Interest in the life and work of Frederick Law Olmsted has never been higher, if we are to judge by the number of biographies and other books that have been published in recent years. Melvin Kaunitz (1990) and Lee Hall (1995) are among a new crop of Olmsted biographers, while Elizabeth Stevenson's 1977 biography has been reissued this year with a new introduction by the author. More importantly, Laura Wood Roper's 1973 biography remains in print, and remains the authoritative scholarly work on Olmsted. Charles E. Beveridge's own contribution (1995) sets a new standard for published documentation of Olmsted's landscape designs, and new biographies of Calvert Vaux by William Alex (1994) and Francis Kowalski (1998) have appeared as well. As of 1997, seven of the proposed volumes of Olmsted's papers have been published by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

All this represents only a portion of the Olmsted literature, which goes back to Marjana Griswold Van Rensselaer's 1893 biographical sketch. At this point, one might expect potential biographers to seek lesser known subjects. And yet a new biography by Witold Rybczynski -- *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, Scribner, 1999 -- achieves what might have been thought almost impossible: a welcome and fresh retelling of the life of Olmsted.

Rybczynski is best known for his 1986 book, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, a fascinating and popular study of the rise and development of Western European concepts of privacy, domesticity, and personal comfort between the 17th and 20th centuries. For many years a professor of architecture at McGill, Rybczynski is now a professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania. His earlier books address the history of technology and urbanism, and few scholars write more perceptively on how technology, architecture, and social trends have mutually interacted to shape the patterns and spaces of modern life.

Considering his previous work, one may be forgiven for having high hopes for Rybczynski's study of Olmsted's life and career. And indeed, the author reveals Olmsted not merely as a landscape designer, but as one of the most fascinating American intellectuals of the 19th century. A sympathetic biographer, Rybczynski also writes in compelling and clear language that makes this a very accessible work. Olmsted's hopes for "civilizing" American cities and society through landscape design and city planning clearly interest Rybczynski, and he succeeds in making the connections between Olmsted's achievements in humanitarian causes and his work as a landscape architect. The author understands the unity in Olmsted's peripatetic life story because he understands how social movements and evolving technologies shaped private and public space in the 19th century. By immersing the reader in contemporary intellectual contexts, including abolitionism, the rise of modern journalism, and the economics of agriculture, Rybczynski is able to present Olmsted's eventual career in parkmaking as a consistent expression of his lifelong commitment to social reform and environmental improvement.

Rybczynski presents Olmsted's intellectual and social milieu thoughtfully, providing a stimulating dimension of insight to the built works. But the most disappointing aspect of the book is that the author approaches his subject almost entirely as a biographer, and not as a historian or theorist of design. If Rybczynski remains a sympathetic observer, he also seems to be discovering Olmsted's landscapes for the first time. One wonders how closely he has examined plans and landscapes when, for example, he describes Egbert Viele's original design for Central Park as "not really that bad" (it is). In a similar vein, Rybczynski dismisses Franklin Park, suggesting that it is "difficult to judge" the park because (among other reasons) of the condition of the Greeting and the existence of a golf course in
**News from Around the Country**

**Maine**

Another public referendum (the third in five years) on restricting clear-cutting of trees will appear on ballots in November. A different effort seems to be having more success in Maine than the legislative ones: the announcement by The Home Depot last August that wood suppliers with Forest Stewardship Council certification would have preference getting contracts. The certification process includes meeting rigorous standards set by professionals and verified by independent scientists. While there have been some ‘growing pains’ since the Council was founded in 1990, the “green” stamp on wood products promises suppliers a guaranteed market.

The Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation has a new head: Bob Page. A Profile will be in the next issue of Field Notes.

**Massachusetts**

Fairlaid, Brookline

Trees are a focus for the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy as they raise money to match and use the funds received last year from the Lisa Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund – Urban Parks Program. A survey of all existing trees in Delaware, Front and Martin Luther King, Jr. Parks and a reforestation program according to Olmsted’s original design are in the works. Late last fall, volunteers planted more than 50 trees on connecting parkways using the “Bare Root” tree planting method designed by Cornell University. A second focus is restoration of the Parkside Lodge in Delaware Park, where the Conservancy celebrated the introduction of the Frederick Law Olmsted stamp to Western New York last September 15 with the Buffalo Post Office. The restored Lodge will serve as the Conservancy’s headquarters and a community and interpretive center for Delaware Park.

**New York**

Buffalo

Trees and native plantings along the DesPlaines Riverbank have been a major focus of effort and money by the Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside this past year. A matching amount is slatted for this new year (upon Village approval) for adequate watering of the newly planted trees.

