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Folger Park - The two Southern magnolias in Folger Park serve as magnificent focal points in the center of the park. Folger Park trees are more than a hundred years old.



The Magnificent Trees of Capitol Hill

Part 2 - Identifying Capitol Hill Trees

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY RINDY O'BRIEN

Three parks near the Capitol South Metro stop included in last month's city tree walk could very well be nominated as the Hill's "Most Valuable Asset." The trio of parks flow easily into one another. Folger Park sits at the corner of Second and D streets SE and is neighbor to Providence Park at Second and E streets SE. The third park, Garfield Park, is a block away, situated between the on-ramp to Interstate 395 and the Capitol Hill Day School. The park begins at First and F streets SE and covers three blocks over to Third Street SE.

These Capitol Hill parks provide open space, quiet locations for meditation, playgrounds for children and families, dog runs and soccer fields for young children. In fact, Garfield

Park features a children's playground, lighted tennis and basketball courts, and two bocce ball courts - the only public bocce courts in DC.

The beauty of these parks begins with their trees, which are some of the most magnificent trees on Capitol Hill. Many of the trees have been present since the parks' creation more than one hundred years ago.

It is easy at a single glance to see the difference between these mature trees and the struggling street trees. The huge park trees have benefited from centuries of care, pruning and watering. They also have lots of space for roots and limbs to expand. These trees have protection from the direct contact with automobile pollution and other damaging factors with which street trees must contend. Some of the larger trees in the parks have even

been cabled or wired to fortify limbs that may have been weakened over time.

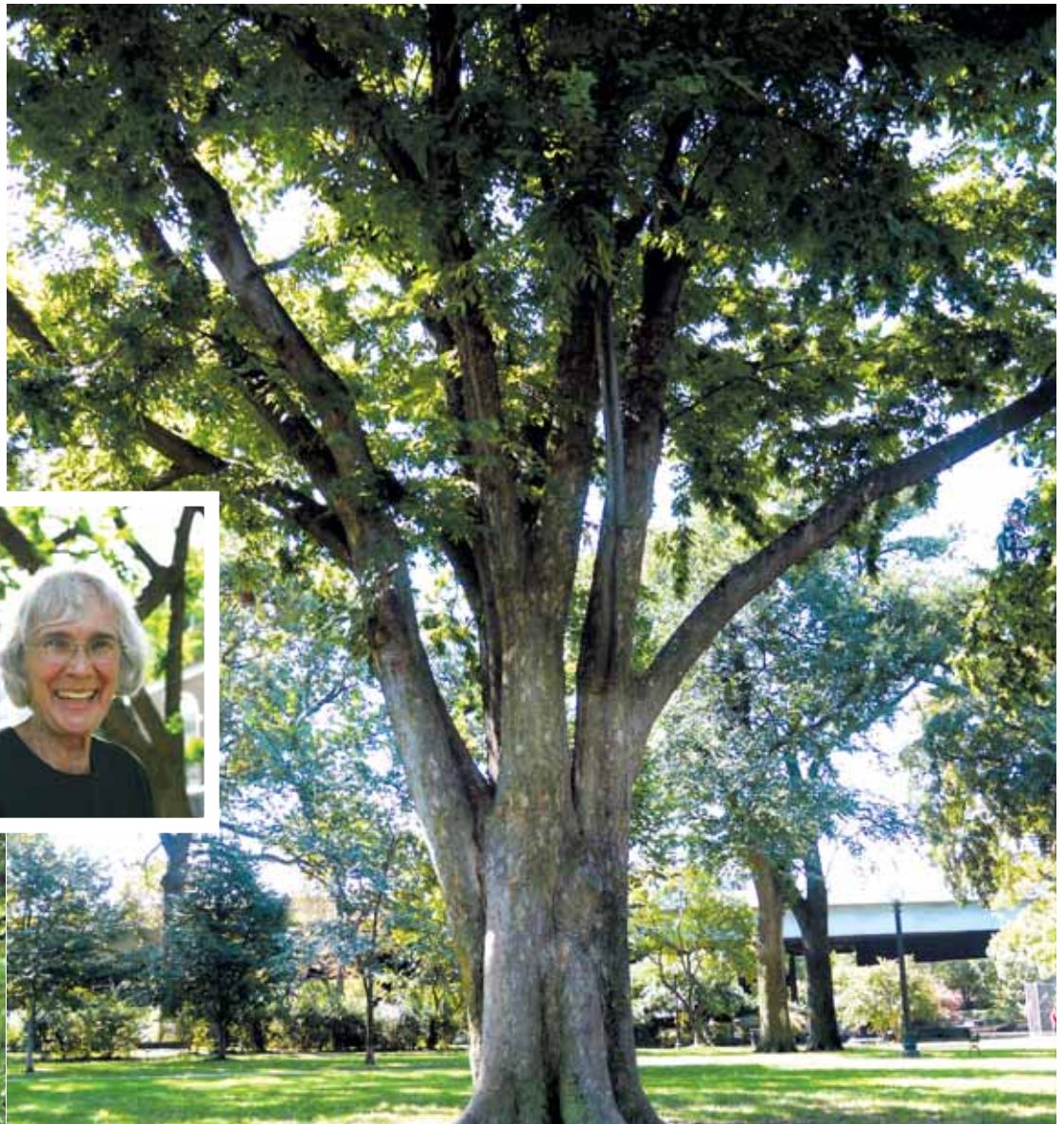
The parks also have historic landscape plans that specify the kind and number of trees to be planted and years of information to guide present-day arborists and park workers. Without a doubt, the early park planners had very good tree sense and chose trees that would thrive in the Washington, DC, climate.

