

Johnson Park

Camden, New Jersey

The Project • The History • The Art



Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project
UNVEILING CEREMONY

Thursday, October 2, 2008

11:30 AM

Johnson Park

Second and Front Streets
Rutgers University - Camden

Eldridge R. Johnson Park



c.1920

Cooper's Ferry Development Association

Rutgers University - Camden

in partnership with

the City of Camden, Camden County, the Camden Redevelopment Agency,
NJDEP Green Acres Program, and the Camden Economic Recovery Board

Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project Unveiling Ceremony

WELCOME

Margaret Marsh, Chancellor, Rutgers University-Camden

REMARKS

Thomas Corcoran, President, Cooper's Ferry Development Association

The Honorable Gwendolyn Faison, Mayor, City of Camden

John Watson, Deputy Commissioner, NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection

Joseph Roberts, Assemblyman, 5th Legislative District

Louis Capelli, Director, Camden County Board of Freeholders

Angel Fuentes, President, Camden City Council

HISTORY

John Gianotti

UNVEILING

REFRESHMENTS

Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project

Fact Sheet

Project Manager: Cooper's Ferry Development Association
Rutgers University - Camden

Owner: Rutgers University - Camden

Project Budget: \$2.5 million

- \$400,000 Predevelopment & Design
- \$2.1 million Construction

Funding Sources:

- Camden Economic Recovery Board (via CRA), \$1.6 million
- NJDEP Green Acres Program (via Camden County), \$500,000
- NJDEP Green Acres Program (via Cooper's Ferry), \$400,000
- Rutgers University - Camden, In-Kind Support

Architect: DPK&A Architects, Philadelphia, PA

Landscape Architect: Andropogon Associates, Philadelphia, PA

Construction Manager: Scungio Borst & Associates, Camden, NJ

Project Schedule: September 2005—September 2008

Project Highlights:

- The restoration of the park's reflecting pools, previously filled with soil and lawn
- The replication of the decorative bronze Lily Pond Railing that once surrounded the Peter Pan statue
- The replacement of the missing balustrade wall in the rear of the park
- The creation of two small pavilions mimicking the changing pagodas once located in the park
- The removal of the existing handicap ramp and the creation of a basement level entrance at the rear of the Cooper Library building

As one of the most significant properties in the State of New Jersey from an architectural, cultural, and historical perspective, the reclamation of Johnson Park was long overdue. Not only is the park an important part of Camden's heritage, it represents an opportunity to develop pride among City residents and reestablish the City as the cultural center of southern New Jersey. The Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project entailed a complete rehabilitation of the historic Eldridge R. Johnson Park to a state mimicking its original grandeur upon completion in 1930. This is the period from which most elements remain extant, and in which the park attained the unique and playful character for which it is remembered.

A project team of landscape architects, engineers, curators, historians, and preservation experts was assembled to complete the designs for the rehabilitation of Johnson Park. This extensive project was made possible by a \$1.6 million grant to the Camden Redevelopment Agency from the Camden Economic Recovery Board and an additional \$900,000 of grant funding to Cooper's Ferry Development Association and Camden County from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, as well as generous in-kind support from Rutgers University-Camden.

The Project's Importance

In the period from 1950 to 1970 Johnson Park was seriously neglected and vandalized. Valuable bronze statues had been stolen or damaged, some ripped from their bases, and graffiti and theft plagued the park that was once the focal point of the City's cultural history. In 1997, a Phase I restoration project, led by Cooper's Ferry, John Giannotti, and Rutgers University, was completed by Heritage Landscapes and successfully salvaged pieces of the park before they had been permanently destroyed; however, there was still much work to be completed.

The Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project is another important step toward the revitalization of the City of Camden. The restored Johnson Park provides recreational opportunities to people of all ages from the City of Camden and the region, with culture, education, and entertainment all in one place. It now serves as a gathering place for residents of the Cooper-Grant neighborhood and a meeting spot for Rutgers University students. In its strategic location, the restored Johnson Park has improved the pedestrian linkages between downtown Camden and waterfront venues. And, located adjacent to a New Jersey Transit RiverLine station stop, the beauty of Johnson Park will entice residents and visitors alike to stopover, enjoy the open space, patronize downtown businesses, and go to a waterfront attraction.

The Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project has preserved the greatest lasting memorial to Eldridge R. Johnson, who contributed so much to the architectural, cultural, educational, and economic betterment of Camden and the State of New Jersey. Johnson Park has a long and distinguished history in the City of Camden, and we have ensured that its character and charm remain for future generations to enjoy.

