1980 is the official year of NAOP’s beginning: by resolution at a conference in Buffalo, New York, in May and by action two months later in Brookline, Massachusetts. The following excerpt from an article in the very first NAOP newsletter – Fall/Winter 1980/81 – gives the background of the founding of our organization. Some of you were there! As we all know, it is essential to know our history.

**National Association for Olmsted Parks Organized**

In the summer of 1977, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan appeared on a television interview program in the City of Buffalo, while participating in a conference there, and discussed his “dream” of a national Olmsted historic park system which would include Central Park in New York City as well as others scattered across the U.S.A. Even before that, he and a group of concerned citizens had met to talk about a greater Federal role in the likes of Central Park, then under severe attack and suffering from too many years of neglect.

It made good sense. The U.S. Government and Frederick Law Olmsted were not, after all, total strangers. In 1947-48, and again between 1965-71, the Library of Congress received the majority of the Olmsted Papers, which now comprise the single largest repository of his work and thought, now in the process of being edited. For more than a decade legislation, initiated by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Congressman Robert Drinan, had been directed toward the acquisition of the Brookline office-home of Olmsted Associates, Fairlston, as a National Historic Site and public resource, due primarily to the consistent efforts of William Alex, President of the Frederick Law Olmsted Association, the acquisition has been accomplished. A few years earlier, lest we forget, in 1874, Mr. Olmsted had also been instrumental in the design of the U.S. Capitol grounds, as one

**NAOP Salutes the American Society of Landscape Architects on its Centennial**

**ASLA Centennial Conference • September 13-15 • Boston**

The Reprints inside the Spring Issue of Field Notes – four letters of Frederick Law Olmsted on the profession of Landscape Architecture – is being made available inside a copy of this UPDATE for the ASLA Conference Attendees.
National Association for Olmsted Parks Organized

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specialist said, preventing the building from looking as though it were about to slide down the west front of now famous Capitol Hill.

Buffalonians were quick to seize on the initiative. Wherever Joen K. Bozer, a member of the Erie County Legislature went, she enlisted “Friends of the Olmsted Parks Committee” from among those who shared with her the idea that maintenance, protection and preservation of our major, historic parks is an idea whose time had come. She had helped to organize the first meeting of Olmsted enthusiasts from around New York State in 1977, and others leading to the Buffalo conference in 1980.

The need was obvious. In Buffalo, as just one example, the number of skilled employees in the city system had dropped from 63 to 16 in twenty years. Where previously it had 20 growers, it now has four; 25 treemen, now only seven. From other cities across the country had come similar horror stories. While generally money for major capital improvements continued to be available, the capacity to maintain either older parks or newly renovated areas declined drastically. It was out of this threat of permanent loss that the new National Association for Olmsted Parks was born, some three years and many meetings later, at a second Buffalo Conference in May.

There the question was asked, “Are we a package? Can we, a network of urban parks designed by Olmsted, obtain national recognition and Federal funds for the maintenance, preservation and protection of our parks, while maintaining local control over parks themselves?” The answer was, “yes!”

In truth, the resounding affirmative response may have applied more to “Are we a package?” than to “can we obtain Federal funds,” for certainly the latter could not be sought and secured without a strong national organization and an on-going effort dedicated to the dissemination of Olmstedian ideas and the preservation of Olmsted’s parks and open spaces.

Thus it was, as some would write, that another meeting was held in July, 1980, in Brookline, Massachusetts, to formalize the resolutions of the Buffalo conference, elect a slate of organizing officers, lay out a schedule of future meetings, plan for the 2nd National Conference and agree on the outlines of a national program and budget which would bring the earlier dreams closer to reality.

The goals of the Association? To develop a national commitment to preserve, protect and maintain our nation’s Olmsted parks. To compile and disseminate educational materials about our historic and socially important Olmsted parks. To identify and enlist the support of Olmsted park historians, park professionals and friends in all Olmsted parks or with an Olmstedian legacy. To locate, evaluate and insure the preservation of and access to Olmstedian archival materials. To work for public recognition of the network of urban Olmsted parks and the National Association itself.