Folger Park

In 1885, 1,000 trees were planted in the newly designated park that was named after Charles J. Folger, secretary of the treasury in the administration of Chester A. Arthur. Folger died while still in office in 1884. The federal government purchased the land back in

FROM LEFT to RIGHT (Opposite Page)

1. Providence Parks' Zelkova trees have been planted in a graceful curve along Second Street helping give the park more character.
2. Margaret Missiaen leads Trees for Capitol Hill, which was founded in 1991.
3. The oak trees in Garfield Park thrive, because they have room to spread and are prominent in the three-block park.
4. Squirrels are populous in Garfield Park because of all the burrs and hollow trees to give them room to nest. The squirrels do no harm to the trees.



1791, and it dates back to the L'Enfant plan. The park is managed by the National Park Service that recently hired a new tree service to care for the huge elms, sycamores and Southern magnolias.

The two magnolias in the center of the park are some of the fullest on Capitol Hill. Margaret Missiaen, of Trees for Capitol Hill, admires these trees but cautions homeowners that these trees require a lot of space to thrive. She says, "They just are too big

for most of our small Hill yards."

Several huge Deodar cedar trees are at each end of the park, and the evergreen serves as a buffer from the street noise. The tree is related to the Cedar of Lebanon, and its pine cones grow up rather than down. The European copper beech tree trunks have been defaced with graffiti but are lovely in structure and size. Unlike a number of other parks around the Hill where benches have been removed, Folger Park has a series of benches down the middle of the park to encourage meditation and visiting.

Providence Park

In a historical sense, Providence Park is relatively new and has been through a variety of uses over the years. In 1871, nuns established Providence Hospital in a house on the square south of the park site at Second and D streets SE. Eventually the hospital was torn down, and in the early 1980s, Congress bought the site with the intention of building a school and dormitory for Capitol Hill pages. However, the neighborhood had come to enjoy the open spaces, also known as "X Park" because

of the walkways that cross it, and an intense debate occurred. In the end the space has been preserved as a park.

The Architect of the Capitol oversees the park and has planted, in a very thoughtful and attractive way, a number of trees along the park's edges. The trees break up the flatness of the park, providing shade for families using the space, and the variety of trees planted are bringing songbirds back to the area.

Of special note is the lovely curve of Zelkova trees planted along Second Street. Crab apple trees, sugar maples and Japanese red pines also give the park excellent color this time of year. The trees are relatively new but will grow into a great tree canopy.

Garfield Park

Like Providence Park, Garfield Park has had a checkered history of ownership. It passed between the federal government and railroad companies before being transferred to jurisdiction of the District of Columbia for Southeast/Southwest Freeway construction. At that time, Second Street, which had been a through street in the park, was closed to traffic and became a park.

The stately oak trees that are well over a hun-

dred years old are some of the best species of oaks in Southeast Washington. There are Northern red oaks with their pointed leaf lobes, as well as white and Bur oaks. Distinguishing between the different oaks can be a challenge, even for a well-trained eye. It sometimes takes putting together all the clues of leaf shapes, looking at sinuses, acorn size and the kind of cap on the acorn to make the right identification. Both the Northern red oak and Bur oak are native to North America and can live to be 200-300 years old. The vastness of Garfield Park gives these oaks the room to thrive and helps absorb some of the pollution that fills the air from automobile exhaust on the freeway.

The Friends of Garfield Park, a nonprofit organization that has been working hard to replant and beautify the park, has raised funds and replanted Higan cherry trees, crape myrtles and other smaller trees to bring spring and late summer colors to the park.

Margaret Missiaen also shares her organization's resources and expertise with volunteers who are caring for the trees and flowers. Missiaen notes, "The trees at Garfield Park have not been taken care of in the same way that the other parks have because of the lack of city funds."

Another barrier has been that, while the park is managed by the District Department of Parks and Recreation, the department does not have any staff trained to care for trees at their parks, so another agency picks it up. The city's renewed interest in greening our neighborhoods is beginning to bring more resources to Garfield Park.

It is amazing to think of the variety of trees that we have here on Capitol Hill in such an urban environment. Thanks to the dedicated volunteers, like Missiaen, Friends of Garfield Park, Casey Trees and dedicated public servants from the city, the Capitol, and US Park Service, Capitol Hill's trees are being cared for and should continue to provide us with all of their beauty and other benefits for many

years to come.

On Nov. 21, Trees for Capitol Hill will be doing its annual fall planting. Last year, the organization planted 19 different trees across the Hill. The group needs volunteers to help with this year's planting. If you can help, please give Margaret Missiaen a call at 202-546-8681 or e-mail her at missiaen@verizon.net. Due to the lead time of getting city permits to plant the street trees, they cannot add any more tree boxes to this year's planting list but would be happy to talk to you about



future plantings.

Rindy O'Brien is a longtime resident of Capitol Hill, and serves on the board of directors for the Pioneer Forest, a sustainable hardwood forest in the Ozarks. She is working a special art photography project about trees. For thoughts or comments, she can be reached at rindyob@mac.com. ★



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