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Town Day 2008

photo by Christian Klein

# ROBBINS FARM ALMANAC

Robbins Farm Almanac . . . the newsletter of the Friends of Robbins Farm Park

## Time for a Celebration—President's Message

### A "Thank You" to our Members & Volunteers

It's hard to believe that the Friends of Robbins Farm Park has been around for a decade.

From its inception, the overarching mission of our group has been to honor the spirit and wishes of Nathan Robbins, who sold the 11 acre parcel to the town so it would be preserved for the use of the neighborhood children he loved so well.

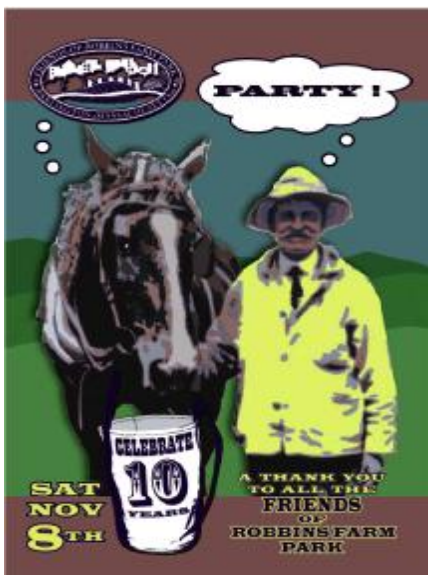
We like to think that old Farmer Robbins, who liked nothing better than seeing the children of Arlington play on his land, and who always looked the other way when the neighborhood kids "borrowed" his apples, would be very pleased to see how his legacy has been continued. As Oakes Plimpton tells in his story, all of our mission's goals were present at the very

start. We also believe that the gentleman farmer who so enjoyed helping his neighbors, would have been delighted to see the community of volunteers that has evolved for the stewardship of his land, our park.

We all know that Nathan's gift is a beautiful place, with the best view of Boston to be found anywhere. But we think that Nathan's other lasting gift is this strong community, with the park at its heart.

This tenth anniversary provides us a wonderful excuse for us to thank you, all our members, volunteers, and supporters. This is a time to celebrate this milestone and look forward to the future of our park.

In the spirit of Farmer Robbins, accompanied by his trusty horse "Tommy," (pictured lower left) we invite you, all our members, volunteers, [Continued on page 2](#)



## Park News Update

Mike Smith is researching native bulbs to include in the mix for our bulb planting and park cleanup day, Sat. Nov. 8. Look for American Natives such as dog tooth violet or sanguinaria in the shadier places next spring.

FORFP Board member Jen Rothenberg, who is also on the Parks and Recreation Commission, attended a brainstorming meeting on Oct. 8, open to all park users, members of DPW, School Committee, and Board of Selectmen to discuss the issue of

porta-potty use in Arlington parks.

On Sunday Oct 12 the sundial subcommittee plans to lay out a temporary sundial at and locate solar noon at the viewing oval at Robbins Farm. The goal of the day is to plan for Field Day, coming up on Saturday, Oct. 18 (though solar noon will be at different time on the 18th!) Dick Koolish, Jack Duranceau, Tony Vogel, Christian Klein, Jeffrey Alexander and Marlene Rockmore will be on hand to provide their expertise, document the event, and prepare a fun activity for the kids to try out on Field Day.

## Time for a Celebration . . .

and supporters to join us for the FORFP Tenth Anniversary Celebration. The party will take place on Saturday, November 8, 2008, at the beautiful Whittemore-Robbins House.

Invitations to the event (see right for a sneak preview) will be mailed to the membership-at-large. We hope to see some faces from the past, those folks who helped with the Community Build in 2002 when the new playground was installed, and others who have stewarded the activities of the park and kept a watchful eye on its well-being.

