Volume 8: The Early Boston Years, 1882–1890
Scheduled for Publication in 2012

Background
Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) was the founder of the profession of landscape architecture in America and the designer and planner of hundreds of landscape commissions across the country, including many of the world's most important city parks. He was also an outstanding public intellectual and advocate who played a significant role in many of the critical social and environmental issues of his day. These included the abolition of slavery and preservation of the federal Union, the improvement of quality of life in urban areas, the improvement of public education, and the preservation of treasures of natural scenery through creation of scenic reservations and national parks. The Olmsted Papers are an invaluable resource of personal and professional papers and provide a unique perspective on American society and institutions in the nineteenth century.

From its inception in 1972, The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers Project has undertaken to identify the most significant of these writings and to make them available to the public in context in an attractive, well illustrated 12-volume format.

Today, the Olmsted Papers Project is within sight of achieving this goal. Volumes 1 through 7 and Supplementary Series Volume 1 have been published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Together, these volumes present the most significant of Olmsted's writings from 1840 to 1882, as well as major reports on public parks drawn from his whole career.

Editorial work is now underway on Volume 8 and Supplementary Series Volume 2. Since 2007, the Project has been under the fiscal sponsorship of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, which provides administrative and financial assistance to the Project and is managing the campaign to complete the 12-volume series.

Volume 8 of the Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted will contain the most significant letters, reports, and newspaper and journal articles written by Olmsted between 1882 and 1890. Scheduled for publication by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2012, it will bring to light correspondence and plans from Olmsted's many works in the Boston area and will document projects throughout the country that the firm created during its first years in Brookline. This volume covers a critical period in Olmsted's life during which he relocated to Brookline, Massachusetts, and established Fairsted, his family home and professional office at 99 Warren Street (today the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site). This is the next to last textual volume of the Olmsted Papers Project and will feature, as with all the volumes, extensive editorial annotations and commentary covering key topics including:

The Emerald Necklace

The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted sets a benchmark for scholarly rigor and usability in published documentary collections.
—David Scobey in H-Net Reviews
The Profession of Landscape Architecture

The 1880s were a period in which Olmsted’s office helped institutionalize landscape architecture, and Olmsted’s statements on theory and practice at this time are particularly significant. Several documents in Volume 8 concerning the Boston/Brookline park system reveal major aspects of his practice of the profession.

The Back Bay Fens provided a remarkably ingenious solution of a series of public health issues, while creating a distinctive public recreation ground. His concept for the Muddy River stands as his most fully realized proposal for preservation of an urban riverway as public greenspace, and his plans for Franklin Park included his most extensive subordination of architecture into the landscape. His proposals for reforestation of the Boston Harbor islands were his most ambitious program for seaside scenic preservation, while his plans for Charlesbank provided a promenade on which to escape the summer heat of nearby tenements, as well as extensive gymnastic grounds for women, men and children.

The rejection of contemporary Victorian gardens, with their elaborate floral beds and excessively ornamental features, runs through much of Olmsted’s writing in this volume. The distinction between landscape architecture and gardening, between “design” and “decoration” was a crucial element of the profession he developed during his Boston years.

U.S. Capitol Grounds

Olmsted’s design for the U.S. Capitol Grounds also continued during this period. Although much of the landscape he designed had been completed by 1882, the great marble terrace Olmsted proposed for the west side of the Capitol had yet to be built, and six documents in the volume describe the efforts to fund, refine, and build the terrace that completed the Capitol Grounds project.

Landscape Design for Semi-Arid Regions

Included in Volume 8 are letters to Leland Stanford regarding Stanford University where Olmsted argues...
for a design and plantings specific to the terrain and climate of California. Olmsted’s concern for developing approaches to landscape design suitable to the American West’s climatic and geographic conditions went back to 1863–1865, when he and his family lived on the Mariposa Estate in California and he designed the campus of the College of California in Berkeley and drew up a remarkable plan for a system of public recreation grounds in San Francisco. Olmsted understood that park-like scenery, featuring expansive greenswards or other vegetation that depended on wetter conditions, would not be appropriate or desirable in semi-arid regions.

