PUBLIC STANDS BY OLMSTED, JR.’S GREENSWARD AT DENVER’S CIVIC CENTER PROTECTING IT FROM DRASTIC ALTERATION

Because of protests from NAOP and many others, a proposed drastic change to the Master Plan for Denver’s Civic Center has been withdrawn. The Master Plan, which was developed with extensive public participation and was formally adopted by the city in 2005, emphasized preservation and restoration. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.’s 1912 plan for Civic Center shaped the space as a greensward park with a cross-axial framework. However, early in 2006, a newly formed Civic Center Conservancy engaged Daniel Libeskind to develop the plan further. The result was a proposal that would dramatically alter the design of the park. The Libeskind proposal was kept under wraps from the end of January until it was unveiled to the public in August 2006.

Preservationists and park advocates were alarmed that private donors, rather than the public, would determine priorities for Civic Center. They insisted on a public process for evaluation of Libeskind’s proposal. Over a five month period, more than 1,250 citizens participated in public meetings, surveys and blogs, and organizations—including NAOP—underscored the importance of protecting and preserving the resource. NAOP’s Board held its semi-annual meeting in Denver in September 2006 and was given a tour of the park. In January 2007, the Conservancy announced that the proposal would not be implemented. In addition, Denver’s Parks and Recreation Department acknowledged that the results of this public process validated the original priorities of the Master Plan.

NAOP COMMENDS SECRETARY KEMPTHORNE ON NPS POLICY

“We write to applaud your effort to assure that the National Park Service’s 2006 Management Policies reconfirm our nation’s historic commitment to conservation…” begins the letter from NAOP Co-Chairs Susan West Montgomery and David Bahlman to Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne commending the Secretary’s decision last fall that the policies would reassert a commitment to the preservation of our national parks. This issue’s Reprints focuses on the philosophy of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., who was instrumental in the establishment of the National Park Service as described in Ethan Carr’s introduction.
The next national urban parks conference, co-sponsored by NAOP, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservatory and City Parks Alliance, is scheduled for Pittsburgh on September 21-23, 2008. Body and Soul: Parks and the Health of Great Cities will bring together leaders from around the country and around the world who are working to create, preserve and restore urban and historic parks to promote the health and vitality of their cities. It will focus on the critical relationship between urban parks and the well-being of the vast numbers of people living in urban areas.

Epidemics of childhood obesity and diabetes among Americans have raised public awareness of the importance of active, healthy lifestyles. Reaching beyond individual health, Body and Soul will also examine the links among parkland, community life and environmental equity. The gathering will showcase the ideas and energies of citizens and leaders from the public and private sectors who recognize the role of safe and accessible parks in addressing environmental health.

Frederick Law Olmsted wrote about the basic right of city dwellers to “relief from urban intensity” and described the beneficial effect of scenery on people. Indeed, our nation’s historic parks were designed as an antidote to urban environmental stresses and are still critical to modern day life, providing an oasis of calm for the restoration of the body, mind and spirit in our fast-paced world.

—Catherine Nagel
An early season snow storm dumped more than 20 inches of wet snow on Buffalo, NY, on October 12-13, 2006, causing severe damage to thousands of trees and shrubs throughout Buffalo’s Olmsted Park System. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy has been working since the storm hit to remove hazardous trees and hanging limbs and clean up debris from the parks.

In addition to the clean-up work, the conservancy in partnership with HSBC Bank has raised more than $250,000 in its Olmsted ReLeaf campaign. The ReLeaf program will enable the Conservancy to work to restore the parks, replacing trees and shrubs lost to the storm. Visit www.buffaloolmstedparks.org for more information.

While the Central Park Conservancy’s primary focus is the care of Central Park, helping other parks is a natural extension of that mission. This year, through a special grant, the conservancy began the Historic Harlem Parks Initiative, which brings critically needed horticultural support and expertise, particularly in the area of turf maintenance, to four Harlem parks—Morningside (another New York City Olmsted/Vaux designed park), Marcus Garvey, St. Nicholas and Jackie Robinson.

