

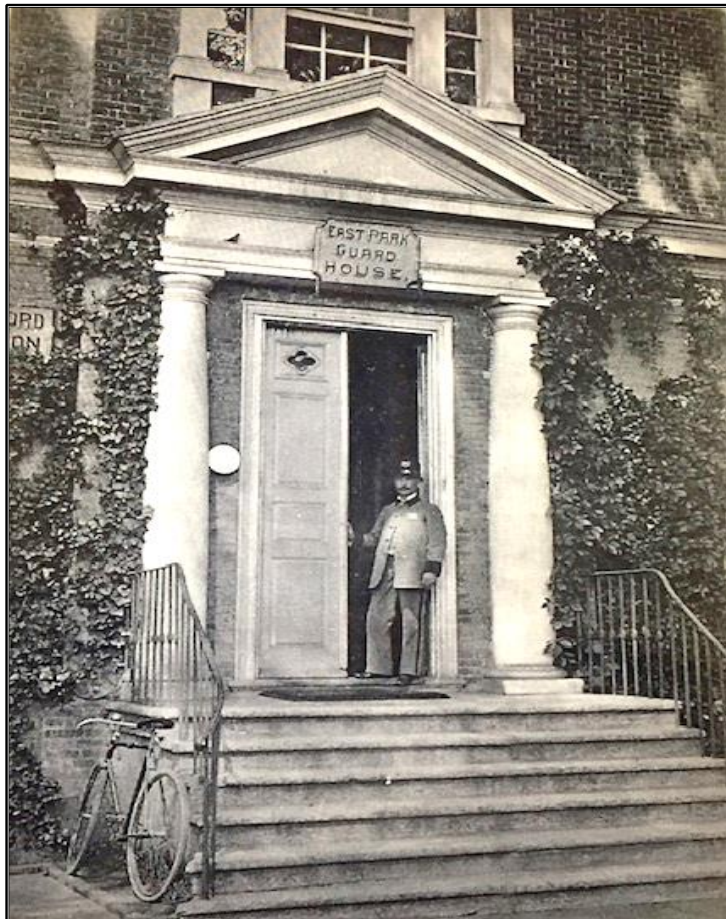
Protectors of the Park:

The Fairmount Park Guards at Woodford Mansion¹

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April 3, 2020

On April 16, 1868, the City of Philadelphia enacted legislation to create the Fairmount Park Guard, a force empowered “to keep good order within the Park limits.” The Guard was divided into a Mounted, Foot, and Harbor police, and given special uniforms and insignia.



A Park Guard member stands at Woodford's Front Entrance

The Park Guards were responsible for maintaining public order with the Park. In their early years of operation, they frequently found lost children, prevented attempted suicides, and responded to medical emergencies, in addition to their responsibilities for arresting vandals, breaking up fights, carrying out arrests, or responding to other incidents. But there are also some amusing episodes from the Park House Guards history that shine a window on what life in Fairmount Park was like in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

For example, an 1875 report from the Captain of the Guard notes that “three swimming females” had been arrested” that year. Other incidents this same year involved a man who was bitten by a bear and an incident of “unattended boys galloping around on ponies.”

¹ This article is based on research contained in Marion W. Rivinus, *The History of the Fairmount Park Guard 1868-1972*, (1976), and from Chapter 8 of June Avery Snyder and Martin P. Snyder, *The Story of the Naomi Wood Collection and Woodford Mansion*, 1981.

In 1877, the Guards reportedly were called upon to address trouble caused by persons lounging about in the public boathouse and the rowing clubs on Boathouse Row who had "indulged in stimulating liquid which induced many battles," as well as rowdy beer parties on the boats coming up the Schuylkill River from the Delaware.

Around this time, bicycling first began to become popular. The Guards soon reported on the arrest of a man scandalously discovered with "a woman sitting on his lap while riding a bicycle," something regarded "as improper behavior in a public Park."

During the winter, skating was very popular on the Schuylkill River and, in 1878, the Harbor Police rescued 38 men and 4 boys who had fallen through the ice.

In 1878, some notable incidents included the rescue of a woman who had fainted "from tight lacing" and the arrest of a man who fell out of a carriage "while sky-larking."

By the 1880s, several of the Park Mansions had been leased out as restaurants or beer gardens. Around this time, there were reports of large parties at the Belmont Mansion that lasted until dawn. A Guard officer reported that Historic Strawberry Mansion was attracting "very low people from Manayunk and all along Ridge Avenue," adding, "...I look upon this place as a badly kept beer garden with the addition of a degrading dance house."

Clearly, there was a need for a larger Park Guard presence in East Fairmount Park, and May 1887, Woodford became the East Park Guard House of the Fairmount Park Guards.

Just down the river from Woodford, Boathouse Row became subject to the scrutiny of the Guards, who reported that:

"Members of the Boat Clubs, after a heathy row, refreshed the inner man sometimes too enthusiastically and caused trouble. The guards were given the authority to enter the club houses and make arrests without warrants

while the Park Commission hopefully sent letters to the officers of the club."

During this period, some rules were adopted by the Fairmount Park Commission to govern activities in the Park that appear rather strange to us today. Some examples:

"No funerals are to pass through the Park. No persons shall take ice from the Schuylkill River within the Park without the license of the said Commission first had, upon such terms as they may think proper. No cattle, horses, sheep or hogs shall be driven over any bridge across the River Schuylkill within Fairmount Park except Girard Avenue Bridge, nor over that bridge between the hours of 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. nor in the remaining hours in greater numbers than ten cattle or horses, or twenty sheep or hogs at any time."

"Blowing of horns, playing of musical instruments of any kind or having musical instruments, shades or awnings attached in any way to a bicycle or tricycle is forbidden."

By 1897 and 1898, Park regulations were adopted which banned driving automobiles in the park. A man named Jules Junker reportedly was the first person to operate an automobile in the Park. He was promptly arrested by the Park Guards and brought to Woodford and fined for the infraction. By 1899, the rules were changed and motor vehicles were now allowed within the Park — thought they were limited to a seven miles per hour speed limit. The Park Guards vigorously enforced these speed limits.

By the early 20th century, there was a "flying squadron" of Park Police who patrolled by bicycles through the Park. Legend has it that their large sweeping mustaches were almost as wide as the handlebars on their bicycles. By 1912, Woodford became the headquarters of the Park Guard, replacing Sedgely, and Woodford also became the headquarters of its traffic court.

Woodford served as Park Guard Headquarters for the sixteen years. In 1927, the Naomi Wood

Trust and the Fairmount Park Commission reached an agreement wherein the Trust would repair and occupy the Mansion and open it up to the public to display the Trust's collections. The Trust worked to restore the Mansion and prepare it for use as a Museum from 1928-30, and Woodford then opened to the public for tours beginning in April 1930.

By 1930, it is reported that "the Guard subquarters was moved from Woodford Stables to the little tenant house nearby while the northernmost outbuilding at Mount Pleasant was repaired and used for a stable for the horses." At some later date, the Park Guards left this house, which is now used as the residence for some of Woodford's caretakers.

The Park Guards would exist for another 44 years, until 1972 when they were absorbed into the Philadelphia Police Department.