The evening's festivities will begin at 8:00 PM. There will be music, dancing, cash bar, hors-d'oeuvres, dessert and coffee. We are very pleased that the Country Dance Society (Boston Centre) is providing the music and a demonstration of traditional English Country Dance. They will also provide a brief lesson for all who wish to participate.

There is no charge to attend the Celebration, and RSVPs will be received on a first-come, first-served basis on our website or by phone until we reach the house capacity. Please e-mail us today at [friends@robbinsfarmpark.org](mailto:friends@robbinsfarmpark.org) to reserve your place. We look forward to seeing you there!

**Tony Vogel, President with  
Barry Russell, Party Chairperson**

PLEASE JOIN US FOR

*The Friends of Robbins Farm Park*  
*10th Anniversary Celebration*

A THANK YOU TO OUR MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2008  
8:00 - 11:00 PM  
WHITTEMORE-ROBBINS HOUSE  
670 R MASSACHUSETTS AVE  
(DIRECTLY BEHIND ROBBINS LIBRARY)

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LIGHT HORS D'OEUVRES & BEVERAGES  
CASH BAR  
MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT  
ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCERS

*RSVP*  
BY NOV 1  
FRIENDS@ROBBINSFARMPARK.ORG  
781-316-8495

*We look forward to seeing you there!*

• THE FORFP BOARD OF DIRECTORS •

ELAINE BACKMAN	JUDY LEICH	MIKE SMITH
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## Mass Ave Corridor Enhancement Project Gets Underway

By Roly Chaput

Last week I attended a meeting to discuss streetscape improvements along Massachusetts Avenue from Pond Lane to the Cambridge line. The session was held to inform the public of a plan to improve not only pedestrian access and better parking along our primary thoroughfare but to create safer modes of transportation for those using the street.

Why would this project be of interest to members of FORFP? I believe we should be showing support for all good projects in town whenever they provide a benefit for the citizens of Arlington even if our park is not directly involved.

There are several meetings scheduled when folks can have a look at plans for this \$4.8 million enhancement of our community. The next one is at the Town Hall Auditorium, 7:00 p.m. on Oct. 23. I'll keep you informed of progress and ask that you respond to inquiries of your neighbors when they ask "What's going on?"

For more information you can look at the town's website summarizing the first meeting:

[http://www.town.arlington.ma.us/public\\_documents/ArlingtonMA\\_Planning/MassAve/10\\_01\\_2008\\_meeting\\_summary.pdf](http://www.town.arlington.ma.us/public_documents/ArlingtonMA_Planning/MassAve/10_01_2008_meeting_summary.pdf)

## A History of FORFP — Looking Back on our 10th Anniversary

**By Oakes Plimpton**

A letter headed FRIENDS OF ROBBINS FARM dated Sept. 22, 1998, begins:

*"Well, first, Friends of Robbins Farm does not actually exist, but we hope to start such an organization, in part based on the success of Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park. We have already existed back a few years, having put on several Kite Festivals at the park. As most of you know, another group got together to redo the playground. The project at hand is the renovation of the tennis courts. . . . One idea: A neighborhood architect has offered to design a new concept gratis. One imagines a sculpture garden with a labyrinth - a circular design where one meditates (not a maze where you get lost) as is found in mediaeval cathedral. Question: could one accommodate toddler tricyclists and older roller bladers?"*

The formative meeting took place October 19, 1998, at the Community Safety room: myself, Roland Chaput, and Elaine Backman present of those still Board members. Also present were Steve Pooley, Pam & Frank Wilwerth, John Weiss, Jeff Zimmer, Bruce Whetle, Tania Wilke, Carol Beggy, Kaye Denny, and Jackie Harrington. At the next meeting, November 9th, Judy Leich, newsletter editor, and Sandy Carmichael, co-secretary were present. Corinna Vanderspek attended the very next meeting. Don Kalischer, current webmaster, wrote us to note his first meeting was in February, 1999. So seven first Friends are still with us, many more still members!

