

# BERGEN COUNTY'S PARK PROGRAM

Seventh Annual Report of the  
BERGEN COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

A Turn in the Path  
Van Sled Right

1953

March 1954

Board of Chosen Freeholders  
Administrative Building  
Hackensack, N.J.

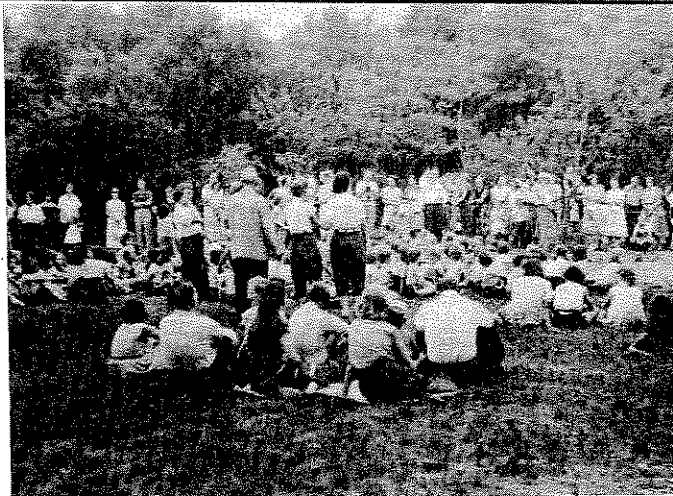
Gentlemen:

The Bergen County Park Commission is pleased to submit its Annual Report for 1953 and desires to call attention to the rounding out of the main areas selected as park sites.

Emphasis has shifted from land acquisition to park development. The County's investment in the land and the Commission's work during the past seven years can become an asset of indeterminable value once these lands are made into parks.

The Commission knows that the Board shares with it a desire to shape these areas for recreational use.

Respectfully submitted,  
*A. Thornton Bishop*  
A. Thornton Bishop  
President,  
Bergen County Park Commission



*The Ridgewood-HoHokus-Glen Rock Council of the Girl Scouts held day encampments in the Wild Duck Pond Park.*

**BERGEN COUNTY PARK COMMISSION**

**A. Thornton Bishop, President**

**Ira H. Davey, Vice-President**

**William Staubach, Secretary**

**Harold M. Davison**

**Emil J. Geering**

**Clifford Mische, Executive Director**

# The Year in Review

Accomplishments of the Bergen County Park Commission during 1953 were highlighted by extensive construction activity in the Saddle River, Lyndhurst and Ridgewood areas; in the acquisition of 394.58 acres of additional sites for recreation purposes; and the extension of the public's use of the park system.

In the Saddle River area construction was begun that will eventually transform many acres of swampland into useful recreation areas. In North Arlington where refuse had been deposited in the swampland on a large portion of the 30 acres acquired by the Park Commission and lying along the Passaic River, the dumps were leveled and covered with top soil and seeded. Picnic tables, fireplaces, benches, and a regulation size baseball diamond were installed in the area. Some 17 acres of this land will soon be available as a park for public use.

In Garfield more than 2,500 scrubs were planted in the Dahnerts Lake Park and in Memorial Field where a new baseball diamond also was constructed, the areas top-dressed and a new basic path system started. In Ridgewood the public space on the west side of the duck pond was completed, and on the east side, landscaping was advanced, the banks along the Saddle River were made more accessible and hard-surfaced paths were installed.

✓ In the Van Saun area, the bridle path was rebuilt making available to equestrians three and one half miles of path through this interesting and varied terrain.

In 1953, as in the year previous, more than 100 children, members of the Ridgewood-HoHokus-Glen Rock Council of the Girl Scouts of America, used the improved groves in the wooded area in the Wild Duck Pond Park for day encampment exercises during July and August. The Commission extended its coop-

eration also to the North Bergen County Council, Inc., Boy Scouts of America, in the use of a portion of the Saddle River area as the site of a development program for scouting activities.

At the organization meeting in January, the Commission re-elected A. Thornton Bishop, president; Ira H. Davey, vice-president; and William Staubach, secretary. Harold M. Davison and Emil J. Geering continued as members of the Commission. The manner in which Clifford Mische had assumed the responsibilities of the office of Executive Director gives great promise for his future value in the development of the park system.

## Changes in the Personnel

Herbert H. Handelsmann of Ridgewood joined the staff in September to assist the Executive Director. His business background in allied fields in addition to his familiarity with general landscape practice has increased the effectiveness of the organization.