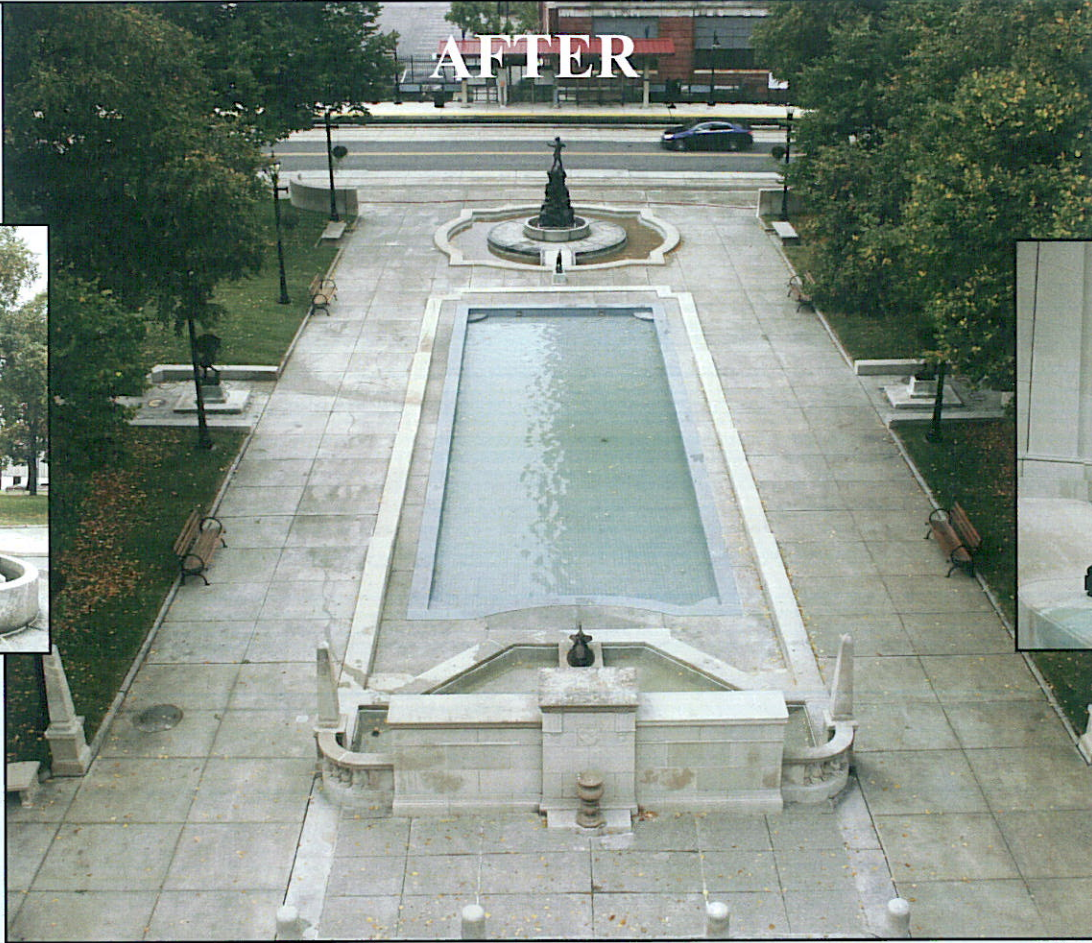
The Project

Reclaiming

BEFORE



History



Historical The

Eldridge R. Johnson Park

Eldridge R. Johnson Park, and the former Cooper Library which stands at the park's center, represent one of the most significant and unique cultural, historic, and artistic resources in the City of Camden and the State of New Jersey. The site has been designated on both the National and State Register of Historic Places based not only on the elements which remain from the early 19th century, but also due to its importance as a reflection of a period of Camden's industrial history. The park and library are the brainchild of Eldridge R. Johnson, founder of the world renowned Victor Talking Machine Company and one of Camden's most important philanthropists. Constructed in several stages between 1916 and 1930, the park's grand design exhibits a classic symmetry and formality offset by delightful and original pieces of sculpture and a diverse collection of trees.



Johnson Park c. 1930

Eldridge Johnson's Vision

From his office on the seventh floor of the Victor Talking Machine Company's executive building at Front and Cooper Streets, Eldridge Johnson had a vision. He imagined a cultural center for the benefit of local employees and city residents and a park where children from all over the region would come to play. To bring this dream to fruition,

Johnson proposed, personally managed the design, and oversaw the construction of the Classical Revival style Cooper Library and an equally magnificent park. His vision focused on art, youth, and beauty.

