

Career: Charles Eliot was the landscape architect who designed the improvements at the Bartlet Mall that we see today. Eliot helped to pioneer regional planning in the United States. He was key in forming The Trustees of the Reservations, laying the groundwork for land conservancies around the world. He argued that areas of scenic beauty should be conserved in the same way that a library holds books and a museum manages a collection of art.

After studying horticulture at Harvard College, Eliot apprenticed to Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr. and Company in 1883, where he worked on many well-known design projects including in Greater Boston, such as the Arnold Arboretum (1885) and the Fens (1883). Eliot eventually became a full partner at the Olmstead firm, and quickly assumed leadership as Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr.'s health declined. Eliot himself died at a young age, 37 years old, from spinal meningitis. His landscape architecture work left a lasting mark in Greater Boston and beyond, and certainly here in Newburyport.



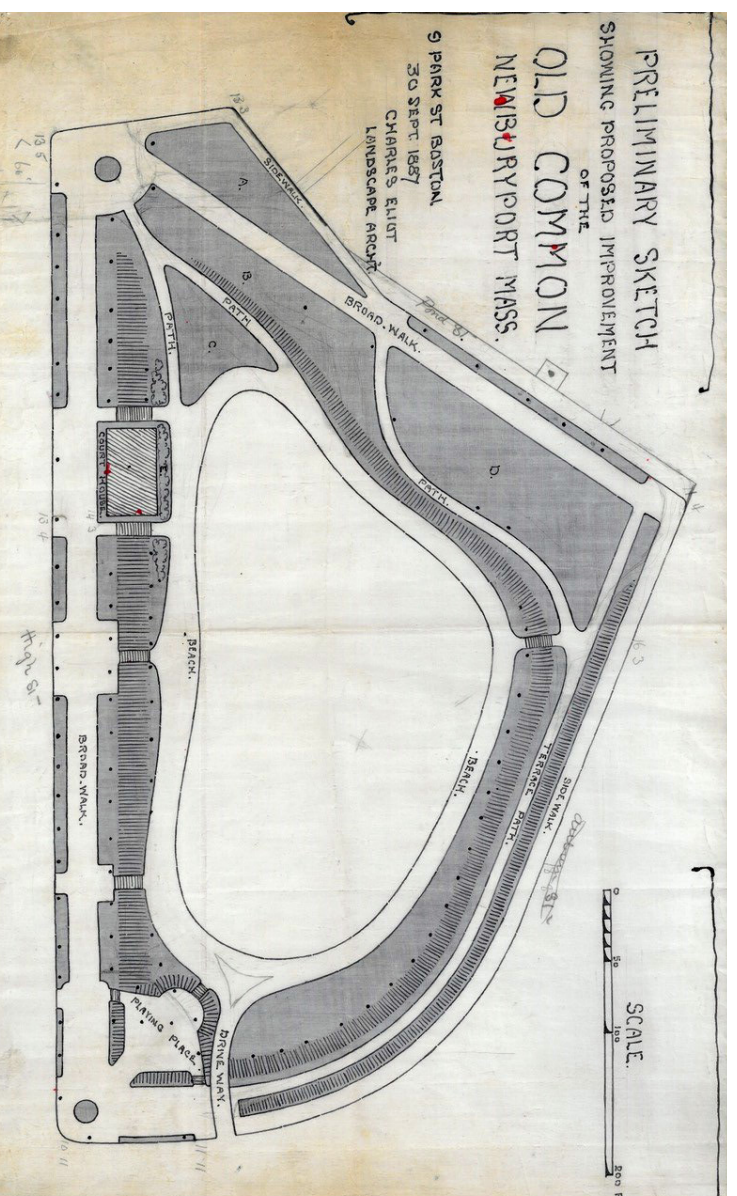
Charles Eliot, Brush Hill, Milton, Mass., ca. 1895

Eliot at the Bartlet Mall: In 1887, the Mall Improvement Association hired Charles Eliot to draw up plans to improve Bartlet Mall, the common for Newburyport for over 80 years, by then. Eliot may have been particularly interested in the project because his Great Grandmother, Catherine Atkins, came from Newburyport. Eliot's original drawings and letters to the Mall Improvement Association are in the collection of the Museum of Old Newbury at the Cushing House.

The carefully and deliberately graded, continuous slopes on two terraces around the Frog Pond, the informal beach bank around the entire perimeter water, including new fill behind the courthouse, the “Elm Allée” (the walkway lining High Street with carefully spaced trees), and “long views” across the pond, beneath tree foliage, from all angles of the park, are all Eliot's design, created in 1887. Even then, Eliot noted the maintenance challenges for the park, identifying in his letters that the changing water levels of the Frog Pond made it impossible to create a more formal curb or bank.

It is because of Charles Eliot's exceptional work and the efforts of the original Mall Improvement Association (1887-1889) to complete them, that the Bartlet Mall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This park may be one of the most intact works of Eliot's short but significant career; certainly it has the most complete record of Eliot's design documents.

A New Effort: For centuries, Newburyporters have worked together, sometimes through formal groups, to maintain and beautify the Bartlet Mall. A new effort is now underway to implement the design by Charles Eliot and restore the Frog Pond.



Original plan of the Bartlet Mall improvements, located at the Cushing House, Museum of Old Newbury

Please consider joining the mailing list for Port Parks Alliance to support restoration and improvement of the Mall. To join or ask questions, please e-mail info@parksalliance.com.