

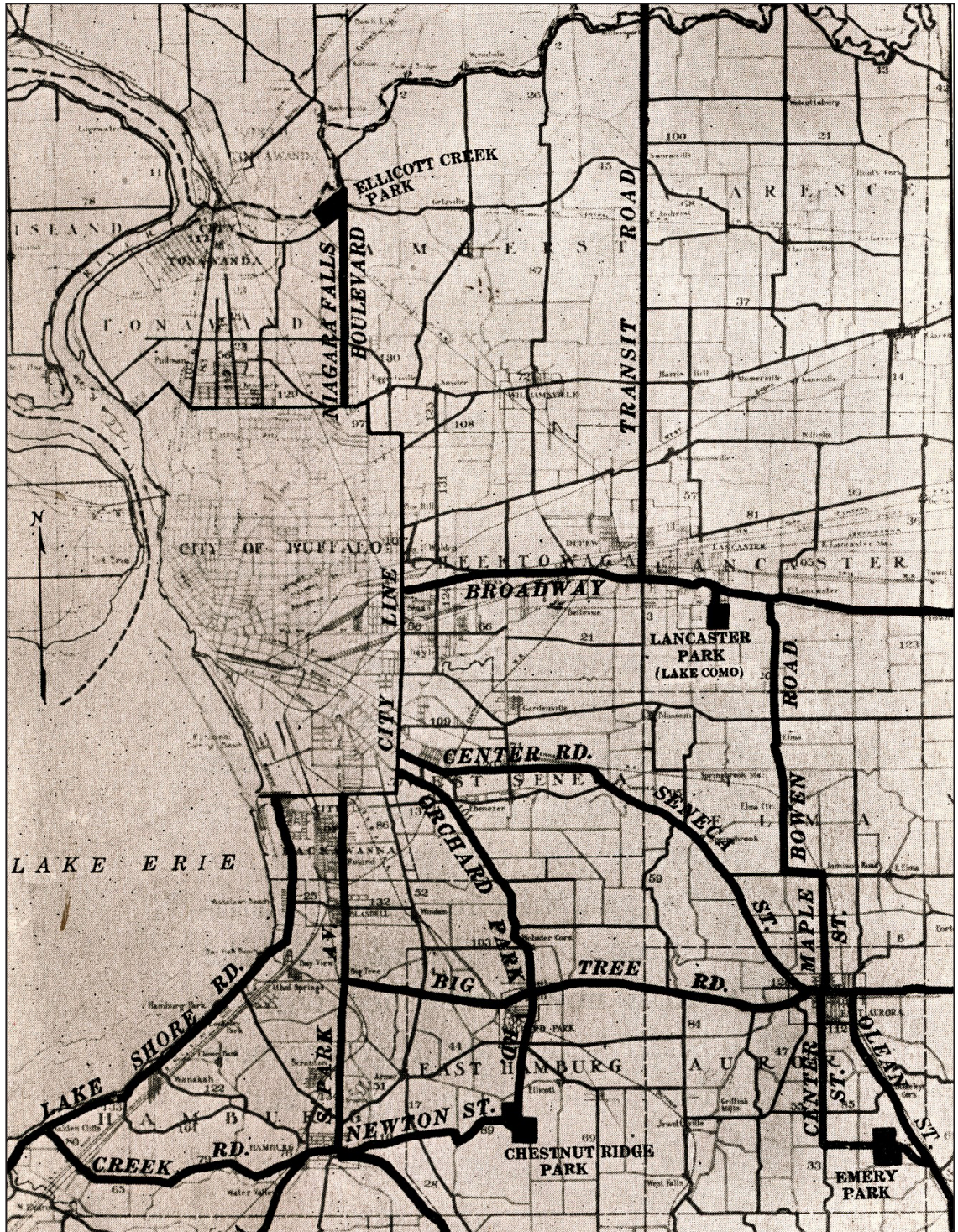
# Erie County's WPA Heritage Parks

James Hornung, Erie County Parks Commissioner

Prepared by the Erie County Historian's Office

Douglas Kohler

Ken Wierzbowski



WPA Heritage Parks  
Initial Survey for NYS and National Register of Historic Places

The Erie County Parks Commission was created in 1924. Over the next year, the commissioners examined land throughout the county in order to determine which parcels would best suite the needs of the county's residents. The commission recommended acquiring land for four parks: Chestnut Ridge, Emery, Como Lake and Ellicott Creek. In 1947, the county took over Akron Falls from the Town of Newstead and added it to the County Park system. Much of the work that was undertaken to create municipal facilities was undertaken as part of the Roosevelt administration's "New Deal" programs. Workers, employed under the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Emergency Relief Board (ERB) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built shelters, roadways, major structures and landscaped the parks. Erie County was part of the WPA District #12. Much of that work remains extant. The following descriptions show what the labor relief workers did at each park.