When Doug Blonsky, president of the Conservancy and Central Park administrator, and Neil Calvanese, vice president for operations, toured these parks, they concluded that maintenance in these underserved parks could be enhanced through the addition of a roving horticultural crew. This crew reports to the existing management structure of the Central Park Conservancy. The crew focuses on a maintenance schedule that enables existing Parks Department staff to consistently maintain plantings and concentrate on other horticultural details needed in the parks. The four Conservancy crew members spend approximately one week per month in each of the four participating Harlem parks. Through this innovative program, the Conservancy will bring these parks to higher standards and, in doing so, improve the quality of life for many more New Yorkers. To learn more about the Conservancy, visit www.centralparknyc.org.

“Branching Out—An Exploration in Arboriculture for Boston Youth,” the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation’s educational program in arboriculture for urban youths, was recently covered in the December issue of Tree Care Industry magazine as a national model for bringing young people into the field of landscape management and park stewardship. The program provides city youths (ages 14 – 18) with an introduction to tree care, hands-on field experience and opportunities to pursue educational scholarships and career paths in the fields of arboriculture, park management and the environment. The program is an outstanding example of utilizing professional staff expertise and resources to provide educational opportunities and engage youth in the concepts of park resource management. Upon completion of the sequenced curriculum, participants are provided with career and educational opportunities in the field of arboriculture. “Branching Out” is a featured case study you can read on the website at www.parkspractices.org.

To learn more, contact Celena Illuzzi at 617-201-7223 or celena_illuzzi@nps.gov.

The restoration of the Olmsted Woods at the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC, was featured in the July 2006 issue of Landscape Architecture. Located at the base of Washington National Cathedral, the five-acre Olmsted Woods, one of the few old growth forests still standing in the nation’s capital, has been kept free from development since landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. designed the Cathedral gardens and grounds nearly 100 years ago.

For more information, visit www.allhallowsguild.org.

2007 marks the Centennial Year for Riverbank Park in Newark, NJ. The community group Save the Park at Riverbank (SPARK) successfully saved this Olmsted park from development in 1996. Subsequently SPARK Friends incorporated as a non-profit and initiated cultural programs featuring family activities, music and art from diverse cultures that attract hundreds of families from the surrounding immigrant neighborhood into the park. Special centennial events are being planned. Riverbank Park is on the National Register. Visit www.riverbankpark.org for more information.

Violent gales swept through St. Louis on July 19th and struck Tower Grove Park with extraordinary fury, inflicting the most severe damage in living memory to the park’s trees. In all, roughly 300 trees were lost. St. Louis was declared a Federal Disaster Area enabling the park to seek assistance from FEMA to offset some of the clean-up costs. With cleanup in sight, a severe ice storm struck on the night of November 30th. Over 200 trees were lost in that storm. In the aftermath of both storms, media coverage was extensive and supportive, and public response was extraordinary. Among other things, the Park was able to match a pending challenge grant from the Whitaker Foundation well ahead of schedule. A comprehensive renewal of the Park’s trees will now be underway over the next several years and should result in a display that is in fact more beautiful, more authentic and more consistent with the gardenesque vision of its founder, Henry Shaw.
**International**

Frederick Law Olmsted did not plan Canada’s Westmount Park, but his ideas shaped its design from the very beginning in 1899, with the Olmsted brothers acting as the first consultants for the rectangular park. It is truly a child of Olmsted, a progeny of his majestic Mount Royal Park looming above.

This smaller, but very natural-looking urban space, with its now vanished gorge and wicker bridges, became so popular that in 1910 Westmount City Council spent $300,000 dollars—millions today—to extend the area to the south. A series of purchases were made “for the purposes of a public park,” and over the last ninety years these southern fields have served as a multi-purpose recreation space giving free access for all sorts of activities. The 1910 acquisition has proven to be the wisest type of stewardship.

The park suddenly became threatened when, on October 3, 2006, Westmount City Council announced its “intention” to cover this southern section with synthetic turf, a polyvinyl carpet that would remove 20% of Westmount Park’s total greenspace of 26.19 acres. Residents and Westmount citizens were outraged, and they formed a group, Save The Park! (Sauvons le parc!), which is now a NAOP member. The whole park is a miniature jewel of North American landscape design, and the placement of a synthetic surface over the southern area would have the same effect as covering New York’s Sheep Meadow in Central Park with artificial matting. The architectural plan used by Westmount envisages a “new sports area” which would effectively cannibalize the park—shifting a bike-path, decreasing CO₂ fixation, vastly increasing heat, imposing concrete walkways (no organic material on turf), destroying valuable trees, and worst of all, privatizing public space through intense rental to private schools.

