: VIRO DILECTISSIMO AMICI (To the most delightful man from his friends.) In a 1905 newspaper clipping, it was estimated that to install the 10-ton seat, it was going to take 4 teams of horses and 12 men 2 days to move it from Alexander Sedgwick's farm...all for \$125!

The **Butler Seat** at the summit of the hill was installed as a memorial in the early 1900's. The inscription on the rear reads: IN MEMORY OF PRESCOTT HALL BUTLER MDCCCXLVIII – MCM I (1848-1901.) **Prescott Hall Butler** was the son of Charles Butler ("Linwood" estate, now Rockwell Museum), partner in a prestigious law firm with Joseph Choate ("Naumkeag" estate) and C. S. Southmayd ("Southmayd" estate.) Prescott followed his father in the firm. In February 1896 Prescott was the first person in the United States to be x-rayed, to help remove buckshot from his hand after a gunshot accident. The seat has a wonderful view west to Monument Mountain.



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INSCRIBED ROCKS

The **Sedgwick Family Boulder** is located at the start of the Sedgwick Path up from the Town Offices west parking lot. The inscription reads:

LAUREL HILL
GIFT OF THE
SEDGWICK FAMILY
1834

(See the HISTORY panel for further background.)



The **Musgrave Seat** is below and to the right of the Rostrum. It was given by Lady Musgrave, the former Jeanie Field.

On the seat back is carved:
ON REVIENT TOUJOURS
(We always come back.)

On the skirt below the seat is carved:
MUSGRAVE.



The **Lucius S. Adams Boulder** is uphill of the Adams Path, midway between the Rostrum glen and the Park Street cul-de-sac. Adams was President from 1855-1880. He had a great influence on many of the early decisions and improvements of the Association.

The Inscription reads:

THIS PATH IS
A MEMORIAL OF
LUCIUS S. ADAMS, M.D.
THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN
1804-1880