The minutes of that first meeting note that 25 people answered the original mailing sending along \$5 dues, the mailing having gone out to the Heights Tower Association, some members of the Skyline Playground group, and people we knew. Interestingly the Skyline folks were not interested in a permanent organization. Here's an excerpt from those first minutes: "One neighbor makes a more philosophical case for passive recreation, noting that the Park & Recreation Commission mostly promotes active recreation -- soccer fields and the like. Why not open areas where adults and children can invent their own games (to replace the tennis courts); he cites the recent occasion where the primary schools science coordinator organized a harvest moon viewing, the park full of families viewing the moon (and moons of Jupiter!) through various binoculars and telescopes.

Hmmm — actually his example, though a good one for sure, is not about kids inventing their own games. As we

know his view prevailed in the present landscaped knoll replacing the old tennis courts.

In 1999 we met with the DPW Head, with the Community Safety Director (problems with vandalism), with the Parks and Recreation Commission, with the Capital Planning Chair. We instituted Park clean-up days, also revived the Kite Festivals. We met several times to tour and view the park deterioration and to brainstorm improvements. This led to the painting of the rusty tennis court fences green! Then we met with Professors John Furlong and Jean Cavanaugh from the Radcliffe Seminars on Landscape Design, (now called the Landscape Institute of Arnold Arboretum) and they promised to assign their students to draw up draft master plans for the Park! Their imaginative designs dominated the next year or two of discussions, and eventually led to the Park renovations of 2003 and 2004.

As part of the review of the park structures, it soon became evident that the 1990 playground renovations were inadequate and deteriorating. The Friends and the Park and Recreation Commission chose Carol Johnson Associates to be the Park renovation designer. The playground was Community Build, and its leaders became part of the Friends — Jennifer Rothenberg, Christian Klein, Marlene Rockmore, Mike Smith and Marianne White, and past directors Kim Cayer, Lisa Gleason and Jack Rogers. Their added input and energy led to new Friends' activities — to the revival of old-fashioned Field Days, to Shakespeare in the Park, to the revival of outdoor movies, the baseball night, and the July 4th celebration to include a band playing and a video of the fireworks and 1812 overture!



*Whittemore Robbins House - Site of the upcoming 10th Anniversary Celebration*

## It Takes a Team To Build A Sidewalk

**By Marlene Rockmore**

*Veteran Town Meeting Member and FORFP Board Member Marlene Rockmore shares her insider knowledge of how that great new sidewalk got built. (Ed.)*

You may have been surprised this summer to see the new sidewalk that seemingly appeared overnight along Eastern Avenue abutting the park extending from Grandview to Scituate Street. But it takes a team effort to build a sidewalk.

Last fall, I went to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to find out how to repair the badly deteriorated sidewalk along Eastern Ave. I learned that our sidewalk was one of many critical sidewalks, near schools and parks, that needed repairs. But with the help of TAC, our new DPW Director, John Bean, and our Selectmen, a process was initiated to have a budget line in the Capitol plan for sidewalk repair. And last spring, we learned that our sidewalk had made it to the top of the priority list!

Many thanks are due to the many dedicated town committee members who volunteer their time to help understand these issues, manage our finances, and do the technical research to make projects like this happen. Thank you to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) who has worked hard to identify critical sidewalks and curb cuts that provide access to the town's schools and parks, to the Town Finance Committee led by Charlie Foskett and Alan Tosti who increased the sidewalk budget for the next few years to make sure critical sidewalks can be built and repaired, to the Board of Selectmen and Diane Mahon, in particular, for their ongoing advocacy and commitment, to John Bean of the DPW and his great staff for carrying out the engineering analysis and managing the work.

We want to thank, in particular, our highly energetic Town Engineer, Mike Rademacher, who came to FORFP meetings to discuss the project, and who worked with us so the scheduling of the repair could be coordinated with our Summer Calendar of Events.