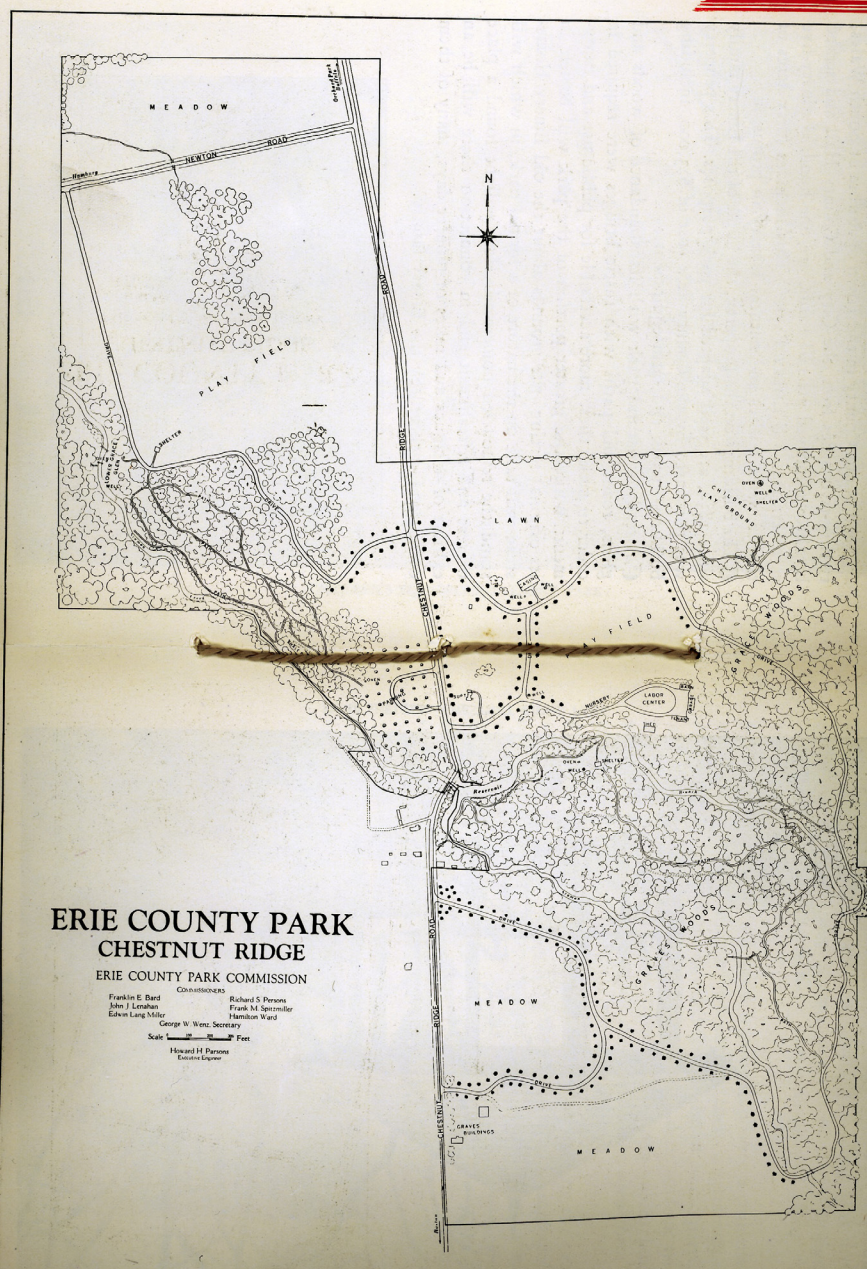
Bibliography for initial survey:

Fox, Austin. *Erie County's Architectural Legacy*. Erie County Preservation Board, 1983.  
Taylor, Nick. *The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: American Made*. New York: Bantam, 2008.  
*WPA in the Buffalo Area*, 1936 (in the collection of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library)  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library Local History Vertical File: WPA  
Erie County History Scrapbooks-Parks  
*The Erie County Park System* (1926)  
Annual Reports of the Parks Commissioners  
Minutes, Erie County Parks Commission  
Miscellaneous files of the Erie County Parks Department  
[www.erie.gov](http://www.erie.gov)  
University of Buffalo Historic Research Survey, 1987

A Note on photographs:

The color photographs were all take in August and September, 2009  
Chestnut-Charlotte Kohler  
Akron, Como, Ellicott-Ken Wierzbowski  
Emery-Doug Kohler

Chestnut Ridge Park  
Orchard Park, NY  
Erie County  
1,231 acres



**ERIE COUNTY PARK  
CHESTNUT RIDGE**  
ERIE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS  
Franklin E. Beard  
John J. Latham  
Edwin Long Miller

Richard S. Parnes  
Frank M. Sporniller  
Hamilton Ward

George W. Went, Secretary

Scale Feet  
Howard H. Parsons  
Landscape Designer



The Chestnut Ridge Park Casino was built in 1938 as a WPA project. The original casino was built in 1925, but was destroyed by fire.

CWA/WPA work at Chestnut Ridge Park:

- Grading of the Casino Hill
- Casino Construction
- Road work and drive construction (see next image)
- Bridges
- Comfort Stations
- Water lines
- Shelters with stone columns (some of the stone used was cobbles from the streets of Buffalo)
- Tennis courts which could be flooded for skating
- Shrub maze
- Transformer housing
- Toboggan run



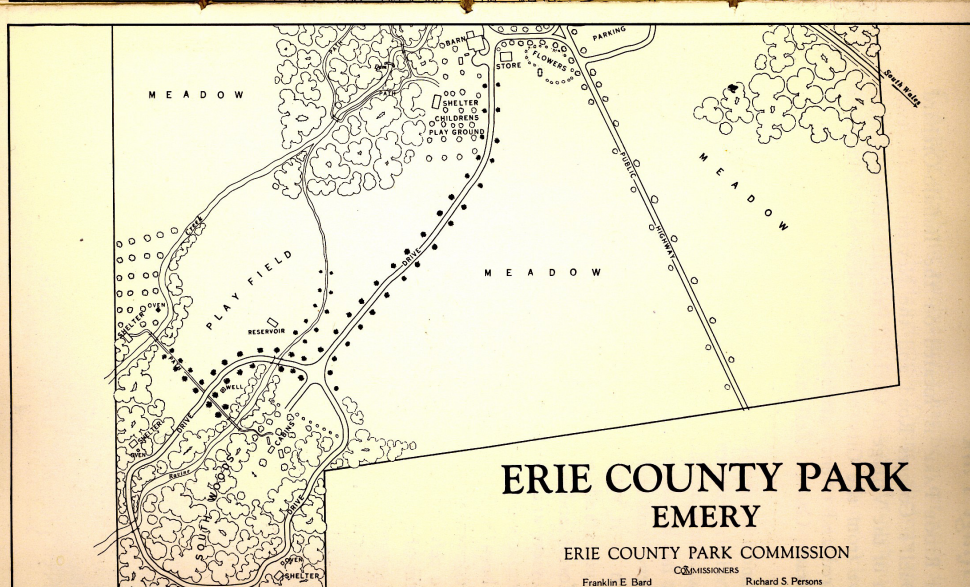
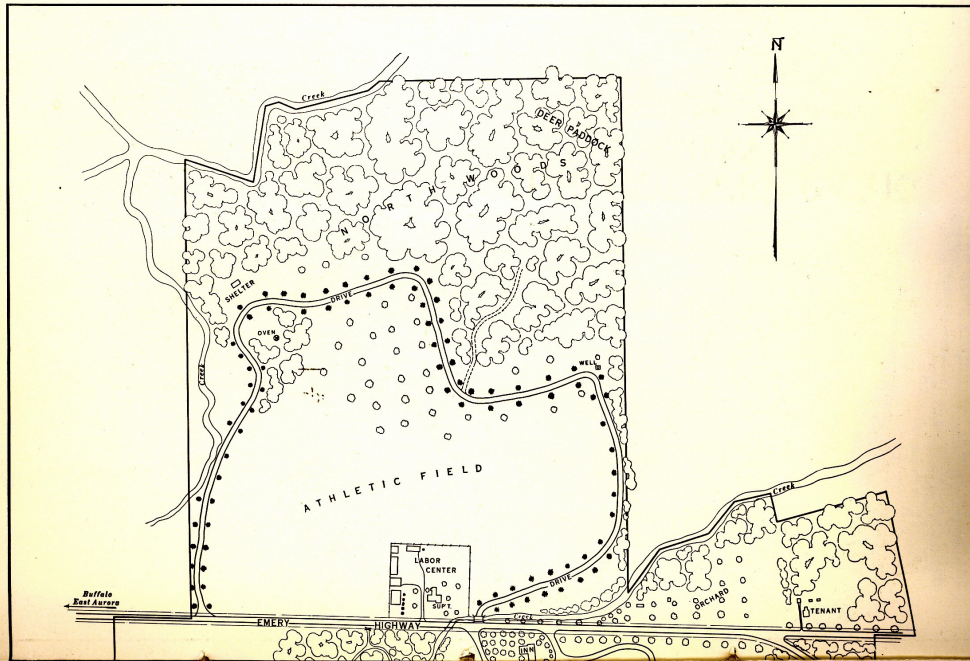