The park exudes a sense of youthful enjoyment and amusement. In every aspect of the park's design, from the fountains and sculptures to the beautiful colored tiles representing children's nursery rhymes, Johnson's love for children can be seen. In fact, the story is told that Mr. Johnson converted what was originally intended to be a lily pond to a wading pool after the pond immediately filled with children before it could be completely filled with the water and the lilies had arrived. As a result, instead of adding lily pads, Johnson added changing pagodas to the park, one for boys and one for girls. Lovely plantings completed the park, which by 1930 had become an international tourist destination.

In the 1960's and 70's the park fell into disrepair. The pools were filled in, some of the sculpture elements were vandalized or stolen and the Library was closed. The reuse of the Library by Rutgers University and the Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project have sparked a new awareness of the unique qualities of this great American treasure.

Eldridge R. Johnson Park

Timeline

Dec. 31, 1915	Camden City Council accepts proposal by Eldridge Johnson to give the City of Camden a Free Library
1916	Construction begins on the Cooper Branch of the Camden Free Public Library. The project is funded by Eldridge Johnson and donated to Camden City.
April 1918	Construction completed on Cooper Library
May 22, 1919	Dedication of Cooper Branch of the Camden Free Public Library
May 27, 1920	Camden City Council votes to change the name of Cooper Park to Eldridge R. Johnson Park
Dec. 29, 1921	Eldridge Johnson donates land surrounding Cooper Library for a park
July 13, 1923	Construction of wading pools begins in Johnson Park
Sept. 24, 1926	Peter Pan statue dedicated in Johnson Park
1928	Addition of statues to park: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Billy (1914)Dancing Goat (1928)Pan (1928)Turtle and Duck (1928)Frogs (1928)
June 20, 1930	Bronze railing installed around Peter Pan statue
1979	Johnson Park designated as a State Historic Site
1980	Johnson Park designated as a National Historic Site
1986	Rutgers University-Camden assumes ownership from the City of Camden
1997	Phase I Restoration of Johnson Park (CFDA)
2005-2008	Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project (CFDA)

The Art

A piece of Never, Never Land in Camden...

“Peter Pan”

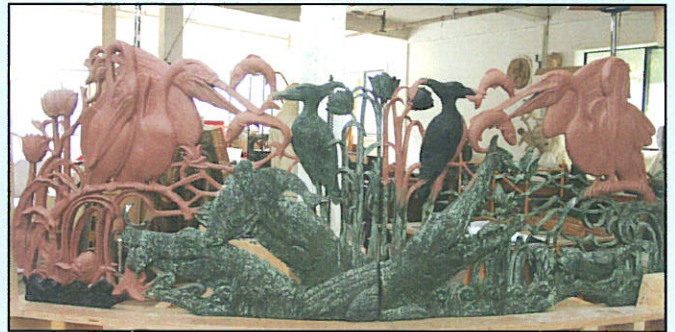
The “Peter Pan” statue which stands at the park’s entrance is the creation of Sir George Frampton and is perhaps his most famous work. The statue is one of only three executed by Frampton. The original stands in Kensington Gardens, London, England (1910) and a replica was presented by Frampton to the children of Belgium in 1924. This 11’ cast bronze statue replica was purchased by Eldridge Johnson for Johnson Park. Peter Pan’s arrival to Camden on September 24, 1926 was a momentous occasion. To celebrate the dedication, a Peter Pan pageant committee organized over 3,000 schoolchildren from Camden, Merchantville, and nearby towns to depict scenes from the story of Peter Pan, schools closed early, and over 10,000 people from across the region attended.



Lily Pond Railing

The last noted piece of sculpture to be added in Johnson Park was the Lily Pond Railing that surrounded the Peter Pan sculpture. This distinctive cast bronze railing was created by Otto Schweizer, a Philadelphia sculptor, for Eldridge Johnson with a decorative and pedagogical purpose. It was to demonstrate to young visitors the plant and animal life in and around a pond, to give them a graphic lesson on its flora and fauna. The fence is an irregular, complex, open design of birds, fish and flowers, 28" high with a circumference of 45'.

