

A History of  
Deering Oaks in Maps

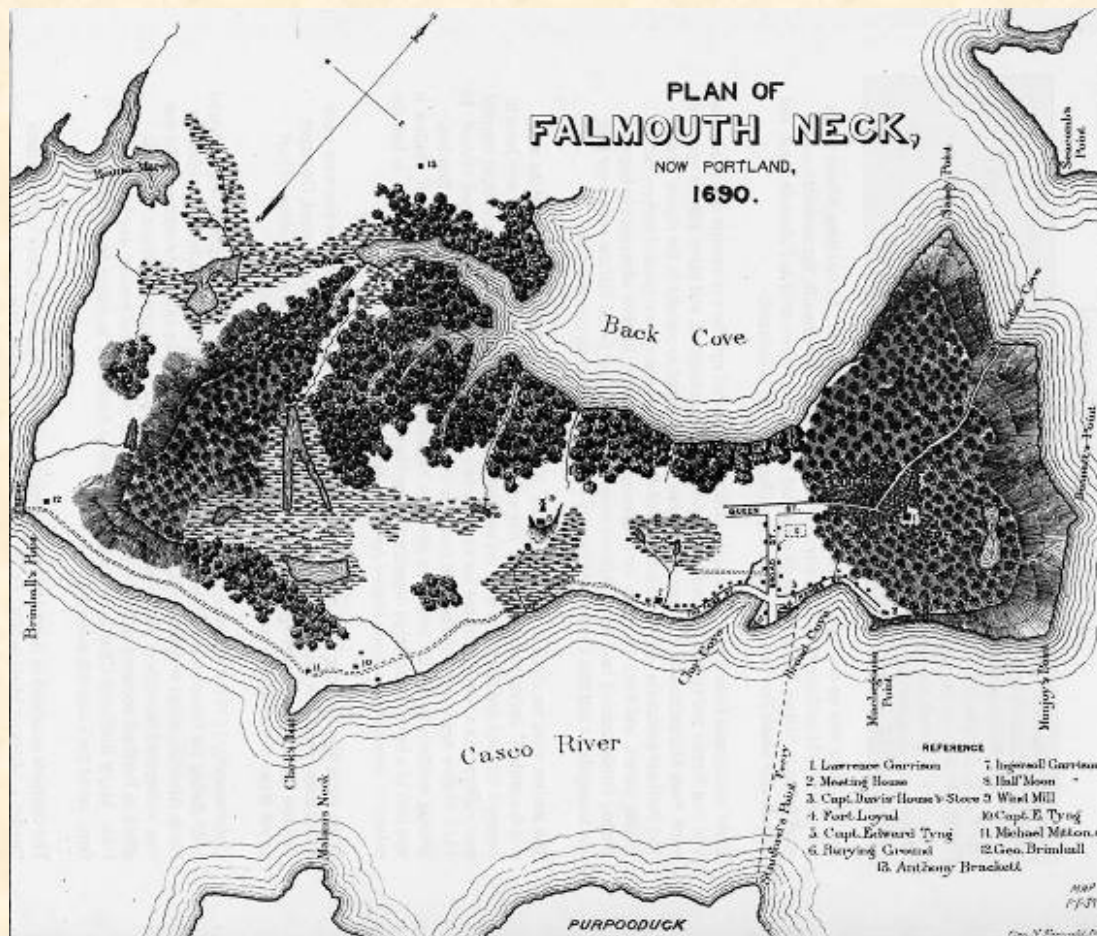


Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 4168)

# Benjamin Church

[www.mainememory.net/item/25775](http://www.mainememory.net/item/25775)

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COL. BENJAMIN CHURCH.

Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 25775)



# Des Barres 1777 (detail)



Charles Codman  
*Untitled (Deering Oaks)*



Image Courtesy of Portland Museum of Art (2003.45)