Edward M. Johnson, Foreman of Planting, was promoted to Superintendent of Landscape in charge of all planting operations and the Van Saun Nursery. Joseph Volpe, Jr., Foreman of Construction, was promoted to Superintendent of Construction, and was assigned to the Saddle River project. Paul Patti, Supervisor of Field Operations, was promoted to Superintendent of Maintenance and Construction.

Miss Iola Peterson, Executive Assistant, who has been with the Commission since its inception, requested a six-months leave of absence beginning January 1, 1954, on which date she was married. Mrs. Charlotte V. Roth, Secretary, assumed the duties of Miss Peterson, and Mrs. Martha E. Miller joined the staff in November to assist in the growing clerical work.

From the time of its creation in 1947, the Commission has occupied rooms on the second floor of the County Court House. As the activities were extended and the staff was increased, additional space was allotted to the Commission in rooms adjoining and in the basement of the building. A revision of the State judicial structure made it necessary for the court facilities also to expand. It became necessary for the Commission to move to the Administrative Building where space was provided in the pent house. In December the Commission held its first meeting in its newly decorated quarters that is somewhat larger than the rooms it occupied in the Court House.

Executive Director Mische was elected to the Executive Board of the New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association.

### Negotiation for Land Continues

Much of the negotiation for further park sites was centered in the Saddle River area where acquisition of land is required for retaining basins in the flood control program. However, for some years the Commission has been disturbed by the disappearance of large tracts that might be suitable as future golf courses or other functions that require extensive acreage and a varying terrain. The Commission has been watchful for the opportunity to acquire land suitable for this type of development. A sizeable tract, located in the northeast section of the County, was brought to the Commission's



*This area was filled up to a depth of nine feet.*

attention. The land bordered a parcel that had been deeded to the Commission by the Borough of Northvale. The first parcel, amounting to 82.58 acres, was purchased during the year and negotiations are being conducted to round out the desired area.

On May 11, 1953, the Board of Chosen Freeholders awarded a contract to Kuchar Brothers of Montvale for the fabrication and installation of the tide gates for the sum of \$169,500. It was intended that the gates should be in place and operating before the end of the year. By mid-summer it became obvious that the fabricating companies could not meet the schedule because of emergency orders by the Federal government, and the Atomic Energy Commission, both of whom had priority rights over the Park Commission.

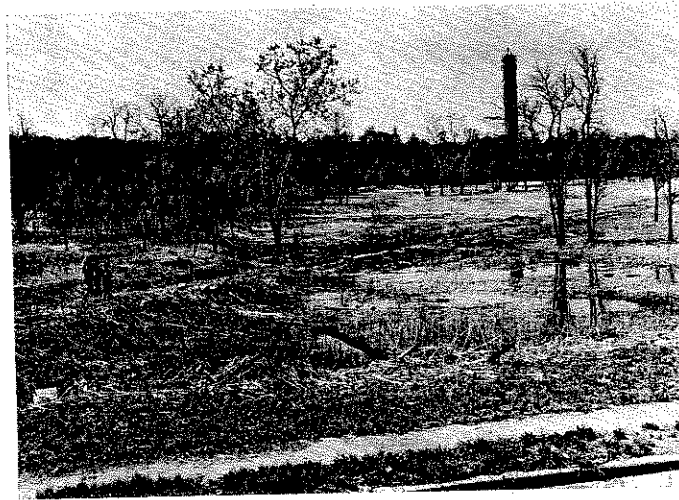
Meetings were held between the parties concerned in an effort to find a solution to the delay, and the result of these meetings gives fair promise to the completion of the installation during 1954.

Legal work connected with the foreclosure of tax lien certificates that represented hundreds of acres of the sub-marginal land conveyed to the County by municipalities bordering the Overpeck was concluded, and negotiations for certain properties still held in private ownership continued. Contracts concluded during 1953 added 12.53 acres to the land held by the County in this area.

*Along the Saddle River. A five acre play field was made out of an impassable swamp during 1953. The main course of the river lies behind the trees.*



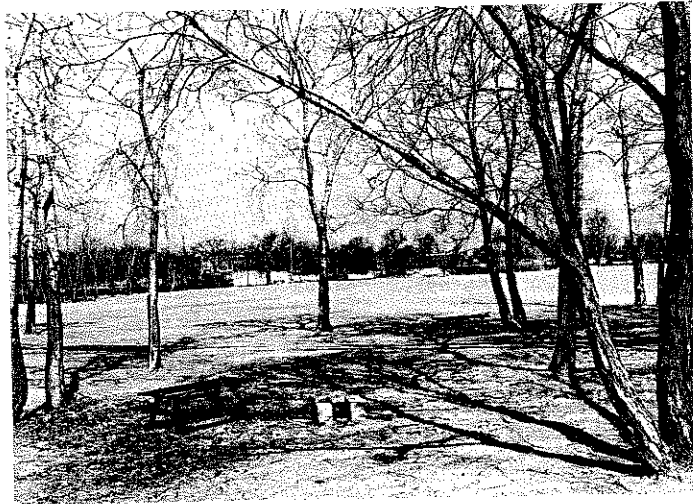




*BEFORE the Commission's bulldozers got to work on this rough terrain in Lyndhurst.*

