Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.: Inspirations for the 21st Century

Thursday, October 10, 2013 • National Building Museum
1890–1895: Before joining his father’s firm, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (Olmsted) studies at Harvard University, apprentices with Daniel Burnham in Chicago on the World’s Columbian Exposition, and works with his father on Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC

1897: As his father’s health deteriorates and following the death of Charles Eliot, Olmsted and his half-brother, John Charles Olmsted (1852–1920), assume co-leadership of the Olmsted firm

1899: Olmsted co-founds the American Society of Landscape Architects

1900–1914: Olmsted establishes the first professional training program in landscape architecture at Harvard University and teaches there

1901: Congress appoints Olmsted to the Senate Park Commission which, in 1902, presents the McMillan Plan for the District of Columbia, the first comprehensive plan for an American city

1903: Death of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903)

1904: The Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore guides the development of the Baltimore region, followed by the 1926 Report and Recommendations on Park Extension for Baltimore

1906: The Army Corps of Engineers commissions Olmsted to design McMillan Park in Washington, D.C.

1907: Olmsted develops a master plan for the 59-acre site of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

1909: The First National Conference on City Planning defines the birth of professional city planning in the U.S. and establishes Olmsted as a leader of the new profession

1909: Olmsted designs Forest Hills Gardens, a pioneering 142-acre commuter suburb in Queens, NY

1910: Comprehensive plan for The Improvement of Boulder, Colorado

1910–1918: Olmsted serves on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

1912: Plan for a 40,000-acre “mountain park” system for metropolitan Denver

1913: Olmsted begins work on the city of Palos Verdes Estates, CA, one of the firm’s most complex projects

1916: Olmsted writes the key language that establishes the mandate of the National Park Service to preserve park resources “…unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”

1917: Olmsted helps establish the American City Planning Institute, forerunner of the American Planning Association, and becomes its first president

1918–1939: Key planning for Acadia National Park in Maine

1920: The death of John Charles leaves Olmsted as sole head of the world’s then-largest landscape architecture firm

1920: John D. Rockefeller commissions Olmsted to design Manhattan’s 67-acre Fort Tryon Park

1921: Olmsted serves on the Advisory Committee on City Planning and Zoning, which develops comprehensive planning and zoning statutes for state governments

1922–1931: Olmsted advises on the preparation of the New York Regional Plan

1925: The Birmingham Park and Recreation Board publishes A Park System for Birmingham

1926–1931: Olmsted serves on the National Capital Park and Planning Commission

1928: Olmsted’s report for land selection and acquisition results in the California State Park system and becomes a model for other states

1928–1956: Olmsted serves on Yosemite National Park’s advisory board

1930: The Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region recommends a 160,000-acre network of parkland and 440 miles of parkways

1930: The Olmsted-Hall Report on Proposed Park Reservations for East Bay Cities addresses the need for parks in the San Francisco Bay region

1940: Survey for the Colorado River Basin to help plan for the utilization of the region’s water resources

1944: Olmsted proposes a master plan for saving the California Redwoods

1949: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. retires from active practice but remains a partner and continues to bring in business until his death in 1957
To live-tweet the event, please include the #FLOJr hashtag

MC: Jack Sullivan, FAAR, FASLA, associate professor, Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, University of Maryland

7:45 am  Registration and refreshments

8:45 am  Welcoming Remarks
  • Chase W. Rynd, president and executive director, National Building Museum
  • Iris Gestram, executive director, National Association for Olmsted Parks

9:00–9:30 am  Keynote—Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.: Bridging Professions and Eras
  • Thomas J. Campanella, PhD, FAAR, associate professor, Cornell University, College of Architecture, Art and Planning
  This lecture explores Olmsted's vital role in connecting the field of landscape architecture and the American urban planning profession, which he helped establish. It also probes Olmsted's critical role in bridging the aesthetic and philosophical fault lines that split the landscape profession in the early 20th century. In that fractious era Olmsted mentored a generation of young designers who would resurrect the profession's legacy of social reform and public works in the 1930s and beyond.

9:30–10:30 am  Park Systems and Provision of Public Space
  • Timothy Davis, PhD, lead historian for park historic structures & cultural landscapes program, U.S. National Park Service
  This lecture investigates Olmsted's pivotal role in the development of Washington, D.C. and in the evolution of American city planning and landscape design. Olmsted's prominent role on the McMillan Commission fundamentally influenced his career and, by extension, the rise of city planning as a professional practice and social force.

10:30–10:45 am  Break and refreshments

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*Presented in memory of Morton “Jerry” Baum, a friend and longtime trustee of the National Association for Olmsted Parks. Jerry was a passionate advocate for the legacy of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore and throughout North America.
10:45 am–12:15 pm  **Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the American City—Panel Session**  
- Moderated by Robert Fishman, PhD, professor of architecture and urban planning, University of Michigan  
- Alexander Garvin, urban planner, adjunct professor, Yale School of Architecture  
- Arley Levee, landscape historian and preservation consultant  
- Peter Pollock, FAICP, urban planner, fellow at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy  
In the early 20th century the city itself became Olmsted's focus as he took a leadership role in the emergent profession of city planning. His city plans sought to coordinate the diverse interests of the American metropolis and provide a framework to guide ambitious infrastructure investment. These plans remain essential documents of the Progressive quest to meld aesthetics, engineering, politics and planning into a consistent urban vision.

