Trenton Update

✓ The Office of New Jersey Heritage (ONJH) will be soliciting matching grant applications only from Certified Local Governments (CLGs). Although Federal funding has increased slightly, a reduction in state funds has resulted in a smaller amount of overall grant funds available. In a notice announcing ONJH’s Survey and Planning Grants, Nancy L. Zerbe, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, regrets the need to eliminate the funding round for governments and private non-profit organizations, but the National Historic Preservation Act’s 1980 Amendments require that CLGs receive funding priority. OnJH will use $25,000 of this year’s available grant funds to complete a two-year matching grant to Warren County for a comprehensive survey. In past years, ONJH has granted substantial amounts to governments and private non-profit organizations, and they hope to reinstate this grant round in future years, if increased state funding is available.

✓ Main Street New Jersey is off to a running start under the leadership of state coordinator Barbara Swanda. An attractive quarterly newsletter is now available, free of charge. If you would like to be on the mailing list, write Main Street New Jersey, ONJH, CN 404, Trenton 08625-0404; (609) 292-2023. The first issue includes a profile of Bridgeton, one of the first four pilot communities in the state. Future issues will include profiles of the other three pilot communities: Englewood, Little Falls, and West Orange. A free Main Street poster featuring a historic photo of Trenton’s commercial district is also available on request.

✓ Judith A. Yaskin, who has been appointed Commissioner of Environmental Protection by Governor Florio, will be New Jersey’s new State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Ms. Yaskin, of Lawrenceville, served as a Superior Court Judge, presiding over Family Court, before joining DEP. She has had an extensive legal background in the state, serving as an Assistant Public Advocate, a Deputy Attorney General, and as First Assistant Attorney General. Ms. Yaskin is a member of both the New Jersey and the Camden County Bar Associations, and of the Camden County Regional Legal Services. Serving as New Jersey’s SHPO has been one of the traditional responsibilities of the DEP Commissioner since the Office of New Jersey Heritage (ONJH) is administered by DEP.

---

Reviving Newark's Branch Brook Park

In 1867, the noted landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux submitted a report to the Park Commissioners of Newark that recommended Concource Hill, with its sweeping views of both the city and of Manhattan in the distance, as the best site for a public park. The State Legislature deliberated nearly 30 years before granting the necessary approval for an urban park in Newark, but in 1895, the Essex County Park Commission was created, and Concource Hill was included in the land acquired for Branch Brook Park, the first county park in the United States.

The Essex County Park System now includes more than 6,000 acres of land and waterways. Since 1987, the County has spent $7.8 million of Essex County Capital funds and $1 million of Green Acres money on restoration projects including Verona Park's Stone Arch Bridge, Weequahic Park’s lake, Eagle Rock Reservation’s paths and roadways, and Orange Park’s pond.

The restoration of Branch Brook Park, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981, has been underway for several years. The installation of Belgian block curbing throughout the park’s roadways prevents cars from parking on, and seriously damaging, the grass. Waterways have recently been cleaned. In response to demands from neighborhood residents, recreational playing fields have been placed in the park, but an effort has been made by the county to group these facilities to limit their intrusion throughout the park.

Efforts to restore the Concource Hill section of the park began in 1988 when County Executive Nicholas R. Amato asked Kathleen Galop to research and prepare a restoration plan which would embody the original Olmsted and Vaux plans. Ms. Galop grew up in a neighborhood near the park and was among a group of residents distressed when part of the lake was filled to create a parking lot. In order to protect the park from further unwarranted changes, she prepared a National Register nomination for Branch Brook Park.

Ms. Galop, who has since been appointed Essex County’s first Historic Preservation Officer with responsibilities for coordinating all preservation projects in the County, and landscape architect Claudia Thornton have designed a plan which will restore the Concource Hill area. The oval concourse, designed originally for parking carriages, will be redesigned for parking cars, with original staircases, terraces, and formal plantings of the Olmsted and Vaux plan, including the arbors and perimeter fences, rebuilt. The restorations continued on page 5
During June, Preservation New Jersey will present three half-day programs focusing on local preservation issues. Historic Preservation: A Natural Resource for Municipal Government will include a workshop addressing the roles and responsibilities of municipal historic preservation commissions and a meeting exploring the challenges and opportunities presented to municipal government by local, state and federal preservation laws.

A workshop on the administrative and technical aspects of local preservation will be presented in Evesham Township (Burlington County) on June 2 and repeated in Paterson (Passaic County) on June 9. This program will include six sessions tailored for individuals with a broad range of local preservation experience and interests. An "Introductory" Track will include discussions of the legal authority for local preservation regulation, a review of the often-confusing language associated with surveys and National Register nominations, and an introduction to the design review process. Concurrent sessions in an "Experienced" Track will provide the opportunity for participants to analyze and understand their local preservation ordinances, to learn techniques for increasing the effectiveness of commission meetings and to refine design review skills.

On June 15, Lawrenceville School (Mercer County) will be the site of a program which will explore the role historic preservation regulation plays in local government. A panel made up of elected and appointed officials (mayor/councilperson, planning and zoning board members, municipal attorney, code official, planner and engineer) from municipalities around New Jersey will discuss "Historic Preservation and the Municipal Agenda: Fit or Misfit?"

The second part of the June 15th program, "Federal and State Laws Protecting Historic Resources: Tools for Local Preservation", will focus on the National and State Register laws and their place in municipal preservation plans. Speakers from the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., and the Office of New Jersey Heritage will be joined by panelists from New Jersey municipalities in a discussion of the opportunities for local participation in the Section 106 and State Register review processes.

Hosts for the programs are the Evesham Township Historic Preservation Commission, the Paterson Historic Preservation Commission and the Lawrence Township Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. Co-sponsors are the Office of New Jersey Heritage, New Jersey Historic Sites Council, New Jersey Federation of Planning Officials, and the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Branch Brook Park
continued from page 4

tion of Concourse Hill is expected to cost $1 million with work to be done by both outside contractors and skilled park personnel.

The restoration of Concourse Hill represents a critical element in preserving the integrity of Branch Brook Park, but it also serves as a focus for neighborhood revitalization in the city of Newark. Concourse Hill is faced by two other registered properties, the magnificent, and recently restored, Sacred Heart Cathedral and the Parks Administration Building, which is in dire need of restoration to protect its lovely tiled facades. When completed, Concourse Hill will be a magnet for the park's million annual visitors, many of whom come to view the display of cherry blossoms each spring.

Newark's children are packed into the sandbox at Branch Brook Park, in this turn of the century photograph. Photo courtesy of Essex County Department of Parks.