The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University and Mount Auburn Cemetery are jointly sponsoring this year’s Northeast Regional Meeting of the American Association of Botanic Gardens & Arboreta on Thursday, October 28, 1999 at the Arnold Arboretum, Boston (Jamaica Plain), MA and Friday, October 29 at Mount Auburn, Cambridge, MA. For information and a copy of the conference brochure, call 617-547-7105, ext. 230 (voice mail), email currie@maarbourn.com or fax 617-876-4405, attn. Candace Currie.

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Editorial Committee
Lucy Lawliss
Alida Silverman

Field Notes
Spring 1999
Kansas City, often referred to as the crossroads to the west, the Heart of America or The City of Fountains, provided an opportunity to view a park system that includes over 3000 acres and nearly 60 miles of boulevards and parkways, a record few U.S. cities can match.

The plan for Kansas City’s system was developed by Georgé Edward Kessler in 1893. Kessler practiced as a landscape architect for 35 years, undertaking about 450 commissions across the U.S. and abroad. Yet he retained his roots in the Midwest and his connections with Kansas City and its park system for over thirty years. His first plan is regarded by many as amongst his best. No other city has been endowed with so complete a system of parks and boulevards. This remarkable legacy of design was extended by the work of the preeminent landscape architecture firm of Hare and Hare, whose professional work overlapped with Kessler, spanning 75 years from 1885-1960.

As with all NAOP gatherings, we had an opportunity to gain a sense of place through a wonderful tour of the Park and Boulevard System, ably guided by Mike Malyn and Mike Herron (Parks and Recreation Department) and to learn about the landscape legacy of “KC”.

Charles Beveridge, editor of the Olmsted papers, provided a chronology of the Olmsted firm’s park system work in Kansas City, 1892-93, which generally found Frederick Law Olmsted approving of the system being developed by Kessler. However, he urged the inclusion of a large park in the system, and in 1896 the 1300 acre Swope Park was donated to the city, which far exceeded the size even Olmsted envisioned.

We also toured the Modern Sculpture Garden at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (with some of the art placed in a Dan Kiley landscape) and Country Club Plaza.

But lest the reader believe it was all fun, we managed to fit in 6 hours of critical NAOP business, including the election of new trustees, the election of new co-chairperson Mary Fox of Prospect Park, and plans for the ASLA Annual Meeting, celebrating 100 years of Landscape Architecture and the unveiling of an Olmsted postage stamp.

The historic George Eastman House in Rochester, NY is the site for this year’s conference. Themed “Recapturing Waterways in Historic Parks, Rochester’s Olmsted Legacy in a National Context,” it is co-sponsored by the Monroe County Parks Department, the City of Rochester’s Bureau of Parks and the National Park Service – Heritage Preservation Services.

**Thursday** highlights include a gala reception at the George Eastman House, a National Historic Landmark. A new photographic exhibit, “Rochester’s Olmstedian Public Pleasure Grounds,” is up and we can tour the recently restored historic gardens.

**Friday** begins with keynote addresses by Robert Durand, Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs and Charles Beveridge, Editor of the Olmsted papers. Next is a panel discussion of four case studies on recapturing waterways in historic parks. There will also be technical sessions on pollution issues, invasive water vegetation and bank restoration. The focus then turns to Rochester’s Olmsted park system, including a local overview and a discussion on rehabilitation work at Genesee Valley Park with a tour.

**Saturday’s** events include keynotes by U.S. Representative Louise Slaughter from Rochester and Susan West Montgomery, president of Preservation Action. The rehabilitation of Olmsted’s Highland Park, Highland Park Pinetum Drive and Olmsted’s Seneca Park will be discussed in presentations and followed by tours. A reception at the Bausch & Lomb Wintergarden, overlooking Washington Square Park ends the day.

On **Sunday**, pick one great event to finish off the conference with style: an all-day tour at Sonnenberg Gardens, a morning workshop at the George Eastman House on historic photo preservation or a walking/bus tour of Rochester’s historic districts.