**Illinois**

Riverside

Trees - ancient live oaks to be exact - are the stars of 3 walking tours in City Park. Brochures and maps can be found at Timkin Center in the park. Formerly the Casino, a 1912 Spanish Mission-style building, Timkin Center has come back to life after an 18-month, $2 million restoration remodel.

**Louisiana**

New Orleans

The Spring 2000 Trustee Training Seminar of NAOP takes place April 28-30 in Druid Hills, Atlanta. A special Reception at Piedmont Park’s Magnolia Hall will mark the presentation of the ASLA’s Medallion Site bronze plaques to Druid Hills, Grant Park, and Piedmont Park - the Olmsted landscapes in Atlanta - while the NAOP Trustees are present.

**Georgia**

Atlanta

**Honors for Charles Beveridge**

The Frederick Law Olmsted Award of Historic Massachusetts, Inc., goes this year to Charles E. Beveridge “for his vision and leadership in the preservation of America’s historic landscapes.” This award, which will be made on May 3 at the organization’s annual dinner, “celebrates outstanding leadership in historic landscape preservation.” Historic Massachusetts is recognizing Dr. Beveridge’s full range of accomplishment across the country and his specific contribution to their own state. “The Commonwealth has benefited tremendously from Charles’ expertise, most significantly from his role as the program-wide advisor to the Commonwealth’s Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program” (established by the Legislature in 1983). And, of course, the award announcement includes the fact that the series editor of The Olmsted Papers has been a Trustee of NAOP!

On May 16, Dr. Beveridge will receive the Medal for Historic Preservation from the Garden Club of America at its annual meeting in Cleveland Ohio.

**Publication Deadline for the 2000**

Fall/Winter Issue is September 15, 2000

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**Editorial Committee**

Caroline Loughlin
Lucy Lawless
Alida Silverman
Arleyn Lovat
Introduction

After serving an apprenticeship at his father’s nursery in Reading, MA, Warren H. Manning (1860–1936) joined the Olmsted firm in 1888. There, he oversaw the office’s planting plans, which would eventually number some 125 projects in 22 states, including the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. His duties at Biltmore in Asheville, NC, from 1888 to 1895, provided his introduction to the South. After establishing his own firm in 1896, Manning remained active in the region, with city plans for Athens, GA and Birmingham, AL, designs for the VMI and Tuskegee campuses, and a comprehensive plan for the grounds of the 1910 Exposition at Jamestown, VA.

"Atlanta—Early Days and Growth" concludes with a vivid, site-by-site word portrait of the Atlanta Manning recalled from his visits to the city on the eve of the 1885 Cotton States and International Exposition. His equally quotable recollections concerning his boss’s unabashed high praise for Atlanta’s leaders of that era are less convincing. Contrary to claims by both Manning and the editor of these two articles, Olmsted’s plans for the site were, according to the official history of the Exposition, "received...filed but never adopted." In their place, the clearly less innovative and serviceable plans of local engineer-builder Grant Wilkins were adopted and followed.

"Atlanta—Tomorrow a City of a Million" must have seemed to contemporary readers wildly improbable, if not utopian. For as late as 1950, the population of metropolitan Atlanta was only half-way toward fulfilling Manning’s population projections. Even more remarkable, not only did Manning predict that Atlanta would become what Germans called a Millionsstadt, but he also mapped out the directions for its probable development. His sketch map for "a City of a Million" could stand as phase one for the actual expansion of metropolitan Atlanta between 1950 and 2000. What did not happen was careful, responsible, comprehensive region-wide management along the lines suggested in Manning’s "National Plan." What happened, instead, for much of urban America—especially Atlanta—was, and remains, Sprawl.

Dana F. White
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National Association for Olmsted Parks

Warren Manning on Atlanta Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Excerpted from The Sunday Atlanta Constitution Magazine, March 22 & 29, 1922

Atlanta—Early Days and Growth

Atlanta “just grew like Topsy” and some other American cities. It had no pre-conceived plan with town center, public squares, commons, major and minor streets, town lots, and outlying garden and farm lots, as appeared on Lord Montgomery’s Early Georgia Colony, the Margravate of Azilia, that was a plan on paper only, also on the plans of Frederick that was established and then died, and on the plan of the very much alive town of Savannah, both laid down by Ogilthorpe, whose greatness as a pioneer, nation and town builder, administrator, and philanthropist, America never has fully appreciated...

Atlanta did not even begin as a trading port. Hardly, the first settler, who being unable to secure better land at Decatur, the metropolis of the region in that day, came here where he could secure about two hundred acres on the poor gravelly ridges of the city site for “produce as he could spare it.” Had he held on as the Astor’s did in New York city, the Ivy and the Astor families might well have been in the same class, for his property included Peachtree street acres from Decatur to Cain and back toward the Ponce de Leon avenue of today.

