Volume 9: 
The Last Great Projects, 1890–1895

Scheduled for publication in 2015

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 writings and provide a unique perspective on American society and institutions in the nineteenth century.

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

Today, the Olmsted Papers Project is within sight of achieving this goal. Volumes 1–7 and Supplementary Series Volume 1 have been published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Together, they present the most significant of Olmsted’s writings from 1840–1882, as well as major reports on public parks drawn from his whole career. The next volume, Supplementary Series Volume 2 has been delivered to the press for publication in 2012. Work will also begin in 2011 on Supplementary Series Volume 3, and on Volume 9.

The final chronologically arranged volume in the series, Volume 9 will present the last stage of Olmsted's career, with a firm that included as partners his former students Henry Sargent Codman and Charles Eliot and his two sons John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. During this time Olmsted concentrated his energy on his two last great commissions: the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, and Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina. As in previous editions, this volume will feature extensive editorial annotations and commentary covering key topics including:

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Beginning in 1890, Olmsted was the site planner of the “great white city” of the Columbian Exposition, in a section of the South Park of Chicago for which he and Calvert Vaux had prepared a design in 1871. His correspondence and reports for this project contain a particularly rich record of his design concepts for the Exposition, which was the most influential example of city planning of the century for Americans and...
directly influenced the McMillan Commission’s plan for Washington, D.C. and the National Mall, and other city planning of the City Beautiful movement. Volume 9 will also present documents relating to Olmsted’s redesigning of Chicago’s Jackson Park and the Midway Plaisance after 1893 and his determination to make the South Park the “finest domestic boating park in the world.”

Biltmore Estate

Olmsted’s plans for the grounds of residences included the large estates of very rich men, something that appears contradictory to his concern for community. But there were two aspects of his designing of private estates that reflected his broader concerns. Whenever possible he used the private wealth of his patrons to serve a public purpose. This is most evident in his work at Biltmore. There Olmsted convinced his patron, George W. Vanderbilt, to create something that even the federal government had not yet attempted—an extensive demonstration of scientific forestry. At Olmsted’s suggestion, Vanderbilt engaged Gifford Pinchot to direct this operation, and purchased the thousands of acres of Pisgah Forest that came in time to be owned by the nation and operated by the U.S. Forest Service as the “birthplace of American forestry.”

Olmsted also planned what was to be the largest arboretum in the world, an experimentation area for discovering the full range of possible plant materials to be used in the practice of landscape architecture in the American South. The densely planted approach road at Biltmore was to serve a public purpose as well—a demonstration of the viability of a landscape style strikingly different from the expensively maintained bedding-out of colorful flowers and exotic plants so popular at the time. Near the Biltmore mansion, Olmsted planned a series of “outdoor rooms,” each with a separate character and function. The one walled area that he called a garden was intended to provide a demonstration for American visitors of the French jardin potager or kitchen garden.

Boston, Massachusetts

During the years 1890–95 Olmsted continued his involvement in the design and construction of the Boston park system. Volume 9 contains key statements of his design intent for the remarkable rustic structures in Franklin Park, as well as discussion concerning numerous other parks in the system.

Rochester, New York

Olmsted was closely involved in the designing of the parks of Rochester in the years 1888 to 1892. His special interest was the opportunity to plan the parks along the Genesee River and so protect the scenery of the river edge for some seven miles. Genesee Valley Park protected two miles of that scenery above the falls, while

We look forward to the arrival of Volume 9 that will showcase Olmsted’s rich legacy of Chicago parks, especially the grounds for the World’s Columbian Exposition that so influenced future landscape design in Chicago and around the country. This volume will provide invaluable context for critical park restoration efforts.

— Gerald W. Adelmann, President & CEO, Openlands, Chicago
Genesee Valley Parkway preserved the eastern bank two miles farther. Below the falls, Seneca Park made a scenic reservation of three miles of the Genesee gorge.

**Louisville, Kentucky**

In 1891 Olmsted began the planning of a park and parkway system for Louisville. Like Rochester, Louisville intended to carry out an ambitious program for a city of its size. Local park advocates had selected three sites, and Olmsted generally approved of their selection: the site west of the city on the bluffs of the Ohio River below the rapids became Shawnee Park, and the hill south of the city became Iroquois Park; but for a park in the eastern section he chose the bowl formed by hills on either side of Beargrass Creek—Cherokee Park, where he designed the pastoral landscape that was his greatest concern.

Olmsted urged simplicity of treatment of each site in keeping with the character of its scenery, and proposed to plan each park for a distinctive landscape experience. He counseled that it was important to supply “suitable means for making the enjoyment of the scenery of each park available to those escaping from the city, in the form of walks, roads and places of rest, shelter and refreshment …” Finally, he advised, “If gifts are offered you of objects simply ornamental, by all means decline them. Admit nothing to your parks that is not fitting and helpful to their distinguishing purpose.”

**Other Documents**

Volume 9 will also contain correspondence and proposals concerning the development of the park systems of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Kansas City, Missouri, Wilmington, Delaware, and Hartford, Connecticut. The volume will present some of the remarkable retrospective letters Olmsted wrote to Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer and to his son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Other documents describe such varied projects as Olmsted's proposals for landscape architecture in the semi-arid American West at Stanford University and near Denver, Colorado; street plans for Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Reservation at Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York; and commentary on issues ranging from the changes in Prospect Park introduced by Stanford White to the state of landscape design in England and France. Also included will be several undated and unfinished writings on the history and principles of landscape design.

**Sources of Support**

The work of the Olmsted Papers Project has been aided by the staff of 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 (Volume 8) and from Franklin & Marshall College, sponsor of Volume 9. 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.
The National Association for Olmsted Parks is currently seeking funds to complete the work on Volume 9, and the remaining volumes in the series. A detailed budget 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 Olmsted 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.

Volume 9 Editor David Schuyler is the Arthur and Katherine Shadek Professor of the Humanities and professor of American Studies at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania and chair of the Olmsted Papers Project advisory board. Dr. Schuyler holds a Ph.D in History from Columbia University and is the author of several books on the history of urban landscapes. In addition, he served as co-editor of Volumes 2, 3, and 6 of the Olmsted Papers.

**Preserving the Olmsted Legacy**
Olmsted’s legacy is manifest in hundreds of parks, college campuses, residential communities and private residences that are still enjoyed 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 thoughtfully, 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.

**National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP)**
The National Association for Olmsted Parks serves as the sponsor of The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers Project. For more than 30 years, NAOP has raised awareness of the importance of the Olmsted legacy among public officials, community leaders, landscape design professionals, and academics. NAOP’s programs include scholarship and publication of key reference materials, advocacy for historical park restoration, and technical assistance to local preservation efforts. The Olmsted Papers have provided the intellectual capital for many of NAOP’s advocacy and restoration efforts. Completion of these volumes is an essential ingredient in our work to document and protect historic landscapes.

This final volume of The Olmsted Papers will bring to life the rich history behind Olmsted’s last great commission, the Biltmore Estate. His vision and contributions at Biltmore went beyond merely designing a beautiful and picturesque landscape of pleasure grounds and gardens. Olmsted developed a comprehensive plan that included extensive land restoration, a model farm and nursery, and the country’s first scientifically managed forest on a large scale, manifested and continued today at Biltmore.”

—Bill Alexander, Landscape and Forest Historian, The Biltmore Company

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Scene in Muddy River, Boston and Brookline, c. 1920. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site