# Goodwin's Plan for The Oaks 1879



Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

View of Tanneries (Mill on  
Deering's Bridge on Left) 1910

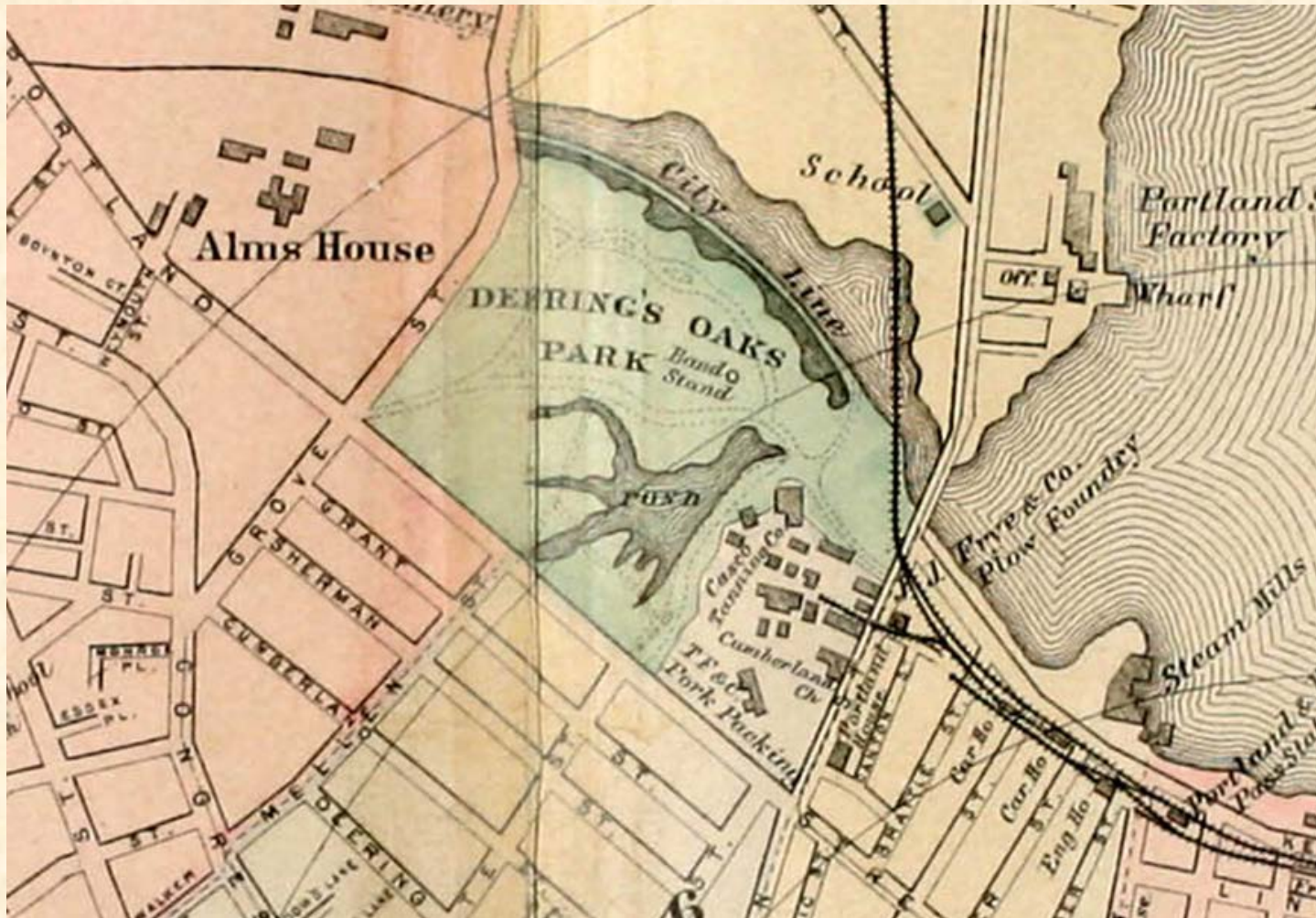


Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 5786)



Portland, 1884

(detail)



# Deering's Farm 1843

[www.maine-memory.net/item/6885](http://www.maine-memory.net/item/6885)

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Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 6885)

# The Deering Barn

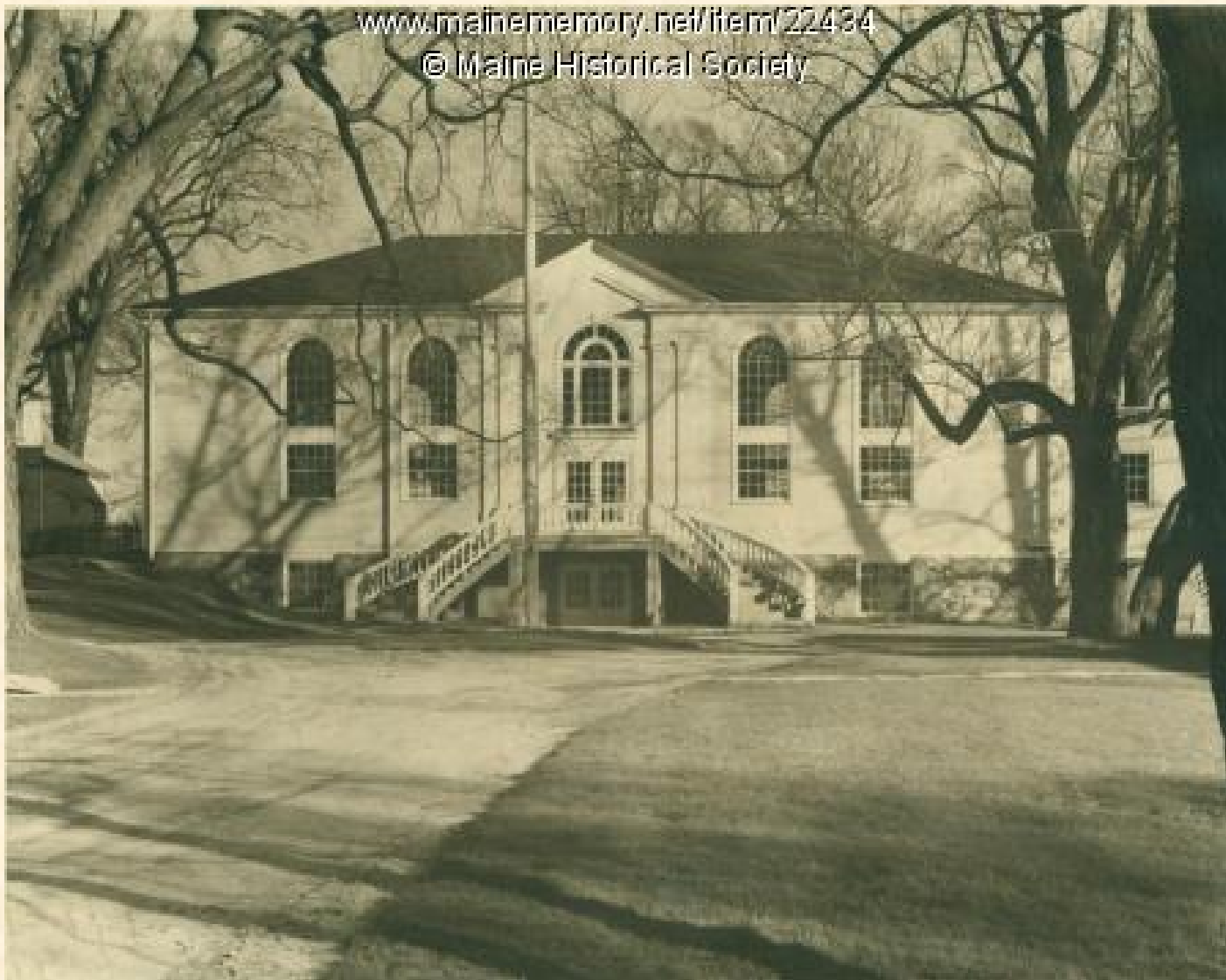


Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 22434)



## The Oaks When Privately Owned 1878



Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 11779)

Deering's Bridge on Green St.  
(now Forest Ave.) 1840

[www.maine-memory.net/item/1128](http://www.maine-memory.net/item/1128)

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Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 1128)



# Deering's Land 1843



Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 11779)