With two full-length soccer fields envisaged, these athletic areas would be so closely wedged together they would need a huge net between them, and citizens are faced with the prospect of a soccerplex dumped on a park whose ecosystem is under stress.

Meanwhile, in November 2006, Westmount City Council administered a second shock to its own citizenry, clear-cutting 120 trees in another of its greenspaces, Sunnyside Park (1.72 acres) on the immediate perimeter of the Mount Royal protected zone watched over by the NAOP member organization, Les Amis de la montagne, which had formally told Westmount Council not to proceed with the draconian cut.

Below, Westmount Park awaits its fate. The only way the City of Westmount, already 38 million dollars in debt, will be able to afford this sportsplex will be through the commercialization of once public space. Gone will be the open, public use for which this southern part of the park was set aside in 1910.

Save The Park! Sauvons le parc! is fighting with all its heart and soul to keep its park healthy and whole. Visit the web site at www.savewestmountpark.com.

—Patrick Barnard, Save Our Park!
ADVOCACY

Riverside, Chicago, IL

In November 2006 NAOP submitted a letter to the President of the Village of Riverside, Illinois, expressing our concern about a preliminary plan to create a tax increment financing district that includes a transit-oriented development component. The letter addressed the potential impact that the anticipated “high-density” development would have on Riverside’s historic center and adjacent land, threatening the unique character that gives the community national and international significance. NAOP urged the Village to adopt a comprehensive plan that guarantees future generations enjoyment of the quality of place that Olmsted envisioned for all its citizens.

In response to our offer to provide assistance at a series of upcoming public meetings, NAOP was invited to make a presentation to the Riverside community on April 2. “An Evening of Olmsted” featuring Co-chairs Susan West Montgomery and David Bahlman, and Olmsted scholar Victoria Ranney, moderated by NAOP trustee Chris Robling, was held in the Riverside Township Hall Auditorium. Sixty people attended. NAOP leaders spoke about the challenges of addressing contemporary needs while preserving historic landscapes and highlighted successful examples from other communities that have achieved this balance. They urged the community to build consensus around the future of their historic community, develop a set of principles to guide their planning process and adopt a comprehensive plan that will protect and preserve the unique character that gives Riverside its national and international historical significance.

U.S. Capitol Grounds

The massive Capitol Visitors Center at the U.S. Capitol is set to open to the public this fall. This landmark undertaking, as well as security-driven building and rebuilding projects, has significantly impacted the Olmsted-designed landscape. Since the inception of the Visitors Center, NAOP has been working to ensure that planning at the Capitol includes a preservation mandate that will protect and restore the historic landscape. The Architect of the Capitol (AOC), at the urging of NAOP, has agreed to prepare a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). CLR development began in the fall with a comprehensive review of the site’s “hardscape” elements including walls, paths, the Summer House and other furnishings. Soon, the AOC will go out to bid on the “softscape” phase of the project. The AOC will work with the National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative to ensure that the CLR is developed using standards and methods developed by the Park Service.

This spring, NAOP will assist the AOC to reconvene the group of national stakeholders that NAOP first brought together in June 2005. They will review findings of the CLR and the larger Capitol Complex Master Plan.

Druid Hills, Atlanta, GA

Frederick Law Olmsted’s last suburb, Druid Hills, is currently threatened by a proposed zoning overlay that provides for supersizing Emory Village, effectively putting an early 21st century development in the middle of a late 19th (planned)/early 20th century (developed) neighborhood. Emory Village is the small commercial center of Druid Hills that evolved from the Emory University campus in the 1920’s onto a small area at the historic entrance to the university and has served both “town and gown” over the years. An effort to “revitalize” the Village beginning several years ago has resulted in a proposed zoning overlay that puts 4-story buildings on all sides of the identified historic structures. Emory Village is a one-story commercial block type of center typical of early 20th century neighborhoods. The neighborhood civic association has mounted an effort to maintain the Village’s neighborhood scale. Deferrals and now an amended zoning overlay have moved the County Commission’s decision to late May. NAOP has sent a letter urging the County Commission to respect the Olmsted design and offered an educational session. The National Trust has also sent a letter. Unfortunately, the amended zoning overlay does nothing to right the scale issue.

