

Congress Park

The Heart of the City

Experience the legend and lore of one of America's earliest resort destinations while strolling through this beautifully restored and landscaped oasis. Guided tours are available. Call 518-587-3241 for details.

The land south of the park's current entryway was mostly swamp in 1792, when New Hampshire Congressman John Gilman discovered the mineral spring later named in his honor. In 1802, Congress Spring was tubed for easier access by civic leader and visionary Gideon Putnam.

Dr. John Clarke purchased Congress Spring and the surrounding land in 1822. He drained the area, laid out pathways, built pavilions over the Congress and Columbian Springs and initiated concerts that were very popular with visitors. He defined the eastern rim of the park by laying out Circular Street, where he built his impressive Greek Revival home overlooking his park. He also built a bottling plant on land to the north of the park's current entrance. Clarke sold bottled Congress Water around the world, making it the most famous of Saratoga's mineral waters.



Congress Spring, c. 1826

In 1876, Frederick Law Olmsted, the renowned landscape architect, was hired for his expertise with natural design. As a result, dramatic views were accented with shrubs, flowers and trees. Visitors strolled through dense growths of trees and shrubs, arranged to mimic a woodland effect. Other plantings were more formal, with clipped hedges and pruned trees. Many of these early features have been retained, with sections of the current park displaying either natural or stylized areas. There are now over 45 species of trees, many of which are labeled with small metal plaques.



Entrance to Park late 1800's Entrance

The Park Expands

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Congress Park was privately owned. By 1911, two additional parcels had been purchased by the village. Now almost twice its original size,

the 32-acre park, comprised of three sections, is owned and maintained by the City of Saratoga Springs.

Southwest Section

In 1909, legislation was enacted to allow the village of Saratoga to purchase Congress Spring and the original park area from the State Reservation. The area included the land south of the current entrance road, formerly East Congress Street. When the transaction was completed in 1911, new landscaping plans included a second pond to be located at the south end of the park.



Congress Spring, c. 1913

Northeast Section

In 1907 widespread state gambling reforms led to the demise of the high stakes gambling originally brought to the park by John Morrissey's Clubhouse, followed by Richard Canfield's Casino. With the stringent reforms in place, Mr. Canfield was unable to find a buyer for several years. In 1911, the Casino and grounds, including the elaborate Italian Gardens, were purchased by the Town of Saratoga Springs for \$150,000.

Northwest Sector

In 1913, the once great Congress Hall Hotel, which bordered Broadway opposite the current Visitor Center, was acquired for back taxes. The hotel and other structures, including Hamilton Spring and the Congress Spring bottling plant, were razed by the village in 1913. The section of Putnam Street that once intersected East Congress Street, was obliterated. Landscape engineer Charles Leavitt was retained to design a master plan for this new section of the park. In the 20th century, anti-gambling legislation, two World Wars and the Depression brought hard times to Saratoga Springs.



The Canfield Casino in the early 1900's

Empty storefronts were plentiful on Broadway and many fine mansions in the city lost their luster; some were demolished. Congress Park was neglected and fell into disrepair. Formerly appealing vistas were overgrown. Statues were stolen or vandalized. It ceased to be a place of beauty. As a final indignity, Congress Spring, a City treasure, was no longer flowing, having been covered with rubble as the coup de grace in a dispute between New York State and the village in the early 1900s.

In 1976, work was initiated by the City's Department of Public Works to upgrade the park and restore it to its original grandeur. A series of City-funded projects, including reproductions of the original pavilions over the Congress and Columbian Springs, reconstruction of the Italian Gardens, a carefully detailed rehabilitation of the circular reservoir, and extensive, painstakingly maintained landscaping have added greatly to the park's appeal. Annually the park is the setting for Art in the Park, sponsored by the Saratoga County Arts Council, various craft shows and the Congress Park Concert Series coordinated by the Saratoga Springs Heritage Area Visitor Center. It is also popular with wedding parties who appreciate the combination of the elegant Casino ballroom and parlor and the dramatic outdoor photo opportunities.