# Division Between Deering Land and Ricker's Tannery 1870

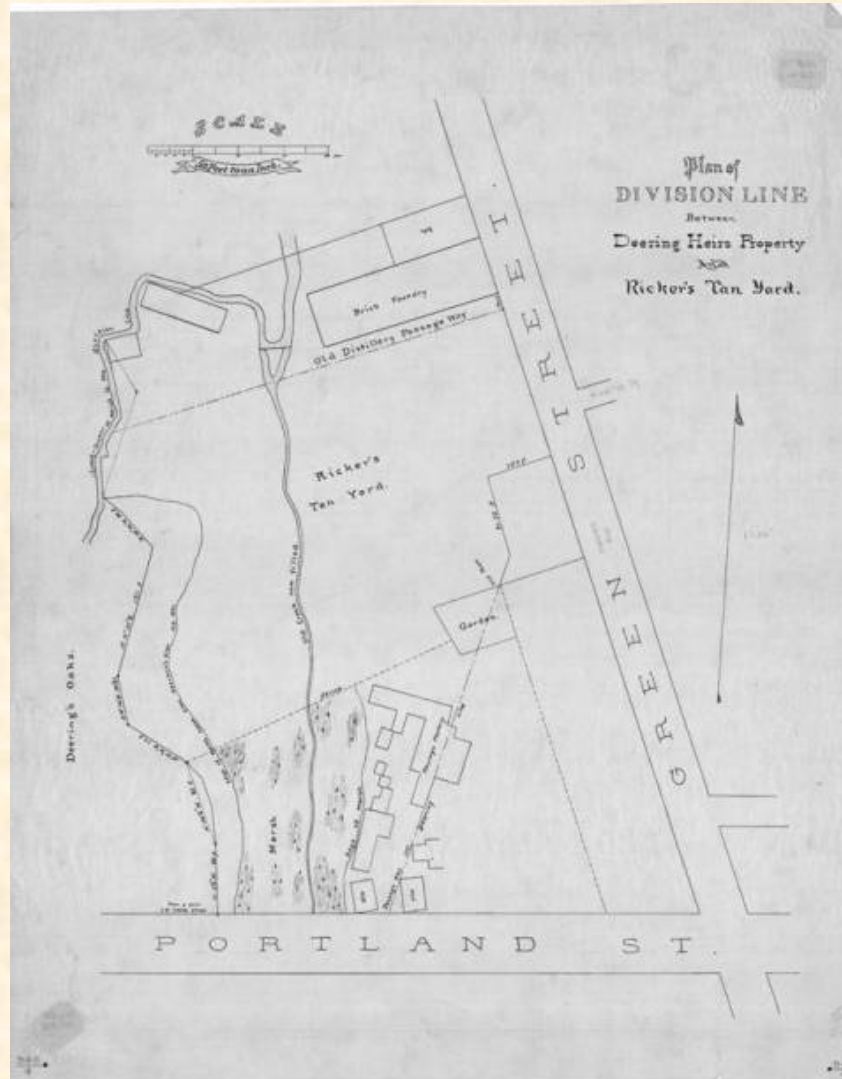


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

## Wooden Bridge Built 1881

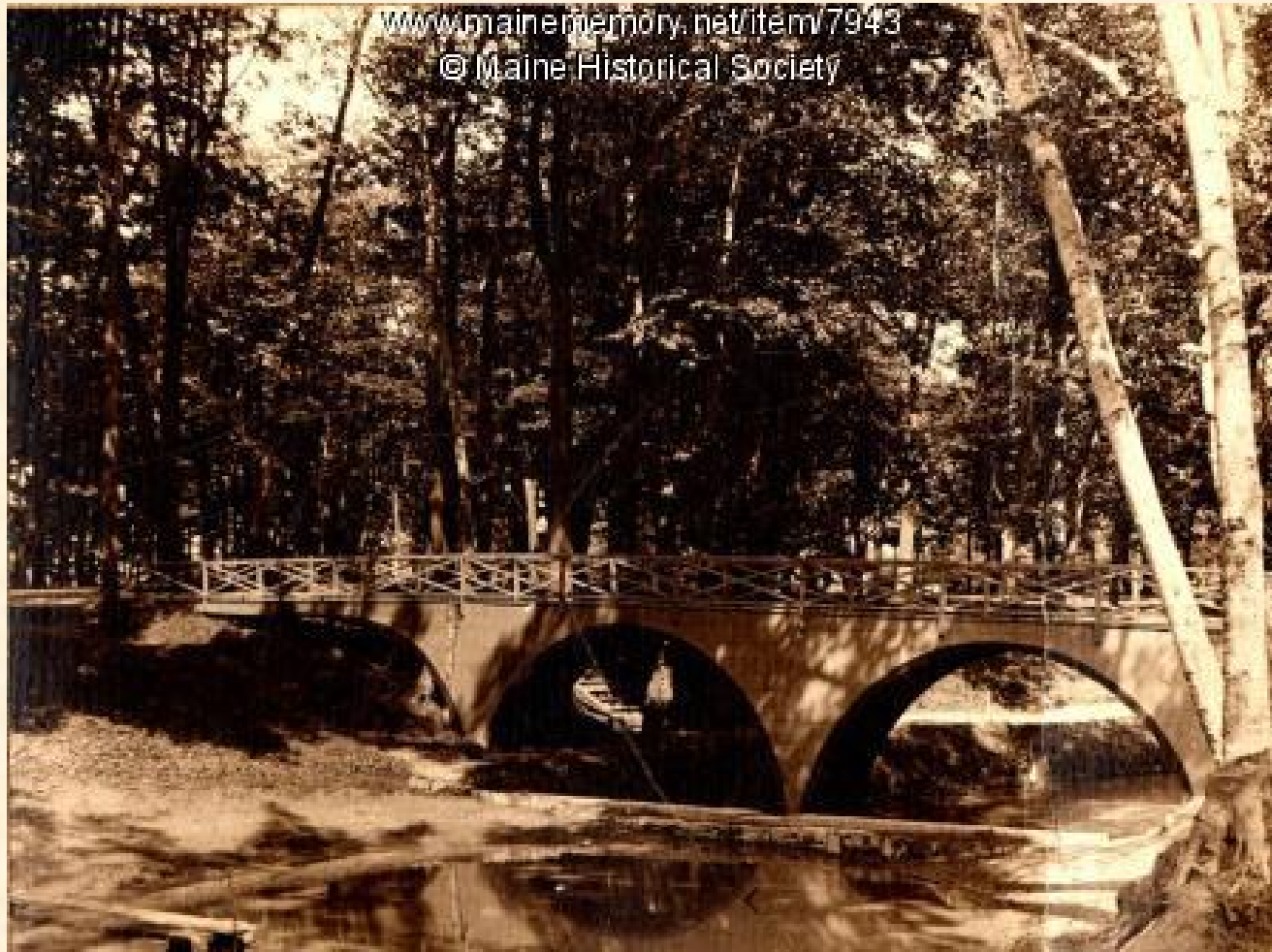


Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 7943)

