



VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD
BERGEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY
PLANNING BOARD & HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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September 4, 2009

Village Council
Village of Ridgewood
131 North Maple Avenue
Ridgewood, NJ 07450

Re: Graydon Park

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

One of the strengths of the Village of Ridgewood is its heritage. Those generations-old buildings in our central business district and stately houses in our neighborhoods are more than physical leftovers of a bygone era. Today, their beauty, elegance, and architectural styles combine to create the charm that makes Ridgewood so unique to residents and visitors alike. Thanks to thoughtful property owners, the guidance of the Historic Preservation Commission, and the leadership of the Village Council, the past wonderfully lives on in the present as we hold onto what we inherited from those who went before us.

Landscapes are no different than buildings in terms of heritage and historic preservation. Think of the great landscapes of Frederick Law Olmstead, who created New York's Central Park and Branch Brook Park in Newark, both of which still retain their original design for all to enjoy today. Graydon Pool is similar. To illustrate, we offer: 1) a brief history of its origin; 2) why it holds historical significance to this community; and 3) our suggestion about how to move forward.

Graydon Pool was the creation of many generations of politicians and citizens of Ridgewood over the past 99 years. It was established in 1910 with a donation of land (now the parking lot) by Samuel Graydon (1852-1926). A modest man, he stayed away from the dedication and rejected suggestions to have the park named after him. Called Linwood Park instead, it was Ridgewood's first park. In July 1918, Mr. Graydon dammed the Ho-Ho-Kus Brook and created the first swimming pond. This was done on an ad-hoc basis for a number of years. In 1925, Graydon donated that pool area and surrounding park to the Village. A year later, contractors excavated this area, removing about 12,000 cubic yards of soil to create a skating pond. In 1931, the skating pond was used for swimming and briefly called Linwood Pool.

On Sunday, November 8, 1931, Linwood Park was renamed Graydon Park, and in celebration of Armistice Day, 14 white ash trees were planted by the Shade Tree Commission along the south side of Graydon Park in honor of Ridgewood's soldiers killed in World War I. Each tree had a bronze plaque placed in concrete at its base with the name of the deceased soldier to whom it was solemnly

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dedicated. Also, along the north side of the Graydon Park, trees (probably Norway Maples) were planted by the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, the Exchange Club, each Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop, the Columbus Cadets and the Junior Sons and Daughters of the Revolution. These were planted as living memorials to George Washington as part of the American Tree Association's nation-wide program to plant 10 million trees as living memorials to the "Father of His Country."

A news article in the *Ridgewood Herald* on October 23, 1931, stated, "Graydon Park promises not only to be a place of great beauty, but of *special significance to Ridgewood and future generations. The trees for the dead, each of which will bear the name of the fallen soldier, will tell its own story*" [emphasis added]. Our point, therefore, is that the design, intent, and dedication of Graydon are what make it of historical importance. It is not simply a pool of water with sand and trees.

A total of 2,000 tags for the use of the pool were issued to adults at \$1 in 1933. In 1936, the WPA (think "stimulus") built the skaters' stone shelter (now the snack bar and offices), deepened the pool, and built the stone edging and tree island. These last improvements to the shape of the pond have not been substantially altered since.

Virtually everyone agrees that Graydon Pool and park and pond are beautiful. The artful curvature of the shore, the grass and sand defining the stone edges, the island and the intervening trees and landscaping all combine to make this a landscape of universal beauty. It has always been a park first and secondly a pool. While the pool is only used for three months, its beauty is year round.

Recent changes at Graydon carefully added a trellis and snack bar to the landscape, incorporating the three existing buildings. While the Snack bar (built in 1936) has been substantially altered, it would be worthy of preservation. Landscapes, like buildings, can be restored and improved without destroying their basic design, integrity, and authenticity.

The recent proposal to destroy more than half of this tranquil setting is contrary to the intent and historical importance of Graydon Park. We urge the Council to consider a non-intrusive design and instead improve upon Graydon's natural and historical landscape. We would be glad to participate in this effort.

Very truly yours,



Arthur Wrubel, Chairman
On behalf of the Village of Ridgewood
Historic Preservation Commission