Branch Brook Park - An Historical Perspective

Branch Brook Park did not just happen. As you enjoy its open meadows surrounded by century old oaks, fish in its tranquil lakes and stroll through a flurry of cherry blossom petals, know that this magnificent urban park was put together with a vision and a design.

The vision came in the 1860s from the City of Newark Park Commissioners who wanted to provide accessible public grounds for recreation and relaxation open to all citizens.

The original design and the recommendation of the site for Branch Brook Park came from the firm of Messrs. Olmsted, Vaux & Co. of New York, landscape architects extraordinaire. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux had already completed the design for New York’s Central Park and Brooklyn’s Prospect Park. The City of Newark selected this premier landscape architecture firm to lay the groundwork for Branch Brook Park. Their “Report on a Site for a Park at Newark” (hereinafter “1867 Report”) is contained in a 36 page detailed handwritten document which was submitted to the City on October 8, 1867.

This “1867 Report” discusses how the design intent behind the great public parks of Europe influenced the work of Olmsted & Vaux. Olmsted & Vaux had every intention to create parks in America as magnificent as the public parks in European cities, such as Hyde Park in London, the Phoenix in Dublin and the Prater in Vienna. In the “1867 Report” Olmsted and Vaux stated that: “the central idea of a large public park is manifestly that of a work of art...designed at the outset as all other works of art are designed with the intention of producing, through the exercise of the natural perception, a certain effect upon the mind and the character of those who approach it”.

The Olmsted & Vaux philosophy of parkmaking extended beyond merely setting aside existing green space for picnics. These gentlemen were about the creation of a total environment and experience. They were intent upon creating an atmosphere in a location which was convenient to the inhabitants of the City.

When selecting the site for Branch Brook Park, accessibility of the park to the public and the existing topography were the critical considerations. After accepting the invitation of the Board of Commissioners of the Newark Park, and inspecting several possible locations, Olmsted & Vaux recommended the location which today comprises the Southern and Middle Divisions of the present day Branch Brook Park. Thus, the boundaries of our present day Branch Brook Park were drawn by our nation's master Park Builders over 130 years ago.

After accepting the Olmsted & Vaux “1867 Report”, Newark’s business leaders recommended purchasing 700 acres in the northern section of the City for over $1 million. Such a large expenditure required the approval of the New Jersey State Legislature. It took almost 28 years to secure acceptance for this idea and to move the plans for Branch Brook Park off the drawing boards and into action. Acquiring and dedicating land for public park purposes was a new idea in the late 1800s. Even the legalities of creating public parks were not too clear at that time. Finally, in 1895 the New Jersey State Legislature passed the first law of its kind in the country enabling the creation of the Essex County Park Commission and empowering the Commission to create a countywide park system.

At the time of the creation of America’s First County Park Commission in Essex County on March 5, 1895, there were only 25 acres of land dedicated to park use throughout the entire county. This land consisted primarily of small plots of ground where monuments to national heroes or war dead were placed. No parks as we know them today existed anywhere in Essex County.

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Essex County holds the distinction of establishing the first county park commission in the country. The Commission's priority was to develop a concept for an overall countywide system of park and parkway improvements. As a result, one of the first acts of the Commissioners in April 1895 was to hire the Landscape Architect and Engineering firm of John Bogart and Nation F. Barrett, noted for their wide experience in park work throughout the country. However, after receiving a series of designs from Bogart and Barrett, the Park Commission decided in 1898 to retain the Olmsted Brothers Firm to handle the design work for Branch Brook Park and the rest of the county park system.

Since the idea for a "Park at Newark" had been alive for almost 30 years by 1895, it is no surprise that Branch Brook Park was the first park developed by the Park Commission. The creation of Branch Brook Park was begun on June 15, 1895 shortly after the City of Newark had transferred to Essex County almost 60 acres adjacent to the old City Reservoir, and the work in the present Southern Division of the Park was underway. Most of the land surrounding these 60 acres consisted of swamps and.upon houses. The design prepared by Bogart and Barrett served as the basis for development of the Southern Division up until the Olmsted Brothers Firm was retained in 1898. An interesting fact about this land in the Southern Division is that in the years before and during the Civil War, portions of this tract of land served as Camp Prellinghuyen, a large camp used for mustering Northern New Jersey's Union Troops into action, particularly the Thirteenth Regiment.

The Branch Brook Park which we know today consists of 359.72 acres of land and 36.61 acres of waterways. The Park extends approximately 2 miles in length from Route 290 and Clifton Avenue in the south to the Second River and Mill Street in Belleville in the north. The expansion of the Park from its initial 60 acres was accomplished through outright land purchases, but more significantly through generous land donations from private citizens including: Robert F. Ballantine and the estate of Peter H. and John H. Ballantine; Zebulon M. Keen; William A. Righter; Charles William McAndrews; and, Paul Elias Heller.