# Goodwin's Plan for The Oaks 1879

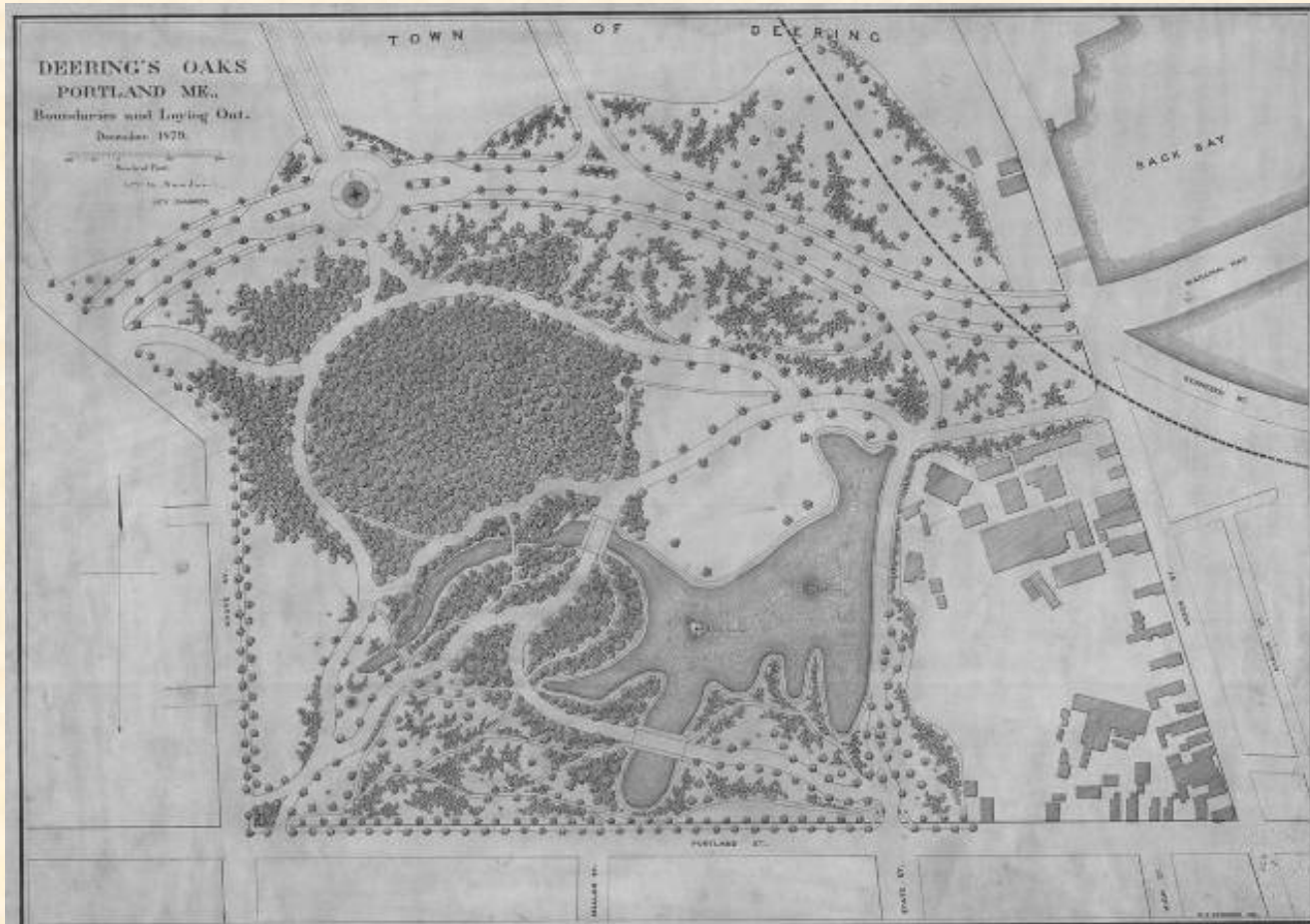


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland



## Bandstand Built 1883



Image Taken from Bold Vision page 82  
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# Goodwin's Plan for The Oaks 1879

