

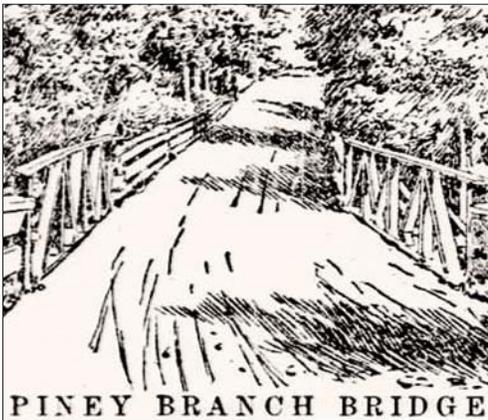
Daniels Road (Oregon Avenue) in 1926

# R is for Roads

From Rock Creek Road to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, traffic has traveled on roads to Rock Creek valley over parts of four centuries.

Much of what we now call Washington was given the name Rock Creek Hundred back in 1715. The name of the creek was then applied to a parish and a church — and eventually to a road that led to the church and continued to the upper Rock Creek valley. This first route north into the wilderness endures on modern maps as Columbia Road, Rock Creek Church Road and Blair Road — and St. Paul's Rock Creek Church still stands on land donated in 1719.

Another early road proceeded west from the church to cross Rock Creek at the shallowest point in the upper valley. Few remnants remain of Milkhouse Ford Road — mainly the park trail west from the ford and three city blocks called Rock Creek Ford Road.



## Road System of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The mid-1800s saw the first road out of the city to pass through what would become Rock Creek Park: a narrow and hilly country way called Piney Branch Road (or, sometimes, 14th Street Road). The route descended to Piney Branch creek from Mount Pleasant. Then — before climbing steeply through the present-day Crestwood neighborhood — it crossed the stream over a rickety bridge (left) just west of where the 16th Street “Tiger” Bridge finally succeeded in spanning Piney Branch valley in the early 20th century. Piney Branch Road was an alternative to 7th Street Road (today's Georgia Avenue, which earlier had been a turnpike and a “plank road” lined with hemlock boards).

Other roads built before the Civil War served the valley's mills and farms: Peirce's Mill Road (1831), Klinge Ford Road (1831) and Linnean Hill Road were laid out privately to provide access to Peirce family holdings — and have been largely replaced by Tilden Street, Klinge Road and Park Road. Adams Mill Road and Blagden's Mill Road (1847) served mills down and upstream. Broad Branch Road (1839) followed a Rock Creek tributary and, like Peirce's Mill Road, led to the road to Frederick (now Wisconsin Avenue).

Other roads built before Rock Creek Park was founded bore the names of property owners Swart, Daniels and Moreland (now 27th Street, Oregon and Utah Avenues respectively). By 1864, the old roads were brought into the DC system and Military Road was constructed to connect the forts defending the capital.

## New Park, New Roads

The 1890 law establishing Rock Creek Park instructed the Army Corps of Engineers to “lay out and prepare roadways.” From 1897 to 1900 the Corps' Capt. Lansing Beach built the road that would be named in his

honor: Beach Drive. With Congress slow to approve appropriations, Beach began by using prison labor and letting park tenants provide work in place of rent.

By the end of the 1920s, the park's transportation system had expanded to include roads named after other Army engineers (Bingham, Grant, Morrow, Sherrill) and park leaders (Ross, Joyce). Wise Road took its name from a nearby dairy farm. Glover Road honors Charles Glover, the businessman who led the push to create the park.

Piney Branch Parkway was authorized in 1907, but not built until the mid-1930s when funding and workers became available through the New Deal. The road was intended to honor another Corps engineer, but the name Biddle Parkway never caught on.

A slow trickle of appropriations also delayed construction of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Approved in 1913, it wasn't completed until 1936. By that time, the route designed to bring people into parkland was viewed more as a commuter highway to bring workers into the city. The parkway became one-way during rush hours in 1937.

### Expressway to controversy

Some officials proposed extending the parkway up Rock Creek as an expressway. Heated debate delayed construction of a tunnel leading north from the parkway that would circumvent two fords near the zoo. Though no superhighway was ever approved, the tunnel didn't open until 1966 (dedication ceremony, left).



The issues raised presaged continuing controversies over the roads of Rock Creek Park. What is the proper balance between the needs of drivers and the protection of the park's environment and peaceful setting — also taking into account appeals for better bicycle access? Olmsted Brothers anticipated

the dilemma in the 1918 plan for Rock Creek Park, saying it "must be opened up to the driving, riding, and walking public; but the roads ... must be ... so built that the essential qualities of the Park are impaired in the least possible degree."

Daniels Road, tunnel dedication photos: National Park Service; Map adapted from District of Columbia topographic map, US Coast & Geodetic Survey 1892-94 (engraved by Evans & Bartle, DC): Library of Congress; Bridge engraving: *Evening Star*, 9/5/1891.

This 1890s map has been enhanced to highlight and label roads in existence when Rock Creek Park was established. M marks the spot of three mills along the creek.

