

# Samuel H. Baynard - Patron of North Brandywine Park

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While William Poole Bancroft is often called the father of the Wilmington park system, Brandywine Park had a special patron in Samuel H. Baynard, entrepreneur, member of the Wilmington Board of Park Commissioners from 1900 until 1925, and Board president from 1922 to 1925. He took particular interest in North Brandywine Park, giving generously of his time and wealth to improve the area along Eighteenth Street.

Born in 1851, Baynard was a watchmaker by training and ran a jewelry shop at Fifth and Market Streets. His business involvement eventually included the presidency of two banking institutions, Brandywine Trust and Savings Bank and Northside Building and Loan, and the directorship of Perpetual Savings and Loan.

In 1891, he and several other Wilmington entrepreneurs--including William Poole Bancroft--formed the North Side Improvement Company to develop land on either side of The Boulevard (later Baynard Boulevard), subdivided property into building lots, and called the neighborhood Washington heights--it was adjacent to Washington Street and was high above the Brandywine. By 1898, the Baynard family was living in Washington Heights at 309 West Eighteenth Street.

Baynard had long been interested in the need for city parks; in 1886 he led the effort to pass City Council legislation enabling the initial purchase of land for Brandywine Park. In 1900, he joined the Board of Park Commissioners, beginning twenty-five years of service to the improvement of Wilmington's parks. He personally underwrote much of the cost of improving the area now called Baynard Stadium. In 1903, Baynard obtained permission to sink a well at the edge of the woods in North Brandywine Park and to install a pump so that park users had access to a refreshing drink. In 1907, he concerned himself with grading and surfacing a road in the park and with improving footpaths there.

In 1912, the city had graded Eighteenth Street between Van Buren and Franklin Streets and had left a bank of dirt some twelve feet high along the park, effectively obscuring any view of the park for two blocks. Baynard paid to have the top of the mound graded down to a "suitable level," moving the material to a low area west of Franklin, thus creating the foundation for what became the Baynard Athletic Grounds. The road work made it necessary to extend the Franklin Street sewer and, when no funds were available to pay that expense, Baynard under-

wrote the sewer extension as well. The earth moving project took over a year to complete and, in the end, involved relocating 40,000 cubic yards of earth. But an area whose contours had allowed for only one baseball diamond had been reconfigured so that it would accommodate three baseball diamonds and one football field. Three years later, Baynard offered to pay for further grading along Eighteenth Street, but equipment problems and then the intervention of World War I delayed completion of the work. In 1920 when the road work was finished, Samuel Baynard had paid some \$27,000 to improve North Brandywine Park and the streets adjacent to it.

By 1921, a quarter-mile cinder track had been added to the sports complex and a stone and concrete grandstand built. Baynard also purchased five cottages adjacent to the sports area and used the buildings to provide storage for sports equipment and dressing rooms with showers for the athletes. On 24 June 1922, the Baynard Athletic Grounds were officially opened with "suitable exercised by an Athletic and Gymnastic" tournament.

Samuel Baynard was also a primary participant in the formation of the Zoo in Brandywine Park. In 1904, he paid to have the north fish pond fenced to create a home for "a number of varieties of ducks and geese." That same year, through the Washington Heights Association, he was instrumental in having two acres of park land fenced as an enclosure for two Virginia deer. The following year, the Washington Heights Association changed its name to the Wilmington Free Zoological Association and devoted itself to the establishment and stewardship of the zoo. Over the years, Baynard continued to support work at the Zoo by his monetary contributions and, in 1922, by his gift of two deer.

When Samuel Baynard joined the Park Commission in 1900, Wilmington's parks totaled 260 acres; at the time of his death in 1925, there were 703 acres of park land. In 1900, there was one acre of city park for every 284 residents; in 1925, the ratio had changed dramatically, with one acre of park for every 154 Wilmingtonians. Looking back over his tenure on the Board, it is easy to see why he was honored by the other Park Commissioners for his energy, enthusiasm, and generosity. Park users today continue to benefit from his many and varied gifts.