Illustration by Eric Meister, Dallin student 2007

*On Friday, October 3rd, children from Brackett School painted watercolors inspired by Robbins Farm during an after school program organized by the Visual Arts Enrichment Committee, a project of the PTO also known as the "Art Squad".*

*FORFP welcomes submissions of artwork or poetry related to Robbins Farm Park for use in the newsletter and other projects. Send email to: [friends@robbinsfarmpark.org](mailto:friends@robbinsfarmpark.org)*

Take a close look at the sidewalk and you will see Mike's engineering efforts. He widened the lower end of the sidewalk to help with drainage and water runoff in heavy rains. It's quite an effort to get the funding, determine the costs, write the specifications, hire and supervise the contractors, deal with public communications, and get a superb result.

The seeds in the adjacent strip are starting to take root, which will help with erosion, and the FORFP Board is considering cluster plantings of wildflowers and daylilies along the sidewalk for beautification and to help prevent erosion. Enjoy our new sidewalk, and please support efforts to repair the other critical sidewalks in our town. After all, it takes a team effort to build a sidewalk.

## Community Outreach Events

By Christian Klein,  
Community Outreach Chair

Another summer has come and gone. This one felt shorter than any other in memory. It seems that not so long ago we had a large portion of town in the park for the Fourth of July. Now, the cooler weather has settled into our area, the leaves are contemplating a change of color, and Field Day is upon us.

The July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration was a fabulous event. Two years ago, the town stopped funding the annual Robbins Farm Independence Day party, and the Friends took it over. Through the generous support of our commercial sponsors -Premiere Roofing, NStar, and Leader Bank – we were able to host the John Penny Band and simulcast the fireworks for an eighth year. I would like to thank all our volunteers, Arlington Community Media, Arlington Emergency Services, and the Arlington Police for making this a great experience for all.

This may not have been the wettest summer on record, but the weather sure knew how to pick our week-ends. Movie Night and Boston Baseball Night were both washouts. In between, we participated in a sunny Arlington Town Day. Our booth, made more colorful by all the beautiful new shirts and bags we had to offer, was a great opportunity to see our neighbors, make new friends, and sign up new members.

Our annual event of the fall season will be Field Day on Saturday, October 18. Starting at 1:00pm, we will be offering a fun family afternoon of games, contests, scavenger hunts, face painting, and more! We will have snacks and warm drinks at our concession stand. We are looking for volunteers and participants – why not be both! Please send an email to:

[volunteers@robbinsfarmpark.org](mailto:volunteers@robbinsfarmpark.org)

Finally, help put the park to bed for the winter on Nov. 8. Rake leaves and plant bulbs with friends and neighbors. Thank you.

### FALL SCHEDULE of EVENTS:

Cut out and post on your refrigerator!



DATE: EVENT:

**Sat Oct 11 Astronomy Night**  
*starting after darkness*

Join Jeff Alexander at the Park. Come by Robbins Farm Park between 7pm and 9pm for a chance to look at the Moon up close. Bring your binoculars, a flashlight, and dress warmly! **Rain date, Oct. 12.**

**Sat Oct 18 Annual Field Day**  
*1 pm to 5 pm*

Games, contests, scavenger hunts, face painting, snacks, and more.

**Sat Nov 8 Fall Clean up Day and Bulb Planting**

*9 am to 12 pm* Bring rakes, bulb planters.

**Sat Nov 8 Tenth Anniversary Party at**

the Whittemore Robbins House, 8 to 11 p.m. See invitation - RSVP to attend - admission free, music, food, dance, cash bar.

