

BEFORE THE PARK

Farm & Country House

Cadwalader Park is best known as an historic urban park, designed by master landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. Underlying the graceful park landscape, however, are features that reflect an even earlier period of time. Prior to becoming a park in 1888, the park was part of a colonial farm, a canal corridor and a great country estate.



Dr. Thomas Cadwalader. Portrait by Charles Willson Peale, 1770.

CADWALADER FARM

Cadwalader Park takes its name after Dr. Thomas Cadwalader (1707-1779) and his descendants. After studying medicine in Scotland and inheriting land and a small fortune from his father, a prominent Philadelphia merchant, Thomas settled near Trenton in the 1740s, constructing a house, known as Greenwood, and clearing land for a farm.

Cadwalader served as the chief burgess (or mayor) of Trenton from 1746 to 1750, after which he moved to Philadelphia where he became one of the first doctors at the Pennsylvania Hospital. Greenwood served as a summer house and tenant farm. Cadwalader died in 1779, at age 72, in Trenton.

Over time, the Cadwalader farm was divided and sold off, mostly among family members. In 1841, one parcel now containing most of the park was purchased by Henry McCall, Sr., a Philadelphia banker and industrialist.

This map, dated 1849, shows the location of the Henry McCall country estate (circled), which would become known as Ellarslie. The bridge near the estate refers to a crossing of the Delaware & Raritan Canal Feeder, which was constructed from 1832 to 1834. General Thomas Cadwalader (1779-1841) is identified as owning two properties southwest of the canal along Old River Road, later known as West State Street. The general was the grandson of Dr. Thomas Cadwalader.



ELEGANT ELLARSLIE

In 1845, Henry McCall, Sr. engaged Philadelphia architect John Notman to design a country estate, which he named Ellarslie. It was the first house known to have been built in what today is the park.

Notman was famous for introducing the Italianate villa to the United States, importing sophisticated design ideas from Europe and translating them into reality for wealthy American clients.

Notman enhanced his estate architecture with landscaped grounds featuring curving drives and natural styles of planting. He also applied these landscaping concepts, known as the picturesque, to park-like cemeteries, a novelty at the time, as well as institutional grounds, including the New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum (now known as the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital). At the asylum and Ellarslie, Notman partnered with Andrew Jackson Downing, a nurseryman and writer who famously popularized the picturesque style.



Ellarslie mansion, c. 1908.



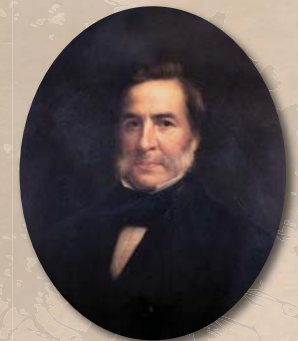
Ellarslie entrance lane, c. 1885. The tree-lined lane became known as Lovers Lane.



Caretaker's house at Ellarslie, c. 1890.



Cadwalader Park entrance, c. 1892. In the background are some of the farm buildings that were part of the Ellarslie estate.



Architect John Notman (1810-1865) designed Ellarslie. Portrait by Samuel Bell Waugh, 1845.

FROM ESTATE TO PARK

In 1881, Henry McCall, Jr. sold Ellarslie to a New York stockbroker, George W. Farlee. By this time, the estate was known for its beautiful trees, planted a generation previously. Farlee used Ellarslie as a summer home and farm, with pasture and barn to raise prized Jersey cows.

Eventually, Farlee sold off much of the farm for residential development, creating a subdivision known as Hillcrest to the northeast of Stuyvesant Avenue. In 1888, Farlee placed the remainder of Ellarslie up for sale. It just so happened that the City of Trenton was seeking land for a park. The city's purchase consisted of 82 acres plus the main house, a tenant farmhouse, a cottage, a small brick house, barn, carriage and tool house, machine shed and icehouse.



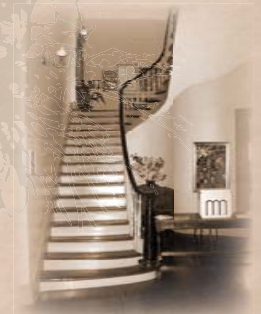
Ellarslie mansion, c. 1920.

TRENTON CITY MUSEUM

By the early 1970s, Ellarslie mansion was in very poor condition. After becoming part of the city park in 1888, the building had served first as a natural history museum, then as a refreshment stand and an ice cream parlor, only last to be turned into a monkey house for the Cadwalader Park zoo.

Restoration of the Ellarslie mansion began in 1971 and the building opened to the public as the Trenton City Museum in 1978. The museum is owned by the City of Trenton and operated by the Trenton Museum Society.

Ellarslie features diverse exhibits and special events on the history, arts and culture of the greater Trenton area. Please stop in the museum during regular visiting hours. You're invited in!



Main stairs in the Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie, 2014.