Villa Narcissa, Palos Verdes, CA

Villa Narcissa in Palos Verdes, CA was the setting for a luncheon in March bringing NAOP together with leaders from allied organizations. Villa Narcissa is listed in the Greenbook as one of sixteen private estates in Palos Verdes designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. It is part of an extended collection of buildings laid out by financier Frank Vanderlip nearly a century ago. The luncheon was hosted by Vanderlip descendents who continue to live on the estate. They led participants on a tour through the property whose highlight is its west coast view taking in all of Catalina Island. NAOP Board member Bill Deverell assisted in arranging the event, which was intended to raise the visibility of NAOP with other organizations and broaden its network of supporters for future endeavors.
Charles Beveridge Honored at NAOP Board Meeting

In a show of support for the city, the NAOP Board held its Spring 2007 meeting in New Orleans where members were able to tour Audubon Park, designed by the Olmsted Firm in 1897. Members also toured several areas of the city which were affected by Hurricane Katrina including City Park, still recovering from the damage it suffered. During the meeting, the NAOP Board awarded the Caroline Loughlin Volunteer Service Award to Charles Beveridge in recognition of his extraordinary dedication and commitment to the preservation of the Olmsted legacy. The award stated that “[Charles Beveridge] is widely known for his decades of scholarship, his wit and wisdom, and his unfailing generosity and kindness in sharing his knowledge and his time. Across North America, people describe the growth of their Olmsted understanding by saying, ‘And then Charlie Beveridge came.’”

Frederick Law Olmsted Cited as Influential American

In the December 2006 issue of The Atlantic monthly Frederick Law Olmsted is ranked #49 in a list of the 100 Most Influential Americans of All Time. He is credited as the “genius behind New York’s Central Park, he inspired the greening of America’s cities.”

News From Fairsted

The long-awaited construction program to improve Fairsted’s fire suppression, museum climate and site drainage systems and rehabilitate its barn began during the winter of 2007 through a contract signed with Consigli Construction Company, Inc. When the National Park Service bid the project, construction costs escalated in the northeast and across the country. As a result, the project had to be trimmed and re-scoped, delaying the overall program schedule. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site will remain closed for the construction period; however, the Olmsted Archives are open for limited archival reference services. Check our web site for contact information and updates at www.nps.gov/frla.

The Olmsted site recently launched Phase II of a curriculum-development project for third graders. The program, “Good Neighbors: Landscape Design and Community Building,” will use resources at Fairsted—including new programming space in the rehabilitated barn—to introduce students to the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted firm, and the role that public parks play in everyday life. Participating students will discover that landscapes affect human thought and feeling, that thoughtfully-designed landscapes strengthen communities, and that the future of urban public parks depends on the involvement of both the public sector and private citizens.

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site continues to work with the Organization of American Historians on a Historic Resource Study which will examine the physical, intellectual and social environment of Brookline, MA, during the periods of FLO senior and the Olmsted firm. The site is also working with NAOP on a project to publish a new updated and expanded version of the master list of Olmsted project work, also known as the Greenbook.

—Lee Farrow Cook, Site Manager
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site
**NAOP lobbies on behalf of Pinebank**

On September 25, 2006, NAOP co-chairs David Bahlman and Susan West Montgomery wrote to Boston Mayor Thomas Menino expressing concern over the proposed demolition of historic Pinebank, the central cultural landscape element of Frederick Law Olmsted’s original 1892 design for the Emerald Necklace. The letter stated that “Preservation of the entire system [of the Emerald Necklace] and its architectural components is critical to the integrity of the Olmsted vision.”

Pinebank, built in 1870, was the home of Boston merchants. It was the only “country” estate out of several surrounding Jamaica Pond that was not razed when Olmsted designed Jamaica Park. In fact his plan stipulated that the Queen Anne style mansion should be preserved and used as a refectory. The building was community-owned and operated in various capacities until 1976 when it was vacated. Vandalism, two fires and a damaged roof accelerated its deterioration. A local activist group, Friends of Pinebank, was formed to fight for its survival.

In her response to NAOP on October 2, 2006 Antonia Pollak, Commissioner of the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, cited efforts by many organizations over the past 35 years to develop a strategy to save and re-use Pinebank. According to her, a viable plan that included the financial resources to restore the property was never found. She went on to say that costs to restore Pinebank were estimated at $3 million in 1988 and reconstruction costs have escalated substantially since then. A structural engineer specializing in historic properties assessed Pinebank and concluded that over 80% of the materials and structure were unsound and unable to be re-used.