At this period traffic was moved by horse, mule, and ox-drawn vehicles, and the nearest trading ports were Decatur, and later Whitehall, where public opinion naturally was opposed to such visionary upstarts as steam engines and trains on rails that would disturb

continued
It is this kind of public spirit, this working individually and collectively for the interest of Atlanta, that is quite as significant as the laying down and adherence to a state railroad system that has already been referred to...

The first important public benefactor was Samuel Mitchell, who gave...five acres...to be used as the terminus of the state railroad. In 1863 the state gave the city permission to improve this square, and under competent advice it was made a beauty spot for public use until its beauty was destroyed, together with three-quarters of all city houses, during the civil war. In 1867, the legislature permitted the sale of this square, and the return of a part of it to the heirs, and it is now covered with buildings, instead of being the open space that is now so much needed in the center of the city.

The city has been fortunate in having other similar gifts, such as are represented by Grant park...

It is this kind of public spirit, this working individually and collectively for the interest of Atlanta, that is quite as significant as the laying down and adherence to a state railroad system that has already been referred to...

In other words, the land was made to fit the plan, instead of a plan being made to fit the land. It must be recognized, however, that the city began on a comparatively level plateau from which some fifteen stream heads started on their way to the Gulf, or the Atlantic, a condition that made the gridiron plan practicable, until it reached the deeper portions of the valley.

In this connection it is a most interesting fact—and this can be said of but a few cities, a very few—that the water that falls on Atlanta, or that is distributed through its sewers, goes in part to the Atlantic ocean through the Ocmulgee river, and in part to the Gulf of Mexico through the Chattahoochee river. Thus the city is a wonderful watershed, built at a height of more than 1,000 feet above the sea level...

The outstanding fact in this review is that Atlanta has not yet secured, and therefore is not following a carefully studied plan to provide for a population of 1,000,000 that it is reasonable to assume will come.

It was as an assistant to that master of design, Frederick Law Olmstead(sic), Sr., in 1893, in the planning of the Cotton States Exposition...that I came first to know Atlanta, some twenty-five years ago.
I well remember my impression of Atlanta when I emerged from under the roof of the big station shed, and found my way to the city streets. I knew the city was not old, and I had read in history of Atlanta's destruction during the civil war, and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw such evidences of an up-to-date growth that compared favorably with the best of the northern cities of the same size, as represented by the modern buildings that had been or were being constructed then.

There was, however, a very marked contrast between the new and the old on city streets, that has now given way so completely to the new that the old is hardly in evidence.

Peachtree street was also a revelation to me, for it was quite different from the residential development of most of the northern cities where the finest homes were generally scattered out on larger estates in suburban towns and well into the country, and not centered principally on one street as they were on Peachtree in Atlanta, and Euclid avenue in Cleveland, both of which are now being encroached upon so rapidly by business houses that the residences during this generation must nearly all give way to, or be surrounded by business, as is now true on much of Euclid avenue in Cleveland.

The next impression was, that while the site of the exposition—now Piedmont park—was a long way into the country, it was very attractive. It had a pleasing variation in its surface, its water and landscape opportunities, and the far-reaching outlook over a landscape that was partly in woods, and partly in farms, as seen from the higher points of the site, which is now mostly in houses...

I remember the dignified, courteous, earnest and capable attitude of the committee that included such names as Inman, Collier, Thompson and Kelly. Mr. Olmstead's comment to me at the end of a busy day, while we were working on the outline of the report, was: "Mr. Manning, that was a fine group of men that we were in conference with today. They represent the very finest type of the business men of the new south, the men who will make this great city and who are looking upon this exposition as a means to this end. We must do all we can to help them plan wisely."

In the Druid Hills residential project, I remember my appreciation of the courage and optimism that would lead a man to invest in the development of a residential tract, so far from the city as it seemed to me then before the days of the automobile...

ATLANTA—
Tomorrow a City of a Million

I have led up to the Atlanta of today in the study of the development of the city and civic consciousness of its people. A study of other progressive and growing cities will show that Atlanta has now arrived at the period, but in lesser number of years, when many of such cities have taken up the study and execution of certain phases of a city plan. The earlier plans, however, gave attention to such special phases of the work as parks and park systems, largely through the activity of a group of enthusiasts who were able to put over such an attractive proposition, or a compelling public need, made evident by epidemics, or great congestion, which led to the preparation of sewage or transportation studies. Even now the coordination of all the factors that must be considered to bring about a well-balanced growth for the city as a whole, are not being considered, for there is as yet little attention being given to the relation that the city must have to plan for the state, the region, or to a national plan study.