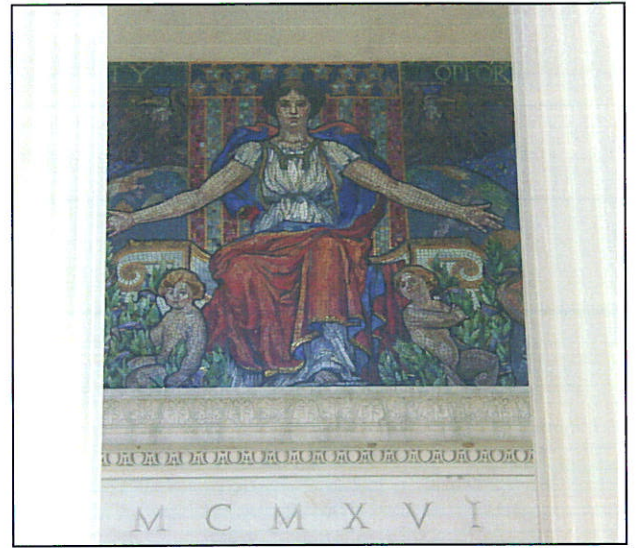
Although much of the original railing had been stolen or misplaced over the years, fragments of the original Lily Pond sculpture railing were fortunately saved. Robert Shure of Skylight Studios created a new replica of the railing by reference to these parts as well as historic photographs. From this information, sculptors created clay models which meticulously matched the original design and details. Rubber molds were fabricated over each model and in the process the clay was destroyed. Wax was then poured into the rubber molds in order to reproduce the clay models. The wax copies were separated into many sections in order to facilitate the lost wax casting process. Approximately, 100 molds were needed to recreate the railing. Each mold went into a "burn out" oven where the wax slowly melted out. The molten bronze was then poured into this empty cavity. Upon cooling, the bronze becomes solid and all the new metal sections are removed from the molds. Each piece of bronze was hand finished, perfected and reassembled by welding. A hot patina was applied to bring out a rich bronze color. Lastly, the railing was reinstalled to match the original design and composition.



"...the Railing is a work of poetic imagination of the first order, idyllic in character, and cyclical in form."

THE ART

“America Receiving the Gift of the Nations”



Extending across the entire front of the Cooper Library building, is the 70-foot long mosaic frieze made of over 100,000 pieces of American opalescent glass. This magnificent work of art entitled “America Receiving the Gift of the Nations” was executed by Nicola D’Ascenzio of Philadelphia and took two years to complete. This artwork represents an ancient method of decoration dating back to that early period of civilization when Egypt and Mesopotamia dominated the Eastern World. There are 36 figures on the composition. Of this number, 29 advance from the left and right, presenting their gifts to America, in the center. On her left stands her son, Opportunity and on her right is her daughter, Equality. Two Native Americans kneel at America’s feet. Also included are Christopher Columbus; Greece holding the model of a temple in her right hand; Rome carrying the standard and fasces; Moses carrying the Ten Commandments; Arabia, with an abacus to symbolize higher mathematics; Raphael carrying his famous “Sistine Madonna” is followed by Michelangelo. In the right wing of the frieze are Shakespeare, Longfellow, and Palestrina. William Penn and a group of Quakers stand beside Equality and typify religious freedom. George Washington stands in the rear. On America’s right are bearers of gifts from the Orient including Japan, Persia, Babylonia, and India. Johannes Gutenberg represents Germany. Three literary figures (Moliere, Walt Whitman, and Dante) are in the left wing of the frieze.

Buddha Fountain



The Buddha Fountain consists of a limestone wall, approximately 7’ high, upon which four oriental faces were carved. The oriental figures on the fountain were modeled from Eldridge Johnson’s collection of teakwood miniatures, Chinese Gods about the size of a quarter, which Mr. Johnson had gathered during his travels. In the middle of the wall is a central Buddha-like figure, above a circular fountain basin.

Eldridge R. Johnson created a unique setting for the library building he donated to the City of Camden. The architects who planned the park, Karcher and Smith of Philadelphia, kept in mind the fact that Mr. Johnson loved children. Each piece was individually selected by Mr. Johnson in an effort to make the park more attractive to them.

It is at Johnson Park that the most complete group of outdoor sculpture by Philadelphia sculptor Albert Laessle can be found. "Billy", "Dancing Goat", "Pan", and "Turtle and Duck" are whimsical additions to the park.

"Billy"



"Billy" is a life-size billy goat which won Laessle the 1915 Fellowship Medal from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA). "Billy" is probably Laessle's best known public work, and was one of the artist's favorites. The original was purchased for the City of Philadelphia and placed in Rittenhouse Square. The figure in Johnson Park is a later cast. A third cast is in the Smithsonian Institution's national Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. The cast bronze "Billy" sculpture is 26 ¼" high by 32" wide.