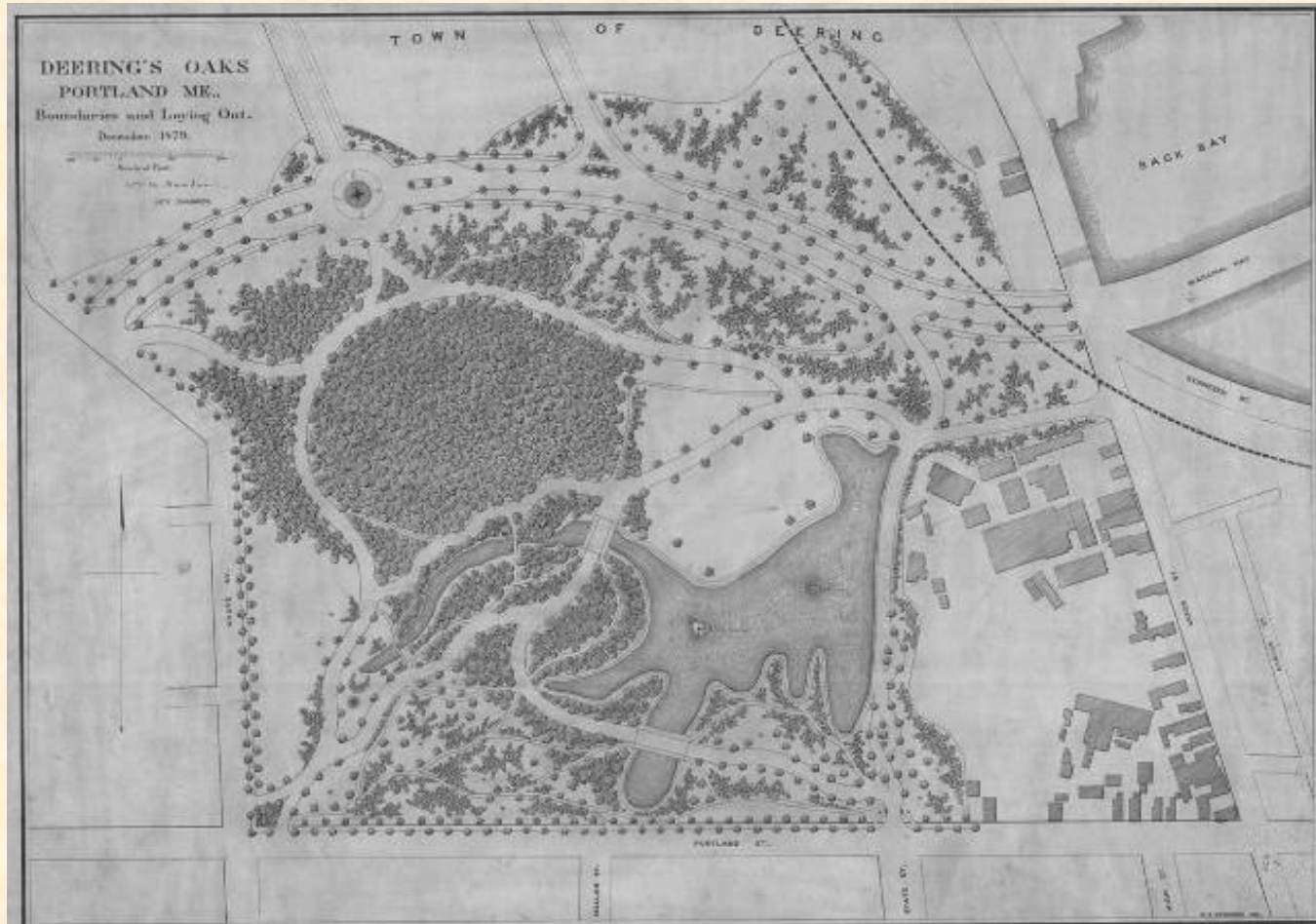


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

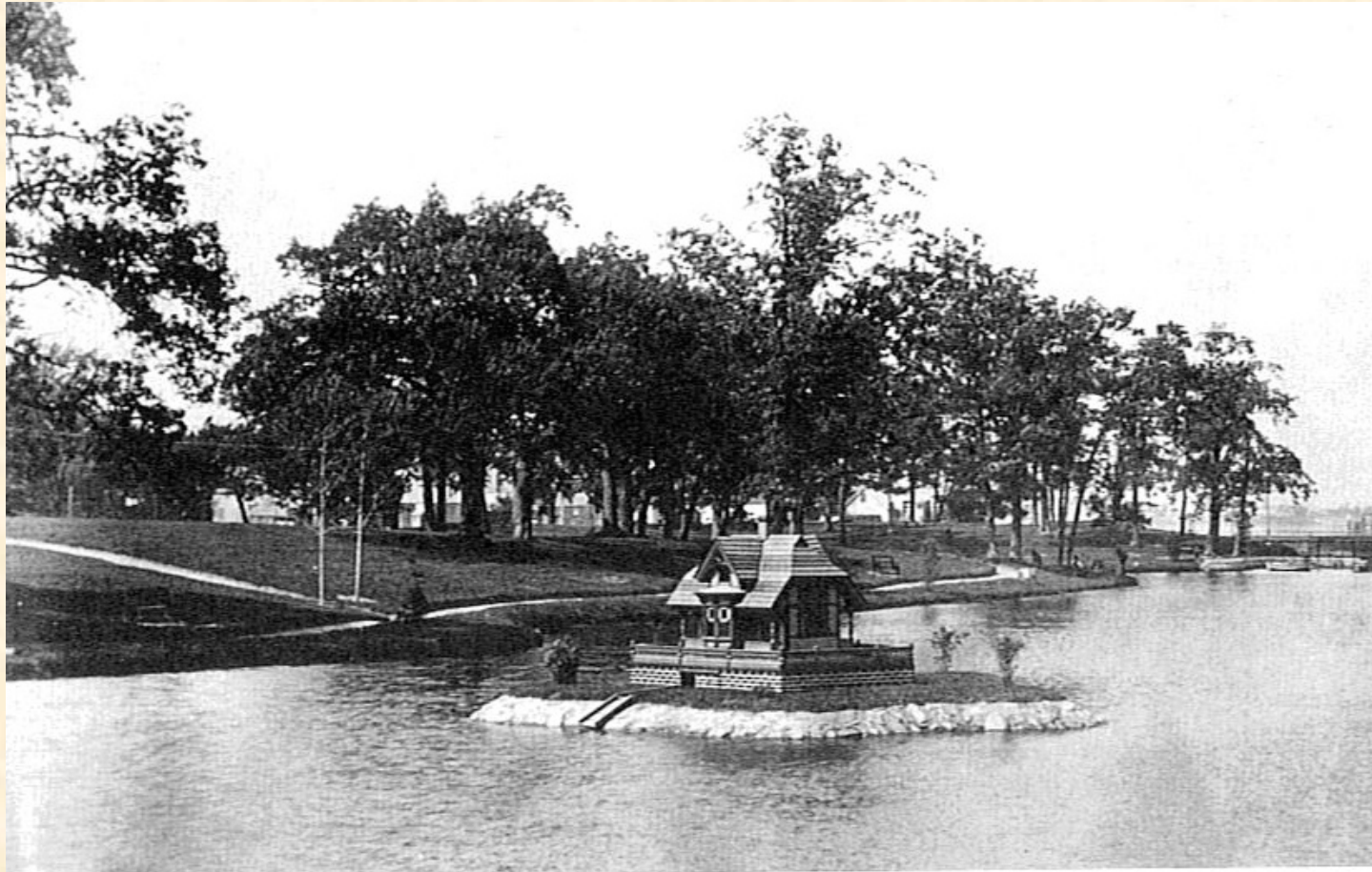
## Fountain Installed 1885



(Detail) Image Taken from Bold Vision page 81  
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## Duck House Built 1887



(Detail) Image Taken from Bold Vision page 81  
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# Goodwin's Plan for The Oaks 1879