The outstanding fact in this review is that Atlanta has not yet secured, and therefore is not following a carefully studied plan to provide for a population of 1,000,000 that it is reasonable to assume will come.

Atlanta has arrived at the prime of life. It has become the capital city of the state, pays about one-eighth of the property tax of the state, and it is the economic, financial and distribution center for one-seventh of the population of the United States. It now begins to seriously feel the pangs of over-crowding, and to realize that something needs to be done.

The question before Atlanta of today is, "Shall I pitch up the old structure, tear it apart, and rebuild it with great cost and with much doubt as to its complete fitness for its new service, or shall I relieve the congestion burdens and high upkeep costs through the development of plans for its extension in a new structure and ways that can be fitted with all the up-to-date labor-saving devices, and be made attractive, without the wastes, delays, doubts and mistakes of a reconstruction period, and with only such modifications in the older parts as the new study shows must be brought about at an early date, or that can be left

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to gradually adjust themselves to new conditions through periods of years...

We must not forget, as Atlanta apparently has done in the summing up of its resources that I have seen, the element of recreation values, and the appreciation of and the need of adequate access to the landscape beauty of the region...

**Atlanta Tomorrow**

Atlanta after less than three generations of growth has arrived at the period when it may, by wise planning, assure a more efficient and prosperous future, by avoiding the tremendous overburden of debt that subways, sub-subways, elevated ways, street widenings and public playgrounds are loading on such cities as New York, Chicago and Boston...

One solution of the problem of congestion, as I see it, will be to establish centers far enough out on the spokes of the transportation ways to permit radial roads to again pass off from these secondary centers into the country. At such points, ample provision should be made for parking automobiles and aeroplanes, for telegraph, telephones and wireless facilities, public comfort conveniences and for opportunities to establish such industries and lines of business as can be done to the best advantage. From such centers rapid transit lines would go to the city center that will still continue to be the banking, wholesale, entertainment, hotels and central administrative center.

Such a plan may be aided by the newly-established policy in Boston of giving a return ticket for a 10-cent fare to such outlying points as I have referred to, to encourage people to do their business at these points and return home, instead of continuing over the congested trunk lines to the city center by paying an extra fare.

The radial points about Atlanta may be established at such points as Bolton and DeFoor Ferry, Howell Mills, Buckhead, Wallace, Decatur, Panthersville, Cornell, Hapeville, East Point, and West End. To most of these points several radial roads come together on ridges.

Between or beyond such points should come great trunk line road and rail thoroughfares... The wide ways for such thoroughfares can now be laid down through the unoccupied land, and secured as a gift from the owner on account of the increase in values that they will give to the adjacent land...

If you will examine the government topographic sheet of Atlanta, you will find the detail as to the lay of the land, transportation lines and occupied areas, that will enable you to trace out the lines for thoroughfares through what is now country, and what will be a part of the city in 1950, if it continues to grow as it has been growing.

My National Plan studies in which I have brought together the economic factors of this country's growth in over 200 maps, indicates very clearly that America must, to meet coming automobile traffic, establish great trunk-line thoroughfares along the lines of least resistance.

Atlanta is growing, and will continue to grow, because it is now not only at the railroad cross-road point, but also at national trunk line thoroughfare cross-roads...

Atlanta in its beginning was an exception to the rule, for the homes were bunched around the terminus of the railroad, and it has made a nearly uniform and well-compacted increase on all sides until West End and Inman Park stuck out of the sides. It is a fact, however, that the big towns of today are growing along the sides of the big thoroughfares, and cities that were isolated are now, by reason of the convenient communications that are offered on these thoroughfares merging as continuous lines of cities, as one can see on the trip from Washington to New York. Atlanta with the establishment of similar adequate main traffic lines is likely to grow along such lines and thus merge outlying villages and cities. I believe there ultimately will be a nearly continuous city from Atlanta to Macon, for example...

To my mind, the ideal city plan and its full realization cannot grow out of the work of one or a group of experts, surveying the field and making a report in a book that very few people will take the time to read. It must grow out of community action directed by experienced men...

With a general interest on the part of all citizens and prospective citizens thus created, and with the knowledge thus gained, we can count on intensifying the loyalty and the “get-together” team work that has made Atlanta a leader among cities. Such work cannot be done to the best advantage by the elected city or county officials, who are over-burdened with administrative details and whose period in office is uncertain. The work should be initiated and directed by a body of citizens, acting under a small executive committee, representing the city, the counties, the villages in all that region about Atlanta that must be considered as a part of the greater Atlanta of the future. Such a body will, of course, secure the financial action from town, county and also from state officials. It will soon come to be recognized that such action on the part of Atlanta must be extended to include the state and provide a state plan to be considered in its relation to a national plan...

Warren H. Manning
of North Billerica, MA