## Sandy's Sightings . . . Observations from FORFP Board Member Sandy Carmichael

Robbins Farm Park has been our backyard for thirty-four years. How happy we were when, in 1974, we bought the house for sale on the aptly named Grandview Road in Arlington. We played tennis on the courts that once perched atop the new overlook area and watched neighborhood children take part in games and arts and crafts on summer mornings at the playground with Arlington Recreation counselors. No sign-ups were necessary, children just walked to the playground and joined the fun. The years flew by and our own children joined us in our love of the park. An easy walk to Brackett School, they departed through our back gate and turned around multiple times to wave goodbye on their way (until they realized that waving to Mom wasn't "cool"). Through the years they sledded, flew kites, led birthday party parades through the park, and loved to show off the world's longest and steepest slide to out-of-town friends. Now the kids are grown, and we find ourselves, as empty nesters, with more time to watch people of all ages enjoy the park. Instead of bird watching, I park watch. What an amazing variety of activities I have seen! My "sightings" have run the gamut from awe inspiring to shocking to just plain entertaining. I want to share some with you.

Aside from the baseball, soccer, volleyball, and flag football games, there have been Easter sunrise gatherings, touching memorial services with hundreds of attendees, the filming of a History Channel movie complete with nighttime torch lit battles, parasailers practicing take-offs and landings, a solitary bagpiper at sunset practicing pacing while playing his music, a fisherman practicing his fly casting, and just recently a group of jugglers honing their skills. A multitude of brides have been photographed at the overlook, but only one just a month ago decided to swoop down the slide in her white dress amid cameras flashing. Cross country bicyclists have timed their racing around the park to include their dismounting and jumping over hurdles with bikes on their backs. An uninhibited teen, on a dare from his buddies, ran the bases on the baseball diamond sans clothing on a sunny, warm, last day of school several years ago!

*... Continued on p. 6*



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*Robbins Farm Almanac . . . the newsletter of the  
Friends of Robbins Farm Park, Inc.*

email: [friends@robbinsfarmpark.org](mailto:friends@robbinsfarmpark.org)

website: [www.robbinsfarmpark.org](http://www.robbinsfarmpark.org)

## Sandy's Sightings. . .

Two of the most unusual sightings occurred this past summer. A group of skiers with a pick-up truck full of crushed ice set up a practice area where they skied a bit and then jumped onto a two foot high railing on which they balanced and slid sideways down the slope.

But the most unusual of all was the group of teens outfitted in taped together cardboard boxes fashioned into makeshift armor and helmets who battled for an hour or more with rolled cardboard swords until only one "soldier" was still intact. The park looked like a battlefield with cardboard pieces everywhere and the boys exhausted from the whimsical but very physical fight.

I'll keep my eyes peeled for more unusual happenings. Look for more of "Sandy's Sightings" in upcoming issues of our newsletter.

*Robbins Farm Almanac is a biannual newsletter published by the Friends of Robbins Farm Park. It is also posted on our website in color. We welcome and encourage your suggestions for articles. Please write or email to the attention of the editor. If you would like to become a member, write or email the membership secretary at [friends@robbinsfarmpark.org](mailto:friends@robbinsfarmpark.org)*

### Officers 2007-2008

*Anthony Vogel, President  
Judy Leich, Vice-President; editor  
Roly Chaput, Treasurer  
Oakes Plimpton & Sandy Carmichael,  
Co-Clerks/Recording Secretaries  
Jim Thompson, Membership Sec'y.  
Oakes Plimpton, Founder/Historian*

*The Friends of Robbins Farm Park, Inc. is a community organization formed to promote the beautification, restoration, improvement and maintenance of Robbins Farm Park in Arlington Heights, Massachusetts.*

*FORFP is a charitable, not-for-profit 501-C-3 corporation. Donations are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.*

*We sponsor and promote cultural, educational, recreational and other community activities throughout the year. We invite active membership in the organization and seek to represent the Robbins Farm Park community.*

*Monthly meetings of the Friends of Robbins Farm Park are typically held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm at the Jefferson-Cutter House in Arlington Center. Anyone may attend. Check the web site as occasionally the meeting place changes.*

*Don't forget to renew your membership to keep receiving the Almanac. Our spring issue contains the Summer Events Calendar.*