

History of Forest Hill Park

In the late 1700s, this 105-acre parcel was part of William Byrd III's vast holdings along the James River. In 1936 Holden Rhodes (1799-1857), noted jurist and first president of Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, purchased land here for his estate, Boscobel. His stone dwelling was built of granite quarried on site. In 1880, Richmond & Manchester Railway established a trolley terminus and amusement park here, with a penny arcade in the Stone House basement. These improvements spurred the development of Woodland Heights and Forest Hill, two early Richmond "trolley car suburbs." The amusements were demolished in 1932, and in 1934 the City of Richmond purchased the land. Funds from the federal Emergency Relief Act paid for Stone House improvements, cobblestone walkways, and picnic shelters. Azaleas planted here in the 1950s became root stock for Bryan Park's extensive Azalea Gardens. Today, the park's natural areas, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and manicured landscapes provide open-space amenities in an urban setting.

The following story of "The Two Signs" illustrates the efforts that have been made to restore features of Forest Hill Park with historical accuracy:

The Story of the Two Signs

When FFHP began researching the park's history many years ago in the Valentine Richmond History Center archives, they found a photograph from around 1910 that showed a man standing by the trolley tracks at the Forest Hill Amusement Park entrance on Forest Hill Avenue.

According to neighborhood legend, sometime in the 1940s, during World War II, the iron letters were taken down as scrap iron "for the war effort" and the stucco columns were changed to brick.

Fast forward to 2006, when the Forest Hill Neighborhood Association sponsored its first annual House Tour. A wish list of donations was drawn up, and neighbors voted to give some of the proceeds to Friends of Forest Hill Park, to restore the missing sign. Some \$3500 was pledged for the sign.

Originally, a less than accurate sign reproduction was installed, but was later rejected in favor of greater historical accuracy. Thanks to the expert eye and typographic skills of admitted "type-font junkie" Matt Boyle at Acorn Sign Graphics, the letters on the new sign precisely match the ones in the original historic photo. (Matt is a Westover Hills resident.)

Custom Ornamental iron of Glen Allen was kind enough to redo the sign at no extra charge, meticulously fabricating it according to Acorn's digital specifications.

If you get a chance, please stop by and see for yourself what a difference a grand entrance can make to a beloved old neighborhood hangout.

From the Friends of Forest Hill Park www.friendsofforesthillpark.org