On December 19th, the city’s Inspectional Services Department ordered Parks and Recreation to demolish the building because of the public hazard it posed. Demolition began in early January 2007.

The Boston Parks and Recreation Department has stated that it will develop an interpretive plan for the site using materials salvaged from the building. One suggestion has been to build a Visitors Center on the location. Friends of Pinebank have drawn up plans for a “green”building recreating the historically significant exterior. Hugh Mattison, president of Friends of Pinebank, says “We believe the best memorial to Pinebank is a new Pinebank.”

—*with contributions by Dorothy Clark, Friends of Pinebank*
RESEARCH


NAOP is delighted to announce that 20 years after its original publication, the Olmsted firm’s master list of projects, affectionately known as the “Greenbook,” will be on the road to republication thanks to a generous $10,000 jump start from the Hubbard Educational Trust, a supporter of the first edition. The envisioned publication will be expanded both in content and presentation and will be accomplished in collaboration with the National Park Service (Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site) and the Library of Congress (Frederick Law Olmsted Papers). The target publication date is April 2008 to celebrate Frederick Law Olmsted’s birthday and the 150th anniversary of the Olmsted and Vaux Greensward Plan for New York City’s Central Park and the firm’s establishment.

Over the past two decades, the Master List of Design Projects of the Olmsted Firm, 1857-1979 has proven to be an invaluable tool for researchers, advocates, public officials, educators, students and design professionals. Similarly, the new Master List will be a stand-alone publication directed toward a diverse and growing audience as new communities and owners embrace the irreplaceable legacy of their Olmsted designs. While the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Olmsted NHS) does provide some archival information online through the Olmsted Research Guide Online (ORGO), it is not possible to easily and quickly retrieve the entire inventory for comparative or contextual research or to clearly see the quantity and diversity of design projects in a given location or for a particular category of work. For this reason, the information contained in the Master List adds to the ORGO, NAOP and Olmsted NHS websites; it does not duplicate them. Finally, the April 2008 anniversary presents an opportunity for renewed public interest and advocacy related to the work of the Olmsted firm, the Olmsted NHS, and Olmsted–designed landscapes across the nation.

Publication of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers

Charles E. Beveridge, Series Editor of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, and the Johns Hopkins University Press have announced that the next volume in the series—Volume 7, Parks, Politics, and Patronage, 1874-1882, was published in April 2007. This leaves only two additional volumes of the papers to be published: Volume 8, The Early Boston Years, 1882-1890, and Volume 9, The Last Great Projects, 1890-1895. Editing has already begun for Volume 8 under volume editor Ethan Carr. In addition, the editors expect to issue two more volumes in the supplementary series. Supplementary Series Volume II, Plans and Historical Photographs of Parks, Parkways, Park Systems, Public Recreation Grounds, Playgrounds, and Scenic Reservations, is expected to be available in 2008. The remaining volume would then be Supplementary Series Volume 3, plans and historical photographs of approximately 100 jobs other than parks and park systems, including the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 (The Chicago World’s Fair), the U.S. Capitol Grounds, and the Biltmore Estate.

All of the currently available volumes can be purchased from the National Association for Olmsted Parks (www.olmsted.org), where there is a discount for members, as well as from the Johns Hopkins University Press (www.press.jhu.edu) or from most bookstores.

NAOP Receives Support from Furthermore for FLO Papers Supplementary Series

NAOP gratefully acknowledges Furthermore, a Program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, for its recent grant of $5,000 for The Supplemental Series Volume II of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers. This large-format two-volume set, edited by Charles E. Beveridge, will contain approximately 900 landscape plans and historic photographs of the nearly 100 parks, parkways, public recreation grounds, playgrounds and scenic reservations designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm during the years of professional practice, from 1857 – 1895. Publication is expected in fall 2008.
NAOP EVENTS

As the first garden cemetery in North America, Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA, is one of the country’s most remarkable and beloved cemeteries. To celebrate the 175th Anniversary of its founding in 1831, it presented to the community a series of events at the Boston Public Library. Dr. Charles Beveridge, series editor of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, and Arleyn Levee, a national expert on cultural landscapes and their preservation, ended the series with a look at The Cemetery and the Park: Nature, The Designed Landscape and Urban Planning. NAOP co-sponsored the event with the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site and Friends of Fairisted.