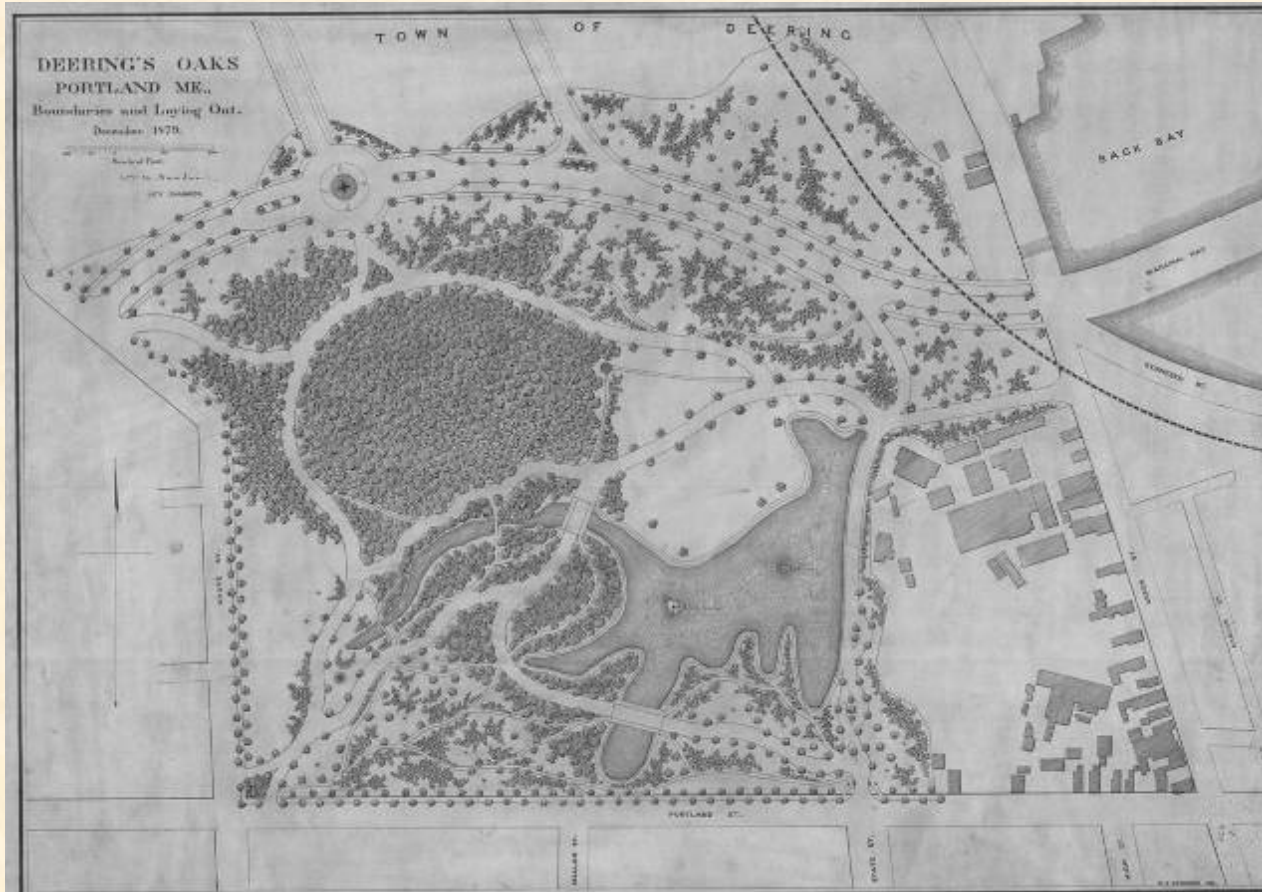


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

## Warming Hut Built 1894



Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 7929)



# Goodwin's Plan for The Oaks 1879

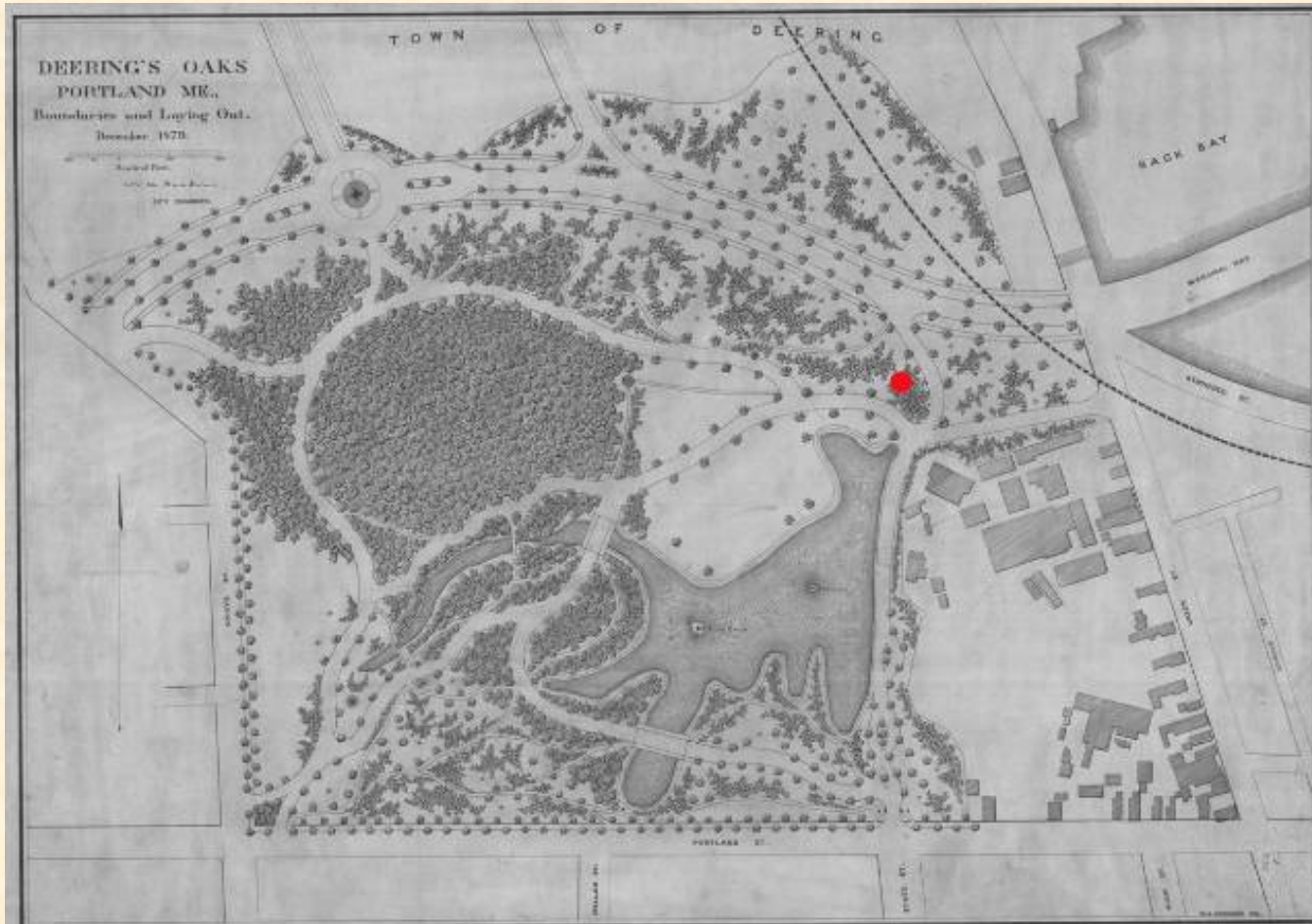


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

## Wooden Bridge Replaced 1911



Image Taken from [Bold Vision](#) page 81  
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# Maine Centennial Festival 1920