*AFTER the land had been leveled, the swamp areas filled, and the ground seeded.*

## The Passaic River Area



*Picnic areas were installed, fireplaces built, a baseball field prepared with backstop erected, and 8,000 trees and scrubs were planted bordering the park.*



## Building a Man-Made Lake

On June 10, 1953 the Commission began operations with its own field force along the Saddle River just south of the former Public Service trolley right-of-way and the Fairlawn boundary. When work is completed the previously impassable and sub-marginal swamplands along the river will be available as a beautiful park. The basic consideration of flood control had to be established before the work began. Plans prepared earlier in the year by Mr. Anthony Lunetta, Hydraulic Engineer, were followed as to grading that necessitated the creation of a lake nine feet deep near the center with sides sloping gradually upward and westward to form a grassy play field.

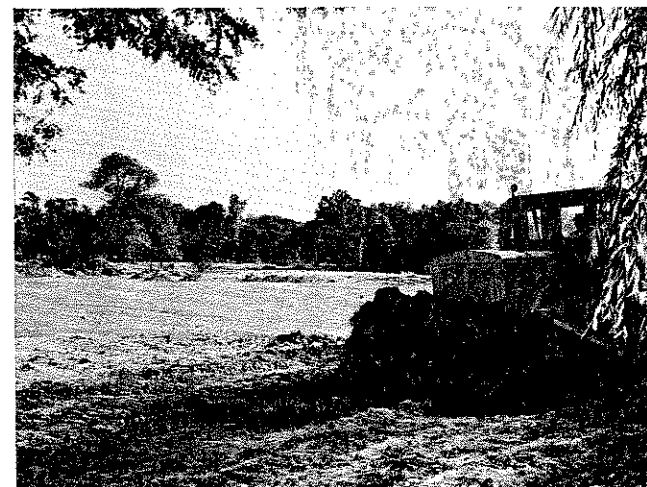
This lake and the sloping area surrounding it comprises a basin that will fill and retain the flash floods on the few days each year that they occur, but will drain and dry rapidly as the waters

recede. This control of large quantities of water will prevent the river overflowing its banks where the stream is narrow. A similar treatment will be developed in other portions of the Saddle River as the project is extended.

About one-half mile north of this first dredging operation the Commission improved a large area bordering the river by trucking approximately 35,000 cubic yards of fill and depositing it to a maximum depth of nine feet and sloping gradually toward the river bank. This land, formerly swamp, is now eight acres of lawns and ready for recreational use.

Late in the fall the County officials were informed by the Garden State Parkway Authority that it was the intention to build the new roadway across the Saddle River at a point not far distant from where construction activities were taking place.

*With pumps, dragline and bulldozers, the Commission's field force changed a large swampy bog into a lake nine feet deep near the center from which the shore sloped gradually in the shape of a large basin. Much of the land above the average water line will serve as playfields, but in times of flood will fill and retain surplus water which will avoid much damage to property along the river.*



The Authority was asked by the Board of Chosen Freeholders to have their engineers work in cooperation with the staff of the Park Commission and with Hydraulic Engineer Lunetta in an effort to effect a right-of-way acceptable to all concerned. Engineering details and the establishment of the line are still being planned by the respective staffs. The Commission, therefore, thinks it advisable to slow down or suspend the construction work in this area until the many factors of the Garden State Parkway problem are determined.

At the intersection of Route 4 and Saddle River Road the State Highway Department is prepared to build an overpass, the approaches of which on the south side will pass close to property already acquired by the County for park purposes. It is quite possible that the interests of both the State and the Commission will be served in a joint effort to beautify this area.

### Activity Along the Passaic River

Following the acquisition of certain properties in the North Arlington area formerly held in private ownership, the Commission began reclamation of land along the Passaic River and followed its improve-

ment with the construction of a baseball field and picnic areas with fireplaces and benches.

This property was separated from the town itself by a wide and impassable drainage ditch. Before work on the area could begin the Commission let contracts for the installation of six-foot reinforced concrete pipe for a considerable distance to give access from a broad frontage into the new park. Work is continuing in this area.