Stone work construction/road guardrails built by the WPA at Chestnut Ridge Park.



Toboggan Run

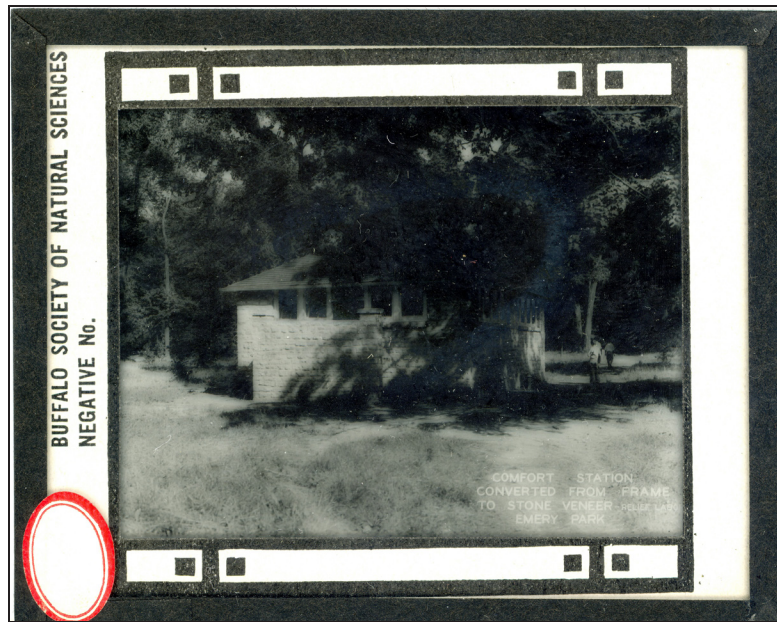
Emery Park  
Wales, NY  
Erie County  
489 acres



ERIE COUNTY PARK  
EMERY

ERIE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS  
Franklin E. Bard Richard S. Persons



Emery Park Comfort station. Note the text in the lower right that notes the construction by “relief labor.”

Glass slide in the files of the Erie County Parks Department

CWA/WPA work at Emery Park:

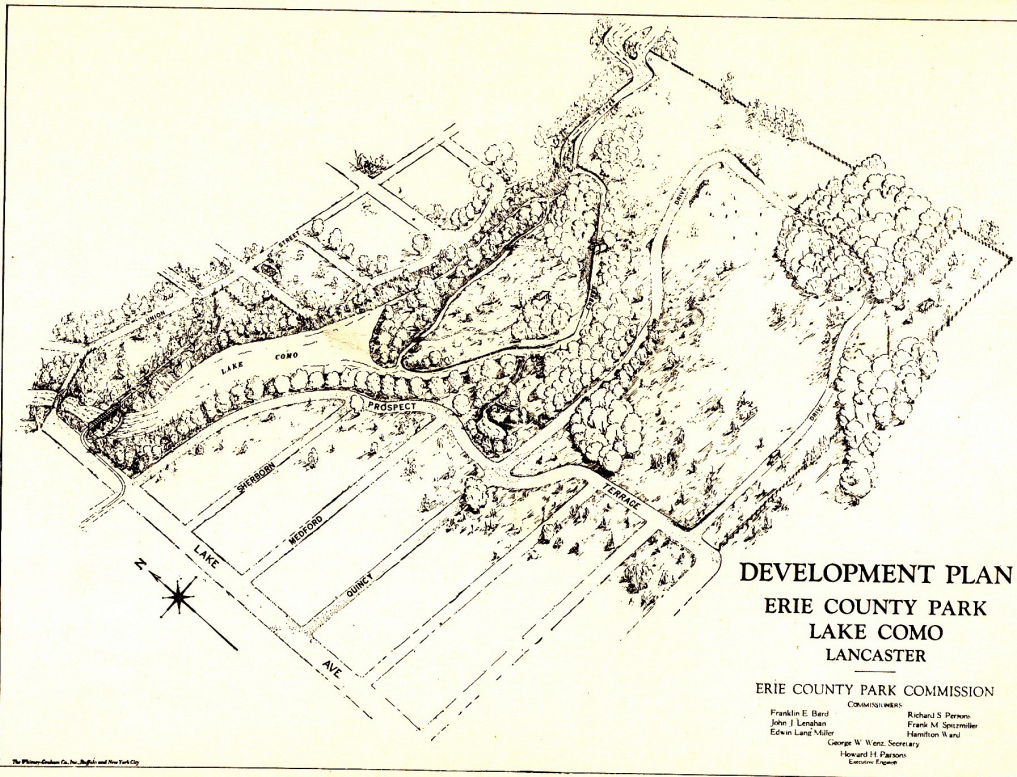
- Stone/log shelters
- Road work
- Tree Planting
- Bridges
- Tennis courts and pergola
- Transformer housing
- Comfort stations







Como Lake Park  
Lancaster, NY  
Erie County  
534 acres



**DEVELOPMENT PLAN**  
**ERIE COUNTY PARK**  
**LAKE COMO**  
**LANCASTER**

ERIE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION  
COMMISSIONERS  
Franklin E. Bard  
John J. Longabaugh  
Edwin Lang Miller  
Richard S. Perren  
Frank M. Spitzmuller  
Hamilton W. and  
George W. Wood, Secretary  
Howard H. Pappas  
Executive Engineer

The Planning Division of the City of Lancaster and New York City



The commission minutes note that a new dam was constructed in 1934-35. It is possible that these undated photos show the construction of the dam. There was also extensive work done on the lake and the blueprints for that work exist in the parks department files. There are additional pictures on the following page.

#### CWA/WPA work at Como Lake Park:

- Dam construction (1934-'35)
- Retaining wall construction (1937-'38)
- Stone/log shelters
- Stairways
- Bandstand
- Island work
- 4,000' of waterline laid
- Concession stand
- Convertible shelters that could be used for winter storage
- Stone veneer field house
- Road work



Como Park Lighthouse (circa 1925-1926) houses flood controls for the dam, and while it is original to the park, it was never intended to be a functional lighthouse.