Image Courtesy of Maine Historical Society (MM item 23412)



Rose Circle Built 1931 –  
last Tannery Bought in 1923



Image Taken from Friends of Deering Oaks website  
<http://deeringoaks.org/about/about.shtml>

# Ball Field Plan 1940

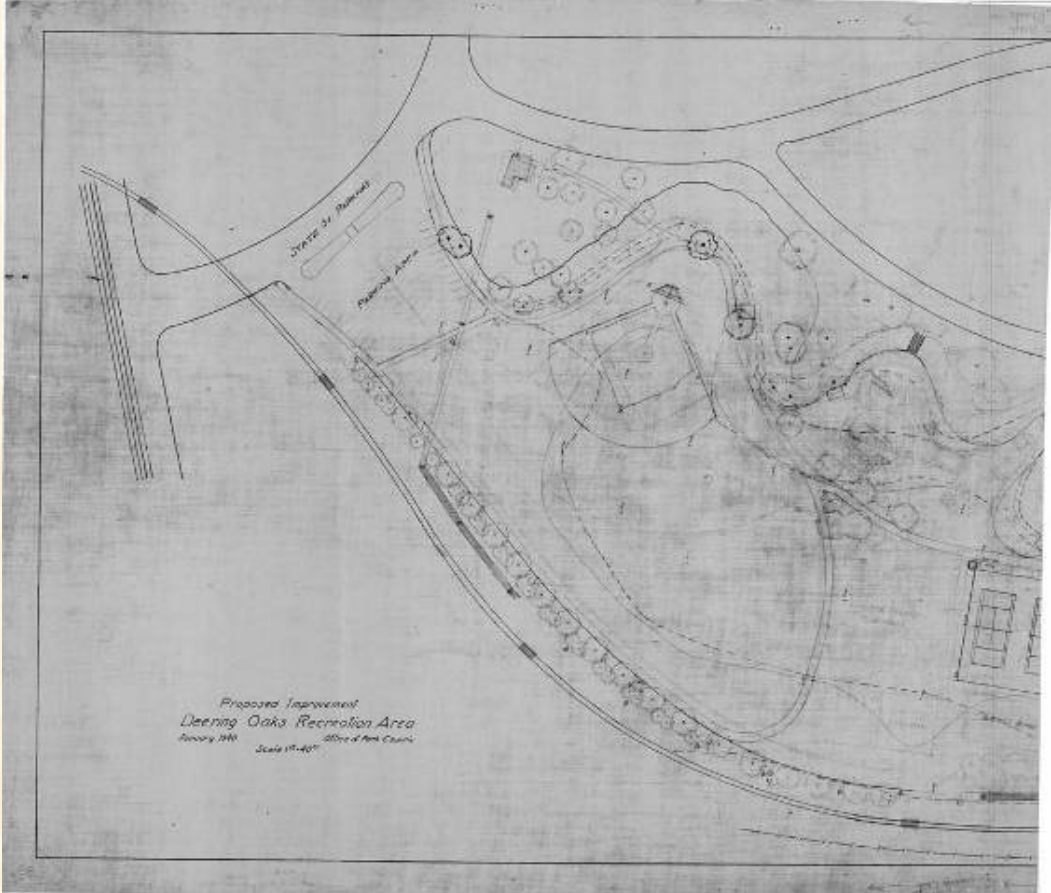


Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland

## Map Showing the In-Filling of Duck Pond (detail)



Image Courtesy of DPS Engineering, City of Portland



# Resources:

- Adams, Herbert. “Deering Oaks,” from *Bold Vision*, ed. by H.B.M. Holtwijk and Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. Kennebunk: Pheonix Publishing for Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc, 1999. 74-93.
- Deering Oaks Master Plan available at <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/planning/complan.asp>
- Friends of Deering Oaks website  
<http://deeringoaks.org/index.shtml>
- Anne Pringle  
President of Friends of Deering Oaks
- Michael Michaud  
Associate Engineer/ Archivist, DPS Engineering, City of Portland
- Maine Historical Society  
<http://www.mainememory.net/>
- Portland Museum of Art  
<http://www.portlandmuseum.org/>

## Script

### SLIDE 2

This map is a depiction of Portland around 1690. As you can see, it is called "Falmouth" during this time, and the peninsula itself is called "Falmouth Neck." These squares [point to a few] indicate buildings that existed in 1690 in Falmouth. This square with the number 13 next to it is the farm owned by Anthony Brackett. This area below the Brackett farm is where Deering Oaks is today [indicate the area of land around the pond and estuary, estimating the borders]. One of the most famous events that took place at Deering Oaks was the "Fite at Falmouth," as described in the diary of Major Benjamin Church.

### SLIDE 3

King Williams War, fought between the French and the English and their respective Indian allies for the land of New England and Canada, had just started. On the morning of September 21st, 1689, the Brackett sons ran into town with news that Indians had attacked the Brackett farm, killing their father. When Major Benjamin Church led his men, consisting of Massachusetts militia and Indian allies, up lower Congress Street and Grove Street to a bridge built over an estuary, the battle was already raging on the North side.

### SLIDE 4

You can see on this map the estuary in question. [point to the estuary above the present day pond]. This map, while made quite a bit later, shows the peninsula as Benjamin Church encountered it. This [point to the southeast corner of the red area] is Fort Loyal, where he and his men started out that day. According to Church's diary they took this road, Congress [use your pointer to illustrate], and went up Grove road (present day Deering Avenue) to a bridge that went over the estuary. The men who'd reached the battle earlier in the day had been able to cross the estuary easily as the tide had been out. By the time Church reached the battle site, however, the tide had come in, and the only way across was the bridge. The bridge was too small, however, and if his men had tried to cross it, they would have gotten killed one by one. So, instead of crossing, he had his men shoot over the heads of their allies across the estuary. The men on the other side, fighting an estimated 400 Indians and French, were running out of ammunition. An Indian ally, "Captain Lightfoot," swam across the estuary with bullets and gunpowder.