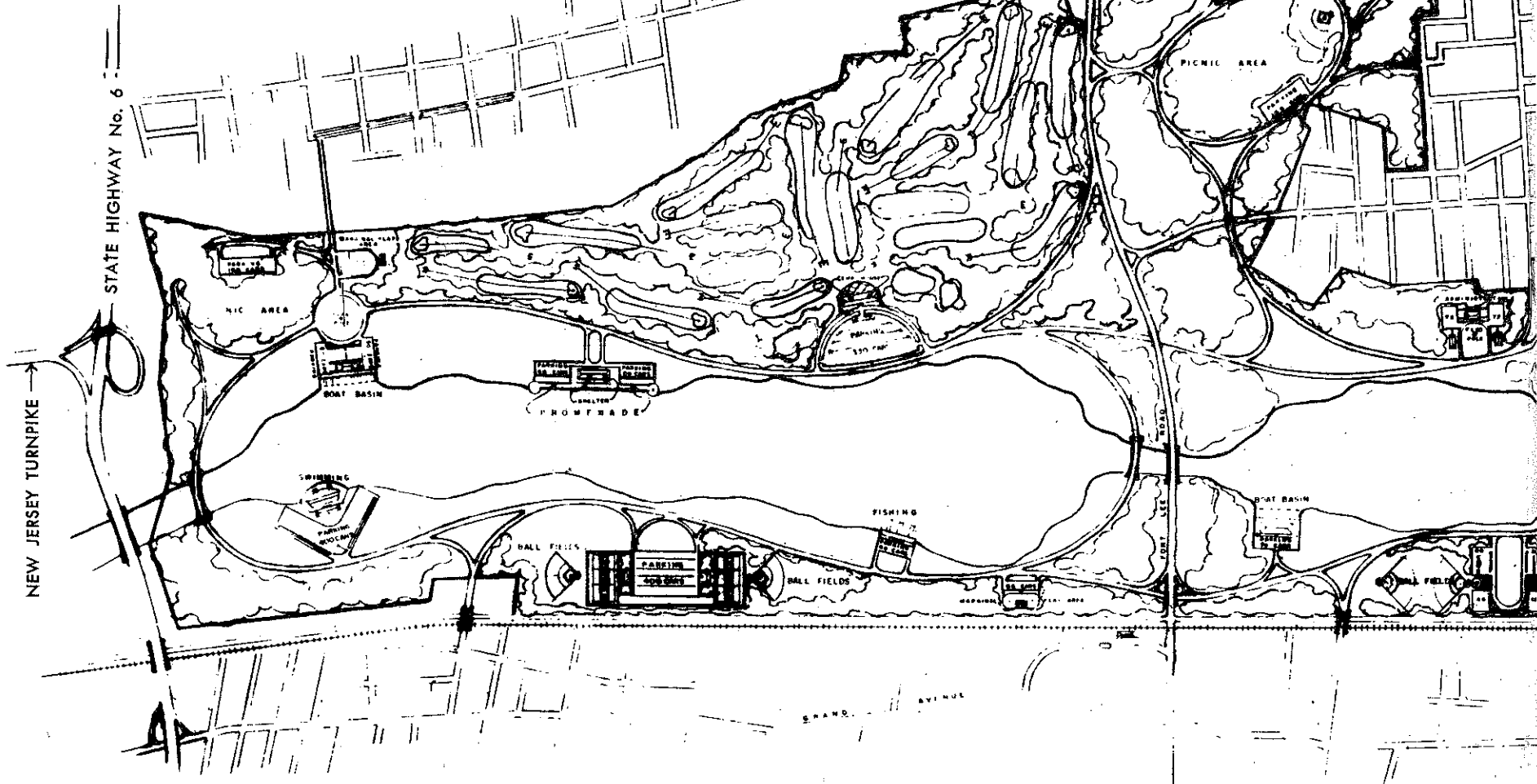


*Left and below, portions of the Saddle River operations. To the right and above, an area in North Arlington improved by the Commission's field force. In the foreground of the picture to the right can be seen the drainage ditch now passing through a six-foot concrete pipe to make the area accessible.*