"Turtle and Duck"



"Turtle and Duck" was made by Albert Laessle in 1926. This 44" long by 18 ½" wide cast bronze sculpture depicts a turtle and duck in combat. Three bronze casts were made of "Turtle and Duck". The other existing pieces are in Brookgreen Gardens, South Carolina and the Cleveland Museum of natural History. "Turtle and Duck" was awarded the McClee prize as the best piece of sculpture in the annual exhibit at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

"Frogs"

There is record of a pair of frogs by Albert Laessle that were also added to the park and had been situated near the "Turtle and Duck" statue. However, they are no longer in existence and no photographic evidence of them has yet been found.

The Art

“Pan”

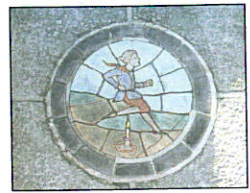


“Pan” is a standing figure of cast bronze, 50” high by 32” wide, made by Albert Laessle in 1928. Located across from “Dancing Goat” flanking the width of the pool, the sculpture stands in a small patio area surrounded by mosaic ceramic tiles depicting children’s storybook figures in a circular design.



Jack Be Nimble

Jack be nimble!
Jack be quick!
Jack jump over the
candle stick!



Little Jack Horner

Little Jack Horner sat
in the corner
Eating his Christmas
pie,
He put in his thumb
and pulled out a
plum
And said “What a
good boy am I!”



Little Boy Blue

Little Boy Blue come
blow your horn
The sheep’s in the
meadow.
The cow’s in the corn.
Where is the boy
who looks after the
sheep?
He’s under the hay-
stack fast asleep.



Pied Piper

The Pied Piper is
an epic poem by
Robert Browning,
published in 1888.
The story tells of the
town of Hamelin who
was rid of their rat
infestation by the
Pied Piper. But when
the townspeople
refused to pay
for his services, he
returned and played
his pipe to lure the
children into a cave
where they would
never be seen again



The Man in the Moon

The man in the moon
came tumbling down
And asked his way to
Norwich;
He went by the south
and burnt his mouth
With supping cold
pease porridge.



Simple Simon

Simple Simon met a
pieman going to the
fair.

Says Simple Simon
to the pieman
"Let me taste your
ware!"

Says the pieman to
Simple Simon
"Show me your first
penny."

Says Simple Simon
to the pieman
"Indeed I have not
any!"



Mary Had a Little Lamb

Mary had a little
lamb.

It's fleece was white
as snow.
And everywhere that
Mary went
the lamb was sure
to go.



Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty sat
on a wall.

Humpty Dumpty had
a great fall.

All the king's horses
and all the King's
men

couldn't put Humpty
together again!



Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son

Tom Tom the piper's
son
Stole a pig and
away he ran,
The pig was eat and
Tom was beat
And Tom went
roaring down the
street.



Peas Porridge

Peas porridge hot.
Peas porridge cold.
Peas porridge in the
pot
Nine days old!



"Dancing Goat"



The cast bronze sculpture of "Dancing Goat" was made by Albert Laessle in 1928. Located across from "Pan" flanking the width of the pool, the sculpture stands in a small patio area surrounded by mosaic ceramic tiles depicting children's storybook figures in a circular design.



Johnson Park

Camden, New Jersey

The Johnson Park Rehabilitation Project has preserved one of the greatest lasting memorials to Eldridge R. Johnson, who contributed so much to the architectural, cultural, educational, and economic betterment of Camden and the State of New Jersey. Johnson Park has a long and distinguished history, and we have ensured that its character and charm will remain for future generations to enjoy.

The collaborative effort that brought about this project demonstrates the accomplishment that can be had when various levels of government, educational institutions, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and the community work together.

Special Thanks To You:

Mayor Gwendolyn Faison, City of Camden
City of Camden
Camden County Board of Freeholders
Caren Fishman, Director, Camden County Parks Department
Senator Dana Redd
Assemblyman Joseph Roberts
Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez
New Jersey Economic Development Authority
Camden Economic Recovery Board
NJDEP Green Acres Program
Commissioner Lisa Jackson, NJDEP
John J. Watson, Deputy Commissioner, NJDEP
Phillip Collins, NJDEP, Green Acres Program
Dorothy Guzzo, New Jersey Historic Trust
New Jersey Historic Preservation Office
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Vincent Basara, Camden Redevelopment Agency
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Steve Johnson, Elite Restoration
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Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association