12:15–1:10 pm  **Lunch**

1:10–1:40 pm  **Keynote—Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Profession of Landscape Architecture**  
- Laurie D. Olin, FASLA, landscape architect  
Building on his father’s legacy, Olmsted was largely responsible for developing landscape architecture as a profession, for its rapid evolution as a university course, and for the development of city planning as a profession and academic degree program. We are the inheritors today of a legacy of physical projects, government policy, academic fields, and professional methods Olmsted created and nurtured. A survey of his work reads like a blueprint for the field and a summary of contemporary activity and ambitions in academic departments and professional offices, as landscape architects once more are working at all scales on urban infrastructure, resource management, and design. The talk discusses examples of current practice and the curricula and political jousting in academia around “Landscape Urbanism”, concluding that the breadth of Olmsted’s vision remains both pertinent and much in play in the field today.

1:40–2:00 pm  **Designing Design: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Creation of the Landscape School at Harvard University**  
- Elizabeth Hope Cushing, PhD, landscape historian  
By the end of the 19th century landscape architecture was slipping out of the shadow of architectural practice, seeking to become an independent field. The time for a professional landscape architecture program had arrived and Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, decided it was his institution that would best serve that demand. He also resolved that it was Olmsted Jr. whom he wished to establish such a course of study. Olmsted’s decision to take up the mantle made him a powerful force in training the next generation of landscape architects in America.

2:00–3:30 pm  **Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.: Nature, People and Places—Panel Session**  
- Moderated by Dr. Catherine Ross, professor of city and regional planning and director, Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development, Georgia Institute of Technology  
This session draws on Olmsted's continuing contribution to the building of park systems. Desiring not to separate the park from activities of the city or place, Olmsted designed landscapes to be assimilated into the built environment. His commitment to integrating and conserving the naturally occurring features of a place undergirds many of today’s plans focusing on the design of the whole from the city to the region.

**The New York Regional Plan**  
- Robert Yaro, president, Regional Plan Association  
In 1929, the Regional Plan Association (RPA) published the world's first metropolitan strategic plan to accommodate a doubling of the New York Region's population by 1965, while preserving its natural resources and improving quality of life. It hired Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to oversee the project.
Olmsted Jr. to plan an ambitious network of regional and state parks, and prepare zoning bylaws to protect the suburbs’ farm and forest land. By 1941, the New York Region developed the nation's largest network of state and regional parks around RPA’s plan and Olmsted's vision, creating precedents for conservation strategies in metropolitan areas across postwar America.

Comparing Park Systems in Louisville and Birmingham: As Built, and As Envisioned

- Dan Jones, PhD, chairman and CEO, 21st Century Parks
- Philip Morris, Honorary ASLA, former executive editor of Southern Living Magazine
- Eric Tamulonis, ASLA, LEED AP, principal, Wallace Roberts Todd LLC

Olmsted helped systematize municipal park and recreation planning. Building on his father’s 1893 system plan for Louisville, he provided a finer grain of public amenity through community parks and recreation grounds. Using a comprehensive, statistically-based approach, he created a system plan for Birmingham, addressing long-term regional growth and recreation needs. Both cities recently expanded ambitiously upon their Olmsted systems in ways that reinforce the legacy and provide lessons for other communities.

3:30–3:45 pm  Break and refreshments

3:45–5:15 pm  The Politics of Planning—Panel Session

- Moderated by Timothy Mennel, senior acquisitions editor, University of Chicago Press
- Dan Kildee, Congressman, 5th District, Michigan
- Karen Walz, FAICP, principal, Strategic Community Solutions

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. lived in an era of big plans, and his legacy lies in the large-scale accomplishments that still define many of our landscapes. The panel explores how planners and other practitioners can build on Olmsted's work and enact bold, wide-ranging plans that address contemporary challenges and help build confidence in governments and planning mechanisms. Panelists discuss large-scale collaborative planning projects and challenges at various levels of government.

5:15 pm  Closing Remarks

5:30 pm  Conference concludes

For symposium speaker bios, additional information on Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Olmsted firm, and to register for Part II of the symposium, please visit www.olmsted.org.

Special thanks to the following individuals who provided invaluable input in the conference content and agenda:

Symposium Planning Committee: Iris Gestram, National Association for Olmsted Parks, Committee Chair; Jon Christensen, UCLA Institute of the Environment & Sustainability; William Deverell, Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West; Maureen Joseph, National Park Service; Paul Killmer, National Building Museum; Arleyn Levee; Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; Timothy Mennel, University of Chicago Press; Christy O’Hara, California Polytechnic State University, NAOP Trustee; Ryan Scherzinger, American Planning Association.

Advisors: Charles Beveridge, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Project; Charles Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Ethan Carr, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, NAOP Trustee; Dena Kennett; Scott Kratz, National Building Museum; Richard Lukas, The Trust for Public Land.
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Symposium Scholarships are provided by:
Friends of Fairsted, Brookline, MA, supporting Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, NPS
Scholarship recipient: Amanda Rookey, MLA student at University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks & Landscapes, Baltimore, MD
Scholarship recipient: Laura Stella, MLA student at Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD

Esley Hamilton, St. Louis County Parks, St. Louis, MO, and NAOP Trustee
Scholarship recipient: Justin Scherma, visiting assistant professor at Sam Fox School of Design, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Susan Klaus, Richmond, VA, Trustee at Library of American Landscape History
Scholarship recipient: Katie Schank, PhD student in American Studies at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

Darwina Neal, Washington, D.C.
Scholarship recipient: Katie Kovalchik, BLA student at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

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