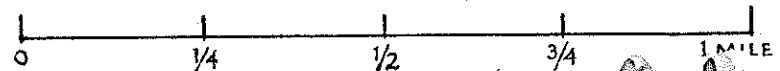
VILLAGE OF RIDGEFIELD PARK

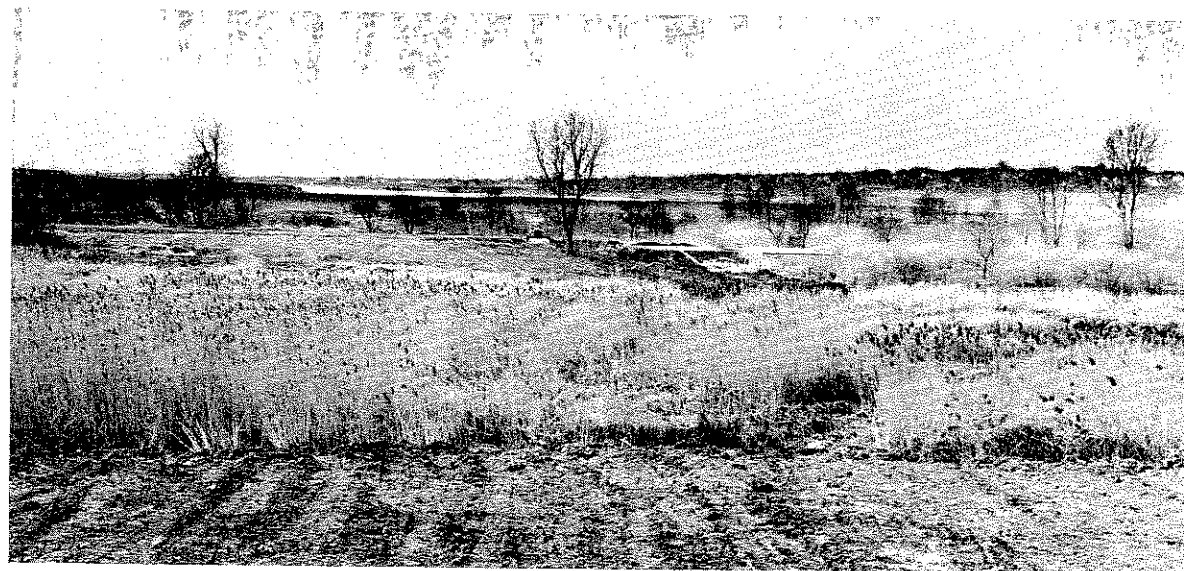
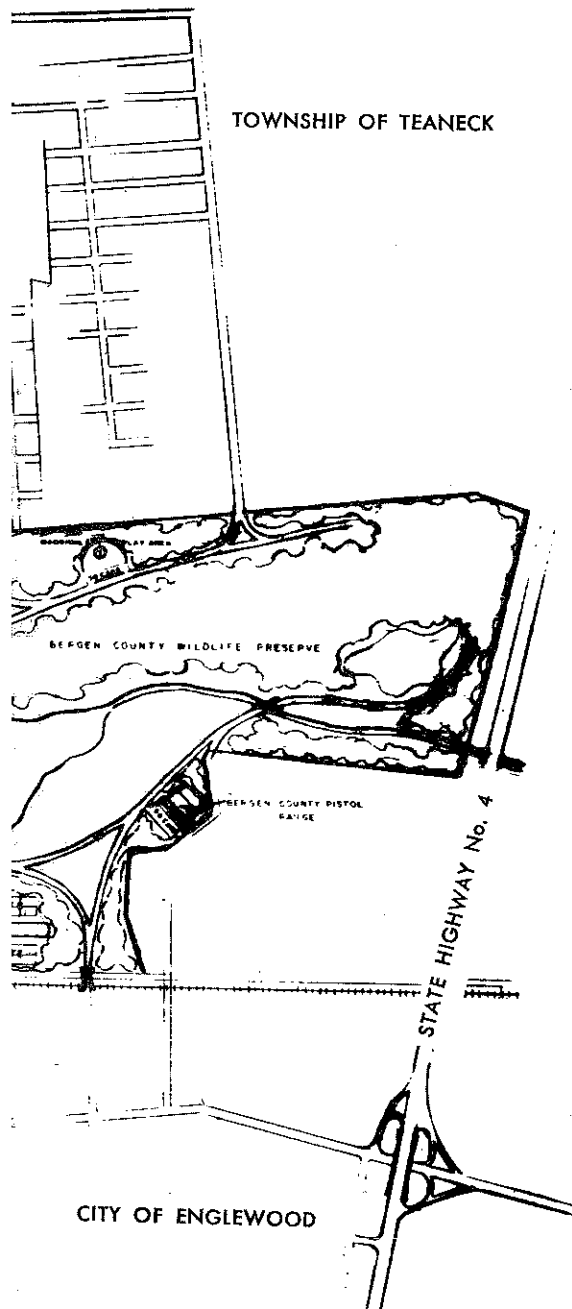