### SLIDE 5

This painting of the Oaks by Charles Codman gives you a sense of how far Captain Lightfoot had to swim. This depicts the estuary before it was filled in, showing how wide and deep it was—clearly deep enough for sailboats.

### SLIDE 6

Eventually, Benjamin Church and his men made it across a bridge, and quickly won the battle. For a long time, it was thought that the bridge was the same Grove Street bridge, but recently Historians have come to believe it was actually the Congress Street bridge down here [indicate with pointer]. The theory is that as the battle moved down the estuary [indicate a westward movement down the estuary], Benjamin Church and his men followed on the other side. Eventually the battle neared an arm of the estuary that was later called horse pond. This is where the Congress street bridge crossed, and where Church presumably led his triumphant charge across the estuary. Unfortunately for the Falmouth residents, the French-allied Indians

returned two years after Benjamin Church and his men chased them off, wiping out the entire settlement.

#### SLIDE 7

Settlers returned to Falmouth Peninsula decades later. One settler was Nathaniel Deering, who bought up much of the Brackett Land in 1761, and built a large farm on top of the same hill behind the Deering Oaks estuary. His son, James, built a large mansion on the property. This plan of the James Deering Farm shows his mansion here [point to the structure on the left], and his barn right here [the structure on the right]. Here is the present day duck pond [point to the left branch of the body of water]. This is present day Forest Ave [bottom street], and this is present day Deering Ave [point to the other street running horizontally].

#### SLIDE 8

Especially under James, the Deering family became very influential, as seen in this image of their barn. It looks more like a mansion than a barn in this photo, because it had already been remodeled for other uses, but the impressive size of it illustrates the wealth of the Deering family.

#### SLIDE 9

For a next hundred and thirteen years, the Deering family owned the land that makes up Deering Oaks. As the generous elite of the city, they made no effort to fence off the Oaks. The land was used extensively by the Portland citizens. This is an image of the Oaks being used by Portland citizens while it was still owned by the Deerings. A fun fact: this photograph was taken by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of Portland's most famous citizens.

#### SLIDE 10

James Deering, whose offices were on Exchange Street in present day Old Port, had to commute to work each day over Back Cove. In 1806, however, a bridge was built on Green Street (now Forest Ave.), making his commute much more convenient. Called "Deering's Bridge," the structure dammed the water draining into Back Cove, forming Mill Pond, a larger version of today's Duck Pond. The site became perfect for Mills, which of course used water power to operate, and tanneries, which required a large amount of water to make leather. In this image of Deering's Bridge, you can see the Oaks in the background, and a mill that was built on the bridge itself.

#### SLIDE 11

In this 1843 plan of the Oaks, you can see the mill on Deering's bridge [point] and the tanneries that were built on the southern boundary of mill pond.

#### SLIDE 12

This map shows the division between the land that the Deering family owned and the land that the tanneries owned. This property on the right side of this line [point to the property line, far left line], belongs to tannery companies, as well as a Brick Foundry up here [point], and a Sausage factory down here [point to the structures closest to Portland St]. Why do you think they would have put a sausage factory next door to a tannery? The property on the left of this line belongs to the Deering family. Notice that modern day Park Avenue is called Portland Street and modern day Forest Avenue is called Green Street.



### SLIDE 13

In 1879, the city finally purchased the Oaks from the Deerings, and the city engineer, William Goodwin, drew up plans for its use. His plans show much of the original pond filled in [indicate where Mill Pond would have been, near Forest Ave]. The fountain and Duck House are shown on the remainder of the pond [point out], and the anticipated bandstand is placed north of the pond connected to the large path by two footpaths [point]. This map also shows how State Street is continued through the park, rather unintentionally, bordering it on the east. The land on the other side of State Street still belongs to the tanneries in 1879.

### SLIDE 14

This image shows the tanneries [point to the buildings with smoke stacks on the right of the photo] on the east side of the park. This [point to the dark building on the bridge] is the gristmill that we saw earlier on Deering's Bridge. You can see the Portland skyline in the background.

### SLIDE 15

This map of Portland shows the railroad bridge that the photograph was taken from [point to the rails going across the former estuary]. Here are the tanneries we just saw [point]. Notice that an Almshouse [point], sort of the homeless shelter of the 1800s, exists where King Middle School is now on the corner of Portland (now Park) and Grove (now Deering).

### SLIDE 16

We're going to look now at some images of improvements and structures that Goodwin built at Deering Oaks. This is the first bridge that stretched over the westernmost arm of the pond. It was built in 1881 and was made out of wood.

### SLIDE 17

[indicate bridge]

### SLIDE 18

This is an image of the original bandstand, built in 1883.

### SLIDE 19

[indicate bandstand]

### SLIDE 20

The park's first spray fountain was installed in 1885.

### SLIDE 21

...And the duck house was put on the pond in 1887.

### SLIDE 22

[indicate duck house and fountain]

#### SLIDE 23

In 1894, a warming hut was built near the pond for ice skaters during the winter. Not a part of the original plans, it nevertheless became an important structure in Deering Oaks.

#### SLIDE 24

The warming hut was placed where this red dot is [point on map].

#### SLIDE 25

In 1911, the wooden bridge was replaced with the current concrete bridge.

#### SLIDE 26

This image illustrates an interesting occurrence in Deering Oaks. In 1920, a week-long festival celebrating the centennial of Maine took place in the Oaks, complete with an encampment of Passamaquoddy Indians. This photo shows part of a ceremony, likely commemorating the 1689 "Fite at Falmouth."

#### SLIDE 27

The last tannery on the east side of State Street was finally bought out in 1923, and the large piece of land between State and Forest now belonged to the park. In 1931, a rose circle was built on top of the tannery land.

#### SLIDE 28

This map is a 1940 plan for the ball field that was built behind the Warming Hut, which is right here [point to the faint structure at top center of the map]. This plan is drawn with South at the top rather than North. It also shows the tennis courts to the west [point].

#### SLIDE 29

This map shows the filling in of the pond and its surrounding marshes. The tip of the longest arm (upon which the bridge was built) was filled in, as well as the two arms at the southwest corner of the pond. [point to the shaded arms]