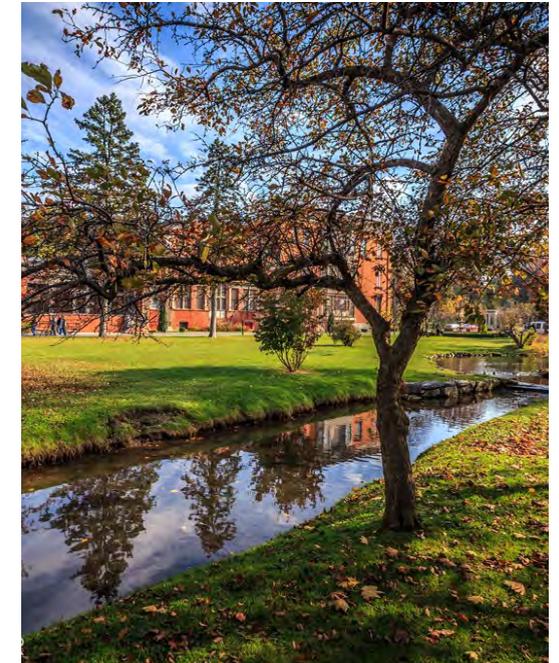
Congress Park is once again a vibrant gem in the crown of the city, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

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518.587.3241
www.saratogaspringsvisitorcenter.com

SARATOGA SPRINGS SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Historic Congress Park



*A lush green gem in the crown
of a sparkling city,
beloved by residents and visitors*

1. The Visitor Center

Start your tour here. Built in 1915 by architects Peabody and Ludlow, the building was commissioned by the Hudson Valley Railroad to construct “the most beautiful trolley station in the Northeast”. When the trolley system ended in the 1940’s, The NY State Reservation assumed ownership and turned the building into a “drink hall” where the Saratoga mineral waters could be enjoyed. In 1986, the site was opened as a Visitor Center. In operation year-round, it offers museum quality exhibits of the city’s history, and a wealth of local and regional information to residents and visitors alike.

2. Columbian Spring

Discovered by Gideon Putnam in 1806, this mineral spring is no longer active. Fresh municipal drinking water flows from a fountain beneath the Federal style domed pavilion.

3. Congress Spring

Named in honor of John Gilman, congressman from New Hampshire who discovered it in 1792, it was tubed in 1802 for improved access by Gideon Putnam. Bottled and sold throughout America and Europe by John Clarke, it was one of Saratoga’s best-known mineral waters. Re-tubed in 1976, the spring is covered by a gracious Greek Revival pavilion, similar to the structure built by Clarke in 1826.

4. Cast Iron Vases

Thought to have been the work of 19th Century Danish sculptor Albert Thorvaldsen, their origin is now under debate. Popularly known as “Day and Night,” they are representative of Clarke’s early 19th Century embellishments to the park.

5. Deer Park Spring

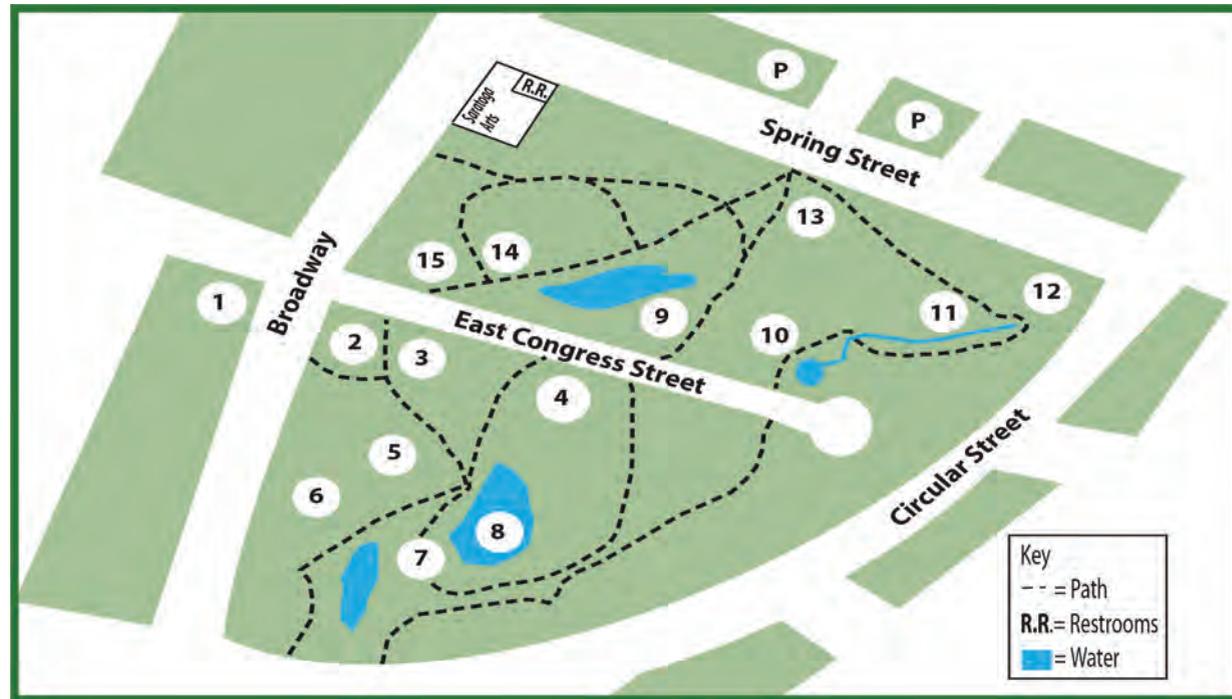
This diminutive cast iron fountain, c.1880, dispenses a derivative of Congress Spring water. It was named for its proximity to the former Deer Lodge, a popular 19th Century attraction housing tame deer.