Facets of Mount Auburn:
Landscape Architecture,
featuring Dr. Charles Beveridge and Arleyn Levee
Rabb Auditorium, Boston Public Library, Copley Square
May 15, 2007, 6:00 PM

Spokane, WA, Board Meeting/Centennial
This fall Spokane, WA, will host the NAOP Board Meeting. The event marks the beginning of the Centennial Celebration for Spokane’s Olmsted-designed park system. The plan, delivered in 1908, was largely implemented over time and its recommendations have continued to guide urban form and parkland acquisition. Olmsted Brothers also provided designs for individual parks, subdivisions and private grounds. Today, the park system with its scenic river drives remains one of the area’s greatest assets.

Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Greensward
The Central Park Conservancy (CPC) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art are planning a celebratory weekend April 26-27, 2008, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Greensward Plan. There will be lectures and presentations by noted speakers as well as tours throughout the Park by senior staff of the Conservancy. The schedule is being finalized and will include a reception for the NAOP board hosted by the CPC.
Birmingham’s Olmsted Project

The contribution of Frederick Law Olmsted and his successors to urban and landscape design in the United States is frequently unappreciated. In Birmingham, AL, the Birmingham Historical Society has been rediscovering the Olmsted legacy and studying current projects in light of Olmsted’s vision and principles. To date, the society’s Olmsted project has produced a republication of the Olmsted plan for Birmingham parks, an illustrated history of historic and current park planning in Birmingham and a DVD and exhibit illustrating the discoveries.

Birmingham was founded in 1871, a few years before Olmsted completed Central Park. By 1924, a little more than 50 years later, Birmingham was the South’s largest industrial center and civic leaders thought the city’s parks “wholly inadequate.” They addressed the issue by hiring the Olmsted Brothers to develop a comprehensive park plan for the region.

With the encouragement of Olmsted scholars Charles Beveridge, Arleyn Levee and Phoebe Cutler, the Birmingham Historical Society has mined the archives of Fairsted, the Library of Congress and local sources to understand and assess the impact of the Olmsted 1925 report on park development. The society has also reviewed from the perspective of the Olmsted heritage the current phenomenal development of new parks and greenways. In the greater Birmingham area more than 5,000 acres of park lands have been acquired in the last six years and developments similar to those envisioned in the Olmsted report are either planned or under way along major creeks and mountain ridges.

To encourage, inspire and educate current and future generations, the Society faithfully reproduced the 1925 Olmsted Brothers’, “A System of Parks for Birmingham” and published “The Olmsted Vision—Parks for Birmingham,” a full-color, 11” x 14,” 116-page volume with historic and current plans and photographs assessing the 1925 report and its impact. A DVD highlighting current park and greenway projects furthering the Olmsted plan has also been produced. In final editing and preparation for printing in 2007 is the 1920s correspondence between Birmingham park advocates and the Olmsted firm.

Additional research focuses on the integrity of the Warren Manning plans for the residential suburb of Mountain Brook. However, with hundreds more plans for our community listed in the Olmsted database and the advice of Arleyn Levey, we will be seeking the assistance of the beleaguered archivists at Fairsted for many more years.

Birmingham’s 1925 park plan ($25), “The Olmsted Vision—Parks for Birmingham,” ($25) and the DVD ($10) are available from the Birmingham Historical Society, One Sloss Quarters, Birmingham, AL, 35222 or visit www.bhistorical.org. Prices noted are postpaid.

—Marjorie L. White, Director, Birmingham Historical Society

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS

Historic Landscapes: Planning, Management and Cultural Landscape Reports
Denver, CO
October 24-25, 2007

Review the basics of scenic vistas, designed, cultural, rural, agricultural and urban landscapes and applicable laws and regulations. Explore the development of the cultural landscape report and its use in planning and managing historic and cultural landscapes. Assess realistic approaches to adaptive reuse, historic preservation, restoration and accessibility and discuss recent preservation theory.

Organized by the National Preservation Institute in cooperation with the Colorado Historical Society, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Preservation, Inc., the Cultural Landscape Foundation and the National Park Service, Historic Landscape Initiative.

Faculty includes former NAOP Trustee Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, and founder, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; editor of “Design With Culture: Claiming America’s Landscape Heritage” and “Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture I and II.”