BOROUGH OF PALISADES PARK

BOROUGH OF LEONIA

## Overpeck County Park





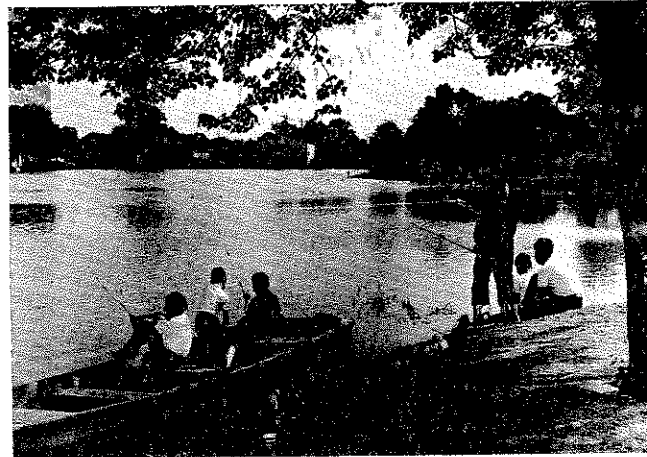
### Progress in the Overpeck Creek Basin

For many months the Commission has been studying the information collected by the staff and consulting engineers concerning the formation of the creek bed and the nature of the land lying along the water's edge. As the information was made available the design of the Overpeck County Park took shape. Although the more recent studies differ in detail from the original conception of the area's development as published in earlier reports by the Commission, the basic pattern for land and water use has remained essentially the same.

A recent study of the design, shown at the left, indicates a circulatory road system within the park area with entrances to each of the bordering municipalities, a golf course, two boat basins, picnic areas, ball fields, a wildlife preserve, and many parking areas. Marginal play fields are planned close to the outer perimeter of the park where they can be reached easily from the various municipalities.

A view of the area taken from Fort Lee Road near the tracks of the Northern Railroad is shown above. Work has been begun by the Commission's field force to clear the land in preparation for development work during 1954. One of the Commission's bulldozers can be seen in the center, middle distance.

## Ridgewood Area



A work record at the Wild Duck Pond. At left, three stages of the operation that changed the shape of the pond that made more of the area available to the public. On the east side of the pond the groves were thinned and cleared, a new course was built by which means the water in the pond flowed into the Saddle River, and a bridge was erected over the stream. Along this waterway a picnic area was prepared. On the north side of the stream the groves accommodated the encampment of the Girl Scouts. The next stage of the work in this area includes a roadway passing through this verdant section.



# Progress in Land Acquisition

Most of the negotiating for land during 1953 was along the Saddle River where considerable acreage of low land bordering the stream is being acquired in the joint interests of flood control and parks. The purchases and commitments in this area during the year totaled 139.16 acres.

In northwest Bergen the acquisitions were virtually completed with the closing of the contract with the Roman Catholic Diocese of the Archdiocese of Newark for approximately 96 acres. Because of a practise of careless conveyancing of property by individual landowners in this locality the Commission finds it necessary to give considerable time to establish clear titles. However, the few parcels remaining are small and the site for this important park is practically secured. Other purchases of

land in this area during 1953 brought the total acreage acquired to 881.18 acres.

The purchase of the first parcel toward the assembly of land in the Northvale-Rockleigh area was mentioned under the heading The Year in Review. Negotiations are being carried on with a view of completing the entire tract during 1954. Other purchases made during the past year represent small parcels acquired to round out larger assemblies elsewhere. No land was received from municipalities during the year. Total acreage in the park system to date is 2,810.13 acres.

A statement of the Land Acquisition program to December 31, 1953 follows:

## LAND ACQUISITION STATEMENT PRIVATE PROPERTY

Close of December 31-1953

	SUB TOTALS		TOTAL	
	Acres	Cost	Acres	Cost
Reported close of Dec. 31, 1952	1,162.65	\$612,152.00		
Plus Title closing adjustments made in year 1953	<u>38.92</u>	<u>15,013.45</u>		
			1,201.57	\$627,165.45

### COMMITMENTS MADE IN 1953

Overpeck Creek Area	12.60	21,700.00		
Saddle River Area	139.16	80,942.00		
Van Saun Area	5.28	10,335.73		
Northwest Bergen Area	116.11	17,442.50		
Northeast Bergen Area	<u>82.58</u>	<u>55,000.00</u>		
Combined Total			355.73	\$185,420.23