Volume 8 presents documents relating to Olmsted’s collaboration with Henry Hobson Richardson in Massachusetts, particularly for the Boston Park Commission and for the Ames family at North Easton. Other documents concern the design of major public landscapes in other states, including Belle Isle in Detroit, the Rochester (New York) park system, and collaboration with Calvert Vaux on the design of Morningside Park in Manhattan and the Niagara Reservation. Other documents in the volume describe Olmsted’s most important campus designs, for the Lawrenceville School (New Jersey) and Stanford University. Also included are ten articles that Olmsted published during this period on a variety of topics relating to landscape architecture, scenic preservation, and public health.

View in Back Bay Fens, Boylston Street Bridge in distance. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

In the 1880s, the Emerald Necklace was the most fully realized example of Olmsted’s vision for how a diverse typology of designed landscapes could make American cities more healthy, functional, and beautiful. With form following function, Olmsted’s elegant solution to a public health crisis created a park system that continues to this day to provide a respite for people from all walks of life. We look forward to the publication of Volume 8: The Early Boston Years and its invaluable documentation of Boston’s significant share of the Olmsted legacy.

—Julie Crockford, President, Emerald Necklace Conservancy

Sources Of Support
The work of the Olmsted Papers Project has been aided by the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, the National Park Service staff at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts, and in-kind support from the University of Virginia. The Project has received substantial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Trust for the Humanities, and other private foundations and individuals.

We still need to raise significant funds to complete work on Volume 8 by December 2011, when the manuscript is due to Johns Hopkins University Press. A detailed budget for Volume 8 is available upon request.

The Volume Editors
Series Editor Charles E. Beveridge holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has been an editor and series editor of the Frederick Law Papers since 1973. Dr. Beveridge has written, lectured, and consulted widely on Olmsted and his work, and is recognized as a leading authority on the subject.

Associate editor Ethan Carr holds an MLA from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and a Ph.D. in Landscape Architecture from the Edinburgh College of Art. He is the author of two books on the history of the National Park Service and has written and lectured widely on the history of landscape architecture. Dr. Carr is associate professor and holder of the Reuben Rainey Endowed Chair in the History of Landscape Architecture.
Architecture in the School of Architecture, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Associate editor Amanda Gagel holds a Ph.D. in Editorial Studies from Boston University. She has completed scholarly editions of the poetry of Amy Levy (1861–1889) and Selected Letters of Vernon Lee (1856–1935).

Preserving The Olmsted Legacy

Olmsted’s legacy is manifest in hundreds of parks, college campuses, residential communities, and private residences that are still used by millions of Americans. This heritage of design-on-the-ground has suffered over the years from neglect and misunderstanding. Government officials, historic preservationists, design professionals, and the general public can only know what those designs were meant to be, and restore them intelligently, if they have available the words that Olmsted used to describe and explain them. In that respect, Olmsted’s unpublished papers are a crucial part of his legacy to the nation as a landscape architect.

The Olmsted Papers project also helps expand our understanding of landscape architecture. The series makes available the concepts of land use, conservation, and public open space that provided the basis for policy relating to these issues in the formative post-Civil War generation and that have influenced generations of designers since that time.

The Olmsted Papers Project furthers understanding of and appreciation for landscape architecture. In particular, Volume 8: The Early Boston Years will bring to light Olmsted’s concepts of land use, conservation, and public open space that continue to guide and inspire landscape architects and urban planners.

—Ray Dunetz, President, Boston Society of Landscape Architects

National Association For Olmsted Parks (NAOP)

NAOP is honored to serve as the steward of The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers Project. For 30 years, the National Association for Olmsted Parks has raised awareness of the importance of the Olmsted legacy among public officials, community leaders, landscape design professionals and academics. Based in Washington, D.C., NAOP’s programs include scholarship and publication of key reference materials, advocacy for historical park restoration, and technical assistance to local preservation efforts. NAOP’s work has played a critical role in documenting and protecting historic landscapes while strengthening the network of communities working together to preserve these valuable places.