Cost: $375 (6-week advance registration); $425 (regular registration). For more information and to register, visit www.npi.org

PUBLICATIONS

SOS: Save Our Seneca Park
The Seneca Park Alliance will publish a NAOP workbook describing its recent advocacy efforts to raise awareness among public officials and the general public about Seneca Park, one of three large urban parks in Rochester, NY, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1890s. In 2000, the park was threatened by a County Zoo master plan that called for a 600-car parking lot in the heart of the Lower Park, the section of Seneca Park that best represents Olmsted’s original design intent and which remains highly intact. Though the park remains at risk from encroachment by the zoo, it is impossible to quantify the results of the advocacy efforts since the most intrusive expansion plan has not been implemented. A Case Study with additional information from the Seneca Park Alliance can be found on the Parks Practices website at www.parkspractices.org.
A VISIT TO BIRKENHEAD PARK: FOLLOWING IN FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED’S FOOTSTEPS

The Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England, Frederick Law Olmsted’s record of his 1850 visit to southern England and Wales, inspired me to follow in his footsteps and visit Birkenhead Park in September 2006. I was fortunate to have Martin McCoy, Birkenhead Park Manager and editor of this article, and some of his staff lead me on a tour of the park.

When Olmsted and his companions... "start[ed] their walk down the Wirral peninsula, the baker who provided their breakfast rolls persuaded them to leave their knapsacks with him and make a detour to see the new public park created by landscape gardeners Joseph Paxton and Edward Kemp, who had taken a “flat, sterile clay farm” of nearly two hundred acres and transformed it into an extensive public pleasure ground. The entire park was underdrained, with wide carriage roads and paths, rock gardens, pavilions, trees and shrubs, and ponds stocked with fish and swans. Construction had required the arduous labor of hundreds of Irish immigrants who used picks and shovels to make the paths, the arches and bridges, and the rockery, and to dig out tons of soggy clay to form the lakes. The spoil was heaped in ridges... to vary the otherwise flat surface of the site and provide the illusion of open countryside.”

It seems apt that one of Olmsted’s first and most memorable sights on this trip was a public park. It must have been a revelation, for no public enterprise like it existed in the United States. “All this magnificent pleasure ground,” Olmsted wrote, “is entirely, unreservedly and for ever the people’s own.”

The original Birkenhead Park was 125 acres, and the intention was that the surrounding land be divided into residential lots and sold to pay the cost of the park. This was partially achieved, but a recession limited its success. Some of those lots are now part of the park. Fortunately, little had been done to the park over the years so it was relatively unchanged when a fund raising effort was planned a decade ago to restore it with full respect for the historical Paxton plan. A Heritage Lottery grant was awarded with certain requirements: a full time manager responsible solely for Birkenhead, a plan developed and implemented by the local government to maintain the increased level of funding provided by the Heritage Lottery and a management plan for continued maintenance.

The restoration was about 70% complete when I was there. Park benches and waste containers have been duplicated in the spirit of 1850, a boat house and bridge have been restored, the lakes were cleared of accumulated sludge and a great deal of planting has been done to restore the vistas as one walks along the park’s paths. The underdrainage was addressed and it was found that it was 90% intact.

Birkenhead welcomes out-of-country visitors. I encourage Field Notes readers to make this most rewarding trip when in England.

—Jerry Baum with Martin McCoy

Photograph courtesy of Jerry Baum

Designed by Sir Joseph Paxton in 1843, Birkenhead Park opened near Liverpool, England in 1847. Frederick Law Olmsted visited the park during a tour of Europe in 1850. This photo shows one view of the Rockery.

Photograph courtesy of Jerry Baum

The Boathouse as seen across one of the lakes Sir Joseph Paxton designed to appear as a sinuous river affording romantic, idealized views during walks in Birkenhead Park.

Photograph courtesy of Jerry Baum

STAFF CHANGES AT NAOP

Cynthia Sanford joined the staff of the NAOP at the end of January as the Marketing & Communications Manager. Cynthia has an extensive professional background in historic preservation and a personal enthusiasm for great parks. She replaced April Croft who decided to move back home to New York with her husband.

Brett Sheppard, who served with NAOP for nearly two years as the Office Manager, left for greener pastures at the end of February. We wish Brett well as he begins his new career in community sustained farming. Replacing him is Marisa Lau, a recent graduate of Williams College. Marisa interned at the National Parks Conservation Association last summer.