



# The Library Branch

Number 17

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## & Recreation:

*come see what lies  
beyond the ampersand*

Our department's official title is City of New York/ Parks & Recreation. Once commonly abbreviated as DPR, nowadays we tend to just say Parks. But recreation is still a major partner in our firm. Aside from providing the public with wonderful parks, we also provide athletic and educational programming to thousands of children in dozens of indoor recreation centers and outdoor recreation areas citywide.

On Wednesday, March 19, Emily Brennan, the Director of Central Recreation, will discuss our various programs and show Park videographer Eric Paul Freidenberg's videos of some of our most popular programs. Even if you currently work for Parks, chances are you'll learn something new by attending this screening.

March 19 @ 1p.m. in the Arsenal Gallery. RSVP at 212-360-8240 or [Library@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Library@parks.nyc.gov)

## Parks Library Book Review



Winfield Memorial 1969

### *Novelli: A Forgotten Sculptor*

By Josephine Murphy

Published by Branden Books, this small, paperback volume presents an engaging history of a man, his art and the world that formed him. As an Italian immigrant boy growing up on Mulberry Street, James Novelli's artistic skill manifested itself in chalk drawings he did on the sidewalk in front of his house. When Novelli was 18, a philanthropist discovered his work and paid much of the cost to send him to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

As the book's narrative unfolds, the author explains many of Novelli's commissions, and in addition to analyzing the art, Murphy describes the intricate process of getting public art approved, paid for and constructed. Novelli's New York City Parks pieces include The Clason Point War Memorial in the Bronx, and the *Corona Heights and Winfield Memorials* in Queens. (A complete history of these and all Parks monuments can be read on our web site at [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks))

Murphy also explains that at the turn of the 20th century sculpting was considered a craft rather than an art. This attitude resulted in Novelli never getting the public recognition his work deserved, guaranteeing his later obscurity.

By the time of the Great Depression, Novelli's sad story turns to tragedy. For one, modernist sculpture began to supplant the allegorical sculpture that had thrived in the 19th century. Furthermore, the economic crunch that hit the nation was especially hard on artisans and other providers of "non-essential" goods and services. Although he held a few jobs with the WPA, including a stint on the Parks Monuments crew (where he even worked on his own piece in Brooklyn's Saratoga Park – later stolen), he went without work for long periods of time. Ultimately, like so many other fathers and husbands who felt powerless to provide for their families during the Depression, Novelli took his life in 1940.

This book contains 62 illustrations showing Novelli's extant works from across the country, works that have been destroyed or stolen since their original installation and many clay studies that were never realized in a more permanent medium. The book is a full and fitting testament to the life of a man who made art for the public, but who the public never knew.

## THIS MONTH IN PARKS

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

John S. Mattera, Librarian

[www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks)

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- 1637 March 4: Pieter Claesen Wyckoff arrived from Holland as an indentured servant. His life story stands as one of the earliest examples of the American dream. After completing his six years of labor at Rensselaerswyck (near present-day Albany) Claesen returned to New Amsterdam where he eventually became superintendent on Peter Stuyvesant's farm. By 1652 Claesen had built his home in New Amersfoort (Flatlands, Brooklyn) on a plot of land he acquired from his boss, Stuyvesant. Claesen became the wealthiest man in town and served as Magistrate of New Amersfoort from 1655 to 1665. When the British took possession of the colony in 1664 all Dutchmen had to take surnames. Wyckoff means town magistrate. The Wyckoff family prospered, and they lived in the same house, although it was expanded several times, until 1901.
- 1811 March 22: Commissioners' Plan published. This pivotal document in New York City history relates to Parks more in what it omits than what it presents. The surveyors' rigid plan mapped over all pre-existing roads north of 14th Street, including Broadway. Furthermore, it would probably shock the present-day observer to see that the 1811 plan made no allowance for Central Park. In fact, 42 years passed before the State Legislature authorized the creation of a massive park in Manhattan.
- 1900 March 24: Groundbreaking in City Hall Park for New York City's first electric subway. Like the grid system, subways are an essential part of the formula for modern New York. The massive system we now enjoy began with one, local line that ran on a combination of today's 4/5, Times Square Shuttle and 1/9 lines, from City Hall Station (now closed) north to Grand Central Terminal, over to Broadway and up to Harlem.
- 1947 March 21: The police respond to an anonymous call reporting the death of Homer Collyer, a former admiralty lawyer who had been blinded and paralyzed by a stroke and lived with his younger brother Langley, a concert pianist, in a brownstone on Fifth Avenue at 128th Street. The reclusive Collyer brothers made headlines after their deaths for their eccentric, junk-collecting lifestyle. Langley, Homer's caretaker, also booby-trapped their house to ward off thieves and curiosity seekers. When the police entered the house on March 21, they found Homer's body, but no trace of Langley. After several *weeks* of clearing out the house they discovered his body under a pile of suitcases, breadboxes and newspapers. Presumably, Langley was felled by one of his own traps, leaving his brother to die of neglect several days thereafter. The house-cleaning unearthed, among much other bric-à-brac, 14 grand pianos and the chassis of an automobile. Later that year the house was demolished and the site became a vacant lot. In 1998 the City acquired the long-vacant lot and turned it into Collyer Brothers Park.
- 1951 March 30: St. Mary's Recreation Center opened. The first in the new generation of community recreation centers envisioned by Commissioner Robert Moses, St. Mary's was designed by the architectural firm of Brown, Lawford, and Forbes and included an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, locker and shower rooms, as well as meeting rooms for classes and community programs. Commissioner Moses placed his new recreation centers in neighborhoods throughout the city that were experiencing high levels of juvenile delinquency.
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### *Silent Voices*: Paintings Inspired by the Textures of Nature



The artist, Charla, begins each of these abstract paintings by wrapping her canvas around a tree or boulder found in nature and rubbing the textures directly onto the canvas. Once back in the studio, the artist develops these preparatory sketches into subtly colored, abstract paintings.

In the finished works, nature is almost imperceptible. Soft, abstract forms painted in oil and acrylic seem vaguely reminiscent of a horizon line draped in fog, luminous light falling on water, or a rough stone viewed through a microscope. Charla's paintings may begin as texture portraits of specific natural elements—a New Hampshire birch tree or a sandstone boulder in New Mexico's Box Canyon—but her art captures the universal physical force and meditative power of nature.

Charla has exhibited at the June Kelly gallery and the National Academy of Design in New York. Other exhibitions include solo and group shows in Philadelphia, Chicago and Washington, DC. She holds degrees from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and Pratt Institute in New York.

the Arsenal Gallery: from March 4 through April 3, 2003