Brought forward

Acres

Cost

355.73

\$185,420.23

Reported close of Dec. 31, 1952	1,252.90	-0-
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ACQUIRED BY ORDINANCE 1953

None

Total

-0-

-0-

1,252.90

-0-

## RIPARIAN RIGHTS PURCHASED

Reported close of Dec. 31, 1952

40,000 linear feet

-0-

40,000.00

Overpeck Creek Area 1953

5,311.19 linear feet

-0-

5,311.19

-0-

\$ 45,311.19

Grand Total of all Property

2,810.20

\$857,896.87

Condensed statement of Lands acquired for park development

Close of December 31, 1953

	SUB-TOTALS		TOTAL	
	Acres	Cost	Acres	Cost
<b>OVERPECK CREEK AREA</b>				
Purchased or contracted for	93.78	\$ 83,154.00		
Municipal land donated	954.81	-0-		
*Riparian Rights acquired	-0-	<u>45,311.19</u>		
Total			1,048.59	\$128,465.19
<b>PASSAIC RIVER AREA</b>				
Purchased or contracted for	50.46	\$121,321.00		
Municipal lands donated	<u>56.00</u>	<u>-0-</u>		
Total			106.46	\$121,321.00
<b>SADDLE RIVER AREA</b>				
Purchased or contracted for	309.82	\$198,470.00		
Municipal lands donated	<u>42.09</u>	<u>-0-</u>		
Total			351.91	\$198,470.00



Freeholders Smeltzer, Leers and Pollitt inaugurate the Saddle River project, Mr. Pollitt with first shovel full of earth, and Mr. Leers starting with the second. Mr. Smeltzer is third from the left.



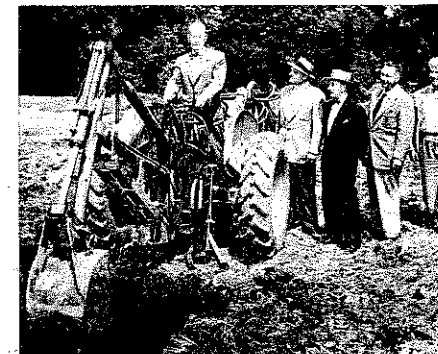
<b>SOUTHWEST BERGEN AREA</b>			
Purchased or contracted for	0.12	\$ 2,200.00	
Municipal lands donated	90.00	-0-	
Total			90.12 \$ 2,200.00
<b>VAN SAUN AREA</b>			
Purchased or contracted for	138.03	\$193,461.73	
Privately owned land donated	1.25	-0-	
Total			139.28 \$193,461.73
<b>NORTHWEST BERGEN AREA</b>			
Purchased or contracted for			881.18 \$158,968.95
<b>NORTHEAST BERGEN AREA</b>			
Purchased or contracted for			82.58 \$ 55,000.00
<b>HACKENSACK RIVER AREA</b>			
Land purchased			0.08 \$ 10.00
<b>PASCACK BROOK AREA</b>			
Municipal lands donated		110.00	\$ -0-
Grand Total		<u>2,810.20</u>	<u>\$857,896.87</u>

#### SUMMARY OF LAND ACQUISITION

Privately owned properties purchased or contracted for	1,556.05	\$812,585.68
Privately owned properties donated .....	1.25	-0-
Municipally owned properties donated .....	1,252.90	-0-
*Riparian Rights acquired (Overpeck Creek Area).....	-0-	\$ 45,311.19
Grand Total	<u>2,810.20</u>	<u>\$857,896.87</u>

\*The Riparian Rights acquired represents 45,311.19 linear feet @ 1.00 per foot.

Average cost for private property purchased and committed approximately \$522.17 per acre



Commissioner Davison tries his hand at operating a piece of field equipment while Commissioners Staubach, Davey and Geering, and Superintendent of Construction and Maintenance Patti look on.

## Problems Awaiting Solution

Each year the benefits of the County's park system are extended to more people. Each new acre prepared for recreational use not only has cost money to acquire and develop but adds annually to the responsibilities of the Commission staff to service and maintain. Each year the need for increased staff and funds exceeds that of the year just passed.

This process of growth has been consistent and can be expected to continue until the park system has improved the sites acquired and until such time when public installations, for which fees may be charged, can yield an income to help defray the annual expenses for service and maintenance.

During the past seven years the chief effort of the Commission has been to acquire the sites on which the County's park system would take shape. It has called for capital outlay and has been financed mainly by means of bond resolutions issued so that at no time would there be more than \$1,000,000 of County commitments for parks outstanding or authorized. All construction and staff operations have been budgeted within the annual appropriations made possible by the Board of Chosen Freeholders, and limited to an amount equal to one half of a mill on each dollar of the assessed valuation of the real estate including improvements in the County as shown by the last list of ratables made up and approved by the County Board of Taxation.

