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# MUDDY RIVER

The Muddy River is a part of a system of brooks and ponds that run through sections of Boston's Emerald Necklace into the Charles River. Flowing north, it connects Jamaica Pond, Willow Pond, and finally Leverett Pond. At this point it is a narrow channel that flows between Brookline and Boston eventually passing through the Back Bay Fens towards the Charles River. Before Olmsted, the river was a narrow, winding, and tidal and it was the tide that helped keep the stream relatively clean. By 1800 though, the pressures of an increasing population were changing the Muddy River from an inoffensive little stream into a source of disease, and its surroundings from a pleasant valley into a potential slum. Roads, railroad tracks and a tidal basin (built to generate power) all helped to interfere with the natural tidal action that twice a day, flushed the area out. The filling of the Back Bay at mid-century also helped to make sure that the 100 acres of marshland the river flowed through would be "the filthiest marsh and mud flats to be found anywhere in the State of Massachusetts" unless a pollution solution was found.

Frederick Law Olmsted took the challenge of cleaning the Muddy River and redesigning it starting at the Back Bay Fens and continuing up to Jamaica Pond. He successfully cleaned out the dirty water and did away with the horrifying and putrid smell. Bridges played a critical role in his design. Not wanting to stop the flow of people across the city, multiple bridges were provided. Some were designed by Olmsted firm members, others by local architects including H.H. Richardson, and along this stretch of the Muddy River his successor firm, Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. The Longwood Avenue Bridge is the largest of these bridges.

Since the fall of 1996, the Muddy River has flooded three times, damaging local neighborhoods. This flooding called the city and state into action with the assistance of the Army Corps of Engineers. The Muddy River Restoration Project aims to improve flood control, water quality, wildlife habitat, and historic landscape treatments. The project is currently focusing on flood control and water quality to both recover from past damage and prevent future damage, the Army Corps of Engineers is leading this part of the project.

How would Boston be now without the current Muddy River Restoration and without Olmsted's earlier Improvement Project?

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