Deer Park Spring, c. 1870

6. Katrina Trask Memorial Stairway

Crafted of her favorite pink granite from the Adirondacks, it was designed by the firm of Ludlow and Peabody and dedicated in 1922. Prominent Saratoga residents, Spencer and Katrina Trask were great patrons of the arts as well as



benefactors to the town. Their home, Yaddo, was bequeathed by Katrina as a permanent home for artists to have as a place to create. Today, Yaddo remains one of the most prestigious artist retreats in the country.

7. The Reservoir

Lined with brick, this 20-ft. diameter reservoir was dug in 1820. Restoration began with the removal of a ton of ashes, dirt and debris. The iron fencing and 300-pound cast iron urns are accurate reproductions of the originals. Chilled water from underground sources once again fills the reservoir, providing an ideal habitat for several large trout. Restoration was completed in 2003, adding another lovely point of interest to the park.

8. The War Memorial

Built in 1932 on the site of the old Victorian bandstand, in honor of veterans from WWI. Bricks, engraved with names and dates of service, pave the Walk of Honor in front of the memorial. On Veteran’s Day, 2007, a Veterans War Memorial was dedicated featuring flags from all six branches of the United States Armed Forces.

9. The Morrissey Fountain

Gambling was never legal in the city, but legend has it that a small red ball was floated atop the fountain when gambling was in session at the Casino so the local police would not raid.

10. The Casino

In 1870, prize fighter, former Congressman, and gambling entrepreneur John Morrissey built ‘The Clubhouse,’ a gaming house for men. Richard Canfield acquired the building and grounds in 1894 and it became known as Canfield’s Casino. He initiated improvements including the addition of a dining room with vaulted ceiling and stained-glass inserts, and a fish pond (recently restored) from which, it was said, diners at the Casino could select their own fish for cooking. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building is now home to the Saratoga Springs History Museum (518-584-6920) and the extensive photographic archives of the Bolster Collection. The elegant parlor and ballroom can be rented from the city for public or private events.

11. Italian Gardens

Designed for Casino owner Richard Canfield in 1902. The reflecting pool, with Tritons ‘Spit and Spat,’ remains a focal point. In 2007, reproductions of the original statues of Pan and the Meneads were placed around the restored sundial.

12. The Devil’s Chair

Set in the early 1800s as the cornerstone for an Episcopal church, it was later abandoned. Referred to as the Devil’s Chair, owing to its proximity to ‘the gambling devil’ Canfield’s garden.

13. The Congress Park Carousel

Carved by Marcus Charles Illions, this restored carousel was moved from its original location on Saratoga Lake and opened in Congress Park in 2002. It features 28 horses and plays traditional calliope and organ tunes. The operating system is computerized. It is the only two-row Illions carousel still in working order. Hours of operation vary according to season and weather; special arrangements can be made for parties, weddings and other private functions.



14. The Spirit of Life

Commissioned by Katrina Trask and Designed by Daniel Chester French, (sculptor of The Minuteman in Concord, MA, and the Lincoln Monument in Washington, D.C.) this graceful bronze statue was dedicated in 1914 in memory of civic leader Spencer Trask. Henry Bacon designed the setting.



15. The Civil War Monument

Dedicated in 1875 to honor the men from Saratoga Springs who volunteered for the 77th NY Infantry. Known as the Bemis Heights Regiment, it left Saratoga for Washington D.C. on Thanksgiving Day in 1861. Originally located on the street near the entrance to Congress Park, increased automobile traffic warranted its relocation to the park in 1921. It is the only regimental monument not located on a battlefield.