While the amount of realty valuations has risen annually, the money that the Board of Chosen Freeholders could appropriate under the law has not been sufficient to keep pace with the increasing need for funds to service the expanding system. It seems that the solution of this problem lies in a revision of the Park law to permit the Board of Chosen Freeholders to provide for this progress in park operations.

While some of the areas in which construction work has been carried on have presented projects not too expensive to finance out of annual appropriations, there are certain areas of such size presenting problems of such magnitude that other means of financing will be necessary in order to contemplate a substantial program for operation. Probably the largest of these is the Overpeck Creek area.

In preparation for development of this area, preliminary surveys and plans have been made sufficient to suggest the methods and means by which the work can be done. The low sub-marginal marshes must be reclaimed before public use can be made of much of this area. Many acres of these marshes are now being used as municipal dumps. Although these dumps can be covered with fill carried to the area and smoothed over, seeded and planted, the cost of the fill together with its transportation will be high and the operation will take a long time.

Silt and clay from the creek bed conveyed to the low-lying areas by a dredge and pump will also be costly but this means of operation will achieve a faster schedule and bring the land into public use in fewer years.

However, this process would require more money than could be provided by annual appropriations even were the law to be changed to permit a moderate increase. The solution to this problem seems to lie in a long range financial plan activated by bond issues by which the development can be advanced without placing a heavy burden on the taxpayer.

The Board of Chosen Freeholders has made available to the Park Commission during recent years all the money it possibly could under the present law. It will be necessary for the public to approve by

referendum such changes in the present Park law as will permit the Board to underwrite further progress in the County's park program.

The Overpeck Creek has presented this problem to generations of Bergen County citizens. The expansion of the County, the importance of its position so relatively close to New York, and the constant threat of increased cost as time passes, points to the importance of the public understanding and acting as soon as possible in order to take full advantage of the land the County has assembled during the past few years. The development of the area will bring many benefits to the public, in health, recreation, and in improved and stabilized land values. It is a big job and must be attacked with big tools, with foresight, imagination and a determination to see it through.

### The Van Saun Area

*The Van Saun area is probably the most promising land from the viewpoint of development for recreation purposes that the Commission has acquired. It has a terrain so varied that many interesting features offer themselves for the future pleasures of the public. Below, the Van Saun Brook widens where a beautiful lagoon can be developed.*



# Report of the Treasurer

J. EDWARD SCHIERLOH

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

210 MAIN STREET  
HACKENSACK, N. J.

February 27, 1954

Bergen County Park Commission  
Court House  
Hackensack, N. J.

Gentlemen:

Pursuant to your instructions, I have examined the financial records of the Commission for the year ending December 31, 1953 and, as a result of this examination, I submit the following:

## BUDGET FUNDS

SURPLUS, JANUARY 1, 1953	\$ 11,210.35
BUDGET APPROPRIATION - 1953, AS AMENDED	308,001.86
	<u>\$ 319,212.21</u>
EXPENDITURES:	
Salaries and Wages	\$ 106,115.99
Administrative and Office Expenses	10,149.33
Engineering and Surveys	5,537.24
Land Acquisition, Appraisals and Negotiations	75,349.39
Legal Fees	9,001.86
Field Expenses:	
New Equipment	33,536.55
Maintenance and Repair of Equipment and Supplies	7,408.03
Park Development Materials	60,574.99
	<u>307,673.38</u>
TRANSFER - SPECIAL TRUST CASH	\$ 11,538.83
	<u>115.00</u>
SURPLUS, DECEMBER 31, 1953	<u>\$ 11,653.83</u>

## BOND ISSUE

COUNTY PARK BONDS AUTHORIZED, INCLUDING DOWN PAYMENT	\$ 925,000.00
LESS:	
Disbursed for Land Acquisition and Improvement	\$ 702,996.34
Committed for Land Acquisition	124,578.00
	<u>827,574.34</u>
TOTAL AVAILABLE, DECEMBER 31, 1953, FOR FUTURE LAND ACQUISITION	<u>\$ 97,425.66</u>

All vouchers were examined and found to be properly approved. Checks issued in payment of these vouchers were compared with both the voucher and the entry in the financial records. These were found to be correct.

Cash in bank was reconciled with the book figure.

Respectfully submitted,

*J. Edward Schierloh*  
.....  
Certified Public Accountant  
(N. J. & N. Y.)