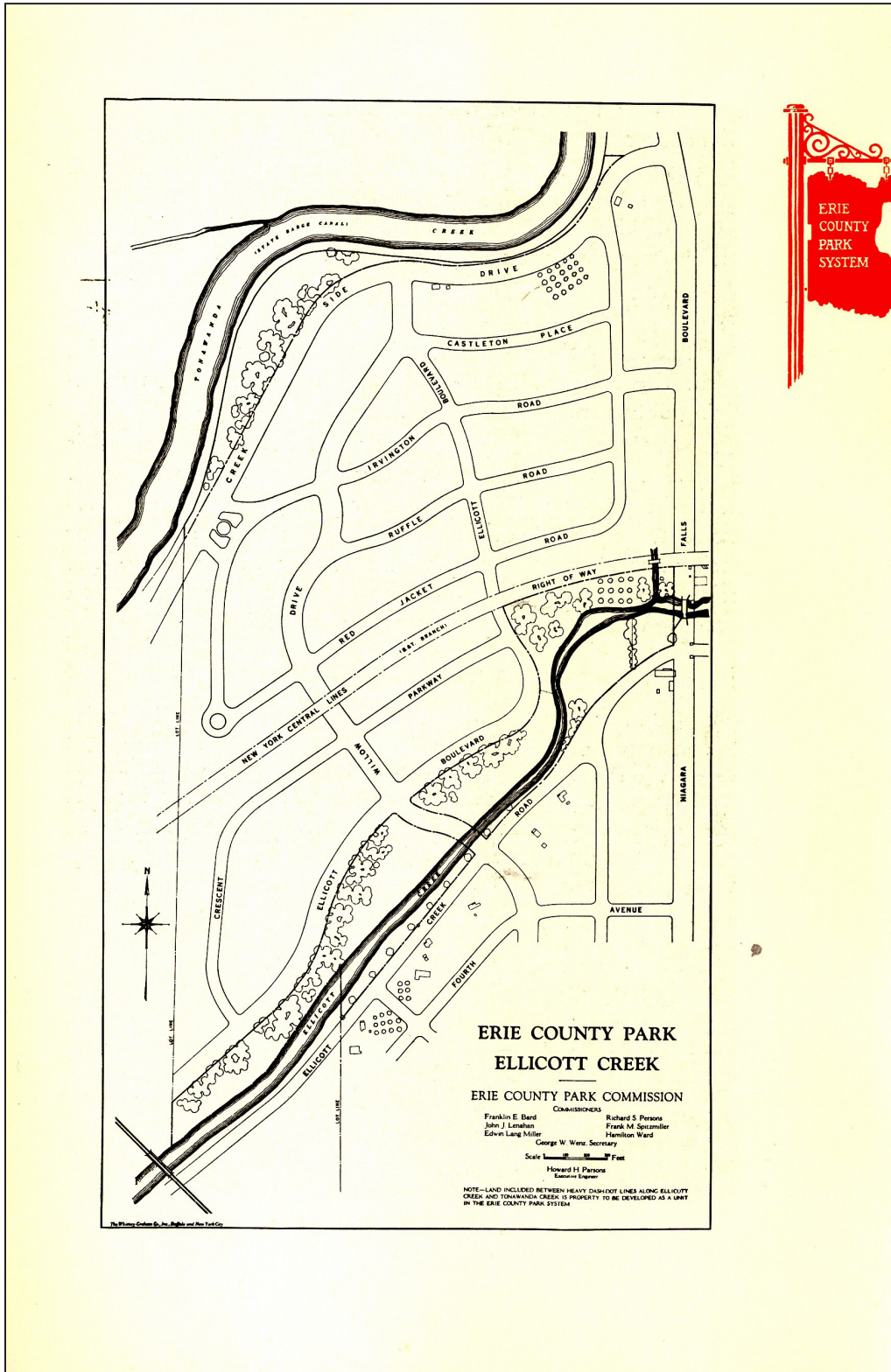


# Ellicott Creek Park

## Tonawanda, NY

### Erie County

165 acres





Shelter M-7 at Ellicott Creek Park bears this mark (WPA 1939), which is still visible in this photograph taken in August 2009.

CWA/WPA work at Ellicott Creek Park:

- Stone boat and canoe house (made with stone from the Erie Canal bed rip-rap)
- Stone/log shelters (see above)
- Levelling of the Erie Canal banks
- Tree work
- Extension to garage
- Tennis courts
- Gardening/tree planting



# Akron Falls Park

## Newstead, NY

### Erie County

#### 284 acres

#### History

The earliest inhabitants of the Akron Park Area were three major groups of Indians: the Eries, Neutral-Wenros, and the Hurons. These cultures lasted until approximately 1650, when the Iroquois Nation absorbed the tribes. The area immediately adjacent to and including the village of Akron belonged to that segment of the Iroquois Indians known as the “Seneca”. The Seneca Indians remained the strongest and most prominent tribe at the time.

In 1798, the Holland Land Company transformed the Great Central Trail (the Iroquois trail which passed from Albany through Akron) into a rutted wagon road for ambitious pioneers. This road was called the “Buffalo Road” and it became the first wagon trail in Erie County. (*The Akron News*, 23 June 1966)

The Civil Works Administration, which was funded by the PWA, initiated the development of Akron Falls. They hired 90 men to develop the park and each received a minimum of \$15.00 per week. Later that same year the dam and artificial lake was constructed from bond funds. (*The Akron News*, December 1933)

Erie County Parks acquired Akron Falls Parks System in 1947. The county purchased additional acreage to provide for a skating rink and picnic space. This further led to the construction of footbridges, stone fireplaces and tables. (*The Akron News*, June 1966)

#### CWA/WPA work at Akron Falls Park:

- work begun in 1933 under the ERB
- 1933-1935 WPA work was done on Park View Drive
- Cement bridge and dam

