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HERMON A. MACNEIL PARK

28.87 Acres

The history of the Hermon A. MacNeil Park and the history of the College Point neighborhood are closely linked. In 1835 Reverend William Augustus Muhlenberg purchased 134 acres of land in the area as the site of a new Episcopal seminary. Due to the financial Panic of 1837, plans for an expensive stone school building were abandoned. Muhlenberg's sister, Mrs. Rogers, purchased the remaining stone for her own mansion, and a new frame building rose on the school's masonry foundation. St. Paul's College (for which College Point is named) opened in 1839 and closed about ten years later.

William F. Chisolm, a former St. Paul's student, married Mary Rogers, the niece of Reverend Muhlenberg, in 1848. The young couple moved into the stone mansion on the grounds of the old school (some sources claim the house was erected for them in 1848). The remaining campus buildings were used by residents of College Point, Strattonburg, and Flammersburg. The school chapel provided a place for religious services, the dormitories and outbuildings served as private residences, and the school building continued to function as a school for many years. Leseman's Academy, Fuerst Institute, Kyle's Institute, Miss Clark's Select School for Girls, and a nautical school all operated from the old seminary building, until it was demolished around the turn of the century.

In 1930 the City of New York acquired the mansion and its grounds for a public park. The Parks Department improved the property with a new playground, football field, roller skating rink, baseball diamond, and picnic grounds. Popular with picnickers, the waterfront property was known alternatively as Chisholm Park (a variant spelling of the Chisolm family's name) and College Point Shore Front Park. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia made the Chisolm mansion his summer City Hall in 1937, conducting his municipal business in July and August on the shores of the East River. The old mansion was razed between 1939 and 1941, and a flagpole marks the site.

In 1966 Mayor John V. Lindsay signed his first local law, which renamed the park for Hermon Atkins MacNeil (1866-1947), a College Point resident and nationally renowned sculptor. At the ceremony, the mayor was flanked by two College Point neighbors who had posed for MacNeil's sculptures. Doris Doscher Baum served as the model for the artist's most widely seen work: the Standing Liberty quarter, which was first minted in 1916. A local mailman, John E. Troesch posed for the memorial to Père Marquette which stands in Chicago's West Park.

MacNeil's sculptures can be seen in four of the five boroughs in New York City, including Washington as Commander-in-Chief at the base of the Washington Square Arch in Manhattan; a cast of his Sun Vow in the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; the Flushing War Memorial in Queens; and four busts in the Hall of Fame of Great Americans at Bronx Community College. His other notable works include the figures on the eastern pediment of the Supreme Court Building in Washington D.C. and Out From Chaos Came the Dawn, which earned him the honor of being the first American to receive the Prix de Rome.

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