Prior to its donation to the Park Commission, the land previously owned by Paul Elias Heller served as the eastern terminal of the U.S. Aerial Mail Service for 18 months from 1919-1921. Use by the Mail Service was short-lived after a series of accidents and the rough terrain made the area unsuitable for a landing strip.

The saplings planted in the late 1890s have matured into stately century-old elms, oaks, and sycamores. The specimen trees and plantings, including even bamboo, selected for Branch Brook Park have developed into a truly unique landscape exactly as it was envisioned by the park creators. The Park expanded during the 1920s in the Extension along the Second River. A most generous gift in 1927 of over 2000 flowering cherry blossom trees from Caroline Bamberger Full has provided us with picture perfect memories of Springtime in the Park. Substantial work in the Extension to mold the terrain for the cherry blossom display, to build the brown stone walls and to prepare the river bed was performed by members of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the days of the Depression.

To focus attention on one of the most positive and visible attributes of the City of Newark, two Newarkers: Gary Brian Liss, an environmental engineer, and Kathleen P. Galop, a corporate attorney, founded the Newark Cherry Blossom Festival, Inc. and organized the first Newark Cherry Blossom Festival in 1976. Determined to overcome the continuing negative publicity surrounding the City and committed to preserving the Park, Galop and Liss encouraged dozens of private citizens, organizations and businesses to join together to host a series of events over a 10 day period centered around the blossoming of the cherry trees. The response to this concept was phenomenal and a Festival has been celebrated every year since then - the year 2001 marked the 25th Anniversary of this Festival.

Since the life span of the famed cherry blossom trees is generally not more than 40 years, replacement of the trees is critical to continuation of the spectacular display. On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the initial cherry blossom tree gift, The Newark Cherry Blossom Festival established the Cherry Blossom Tree Fund and raised $10,000 for the purchase of 300 replacement trees. A celebration was hosted by The Newark Museum and members of Caroline Bamberger Fund's family were honored in her name at the festivities.

With a change in the Charter form of government for Essex County in 1978, the Essex County Park Commission was replaced by an agency of county government, the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. Despite this change in administration, Branch Brook Park and the Essex County Park System continued to survive and to serve as the primary recreational refuge.
May Conference Preview

The Olmsted Legacy: Social Consciousness and Environmental Impact

If you haven’t received your conference mailer, let us know at 508-820-7676. Check out the NAOP web site for detailed information (www.olmsted.org).

In 1992, a group of joggers decided to do more than run through Weequahic Park. They decided to stand up for their park (and sit and listen and talk...and put their hands to the land) with the goal of bringing it back to life. At the NAOP Conference hosted by the Weequahic Park Association, you can hear the particular story of Weequahic Park. Speakers and sessions will focus on parks as community assets, historic research, abolitionism and community development, parks and watershed management, support for parks. Short walking tours also included.

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for many citizens from throughout the county. Today the Essex County Park System encompasses almost 6000 acres of public park lands throughout one of New Jersey’s most urbanized counties.

Noteworthy in the history of Branch Brook Park was its placement on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1980 and its placement on the National Register of Historic Places on January 12, 1981. The Nomination was prepared by Kathleen P. Galop, Esq. and submitted under the auspices of The Newark Cherry Blossom Festival, thereby fulfilling its commitment to preserve and protect this very special Park. Coinciding with the 25th Anniversary celebration of The Newark Cherry Blossom Festival in 2001 was the 20th Anniversary of the placement of Branch Brook Park on the National Register of Historic Places. This is a truly prestigious placement which in time will provide extraordinary protection to the integrity and the property of the Park.

In 1995, Branch Brook Park celebrated its Centennial Year and entered its second century facing increased demands upon its open space, its infrastructure and its ecosystem. Over the years many interest groups and organizations, including the Friends of Branch Brook Park, the North Ward Center, The Newark Cherry Blossom Festival and the Greensward Foundation, have championed Branch Brook Park and advocated for its needs.

In 1998 the citizens of Essex County voted to allocate additional funds to create the Open Space and Recreation Trust. As a result, Essex County, has embarked upon the development of a Master Plan for each of the county parks with special attention being paid to Branch Brook Park. Additionally, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs in the year 2000 established an Historical Documents Library and has undertaken the conservation of the oldest original Olmsted maps of the Essex County Parks. In the spring of 2000, the design of Branch Brook Park was recognized by the American Society of Landscape Architects with the presentation of its Centennial Medal noting the Parks historical significance as America’s First County Park.

The Branch Brook Park Alliance was formed in the fall of 1999 by a group of committed individuals and organizations, including the City of Newark, who have come together to work cooperatively with the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. Co-chaired by Barbara Bell Coleman and Patricia Ryan, the focus of the Alliance is to help restore, renew and cooperatively assist in the maintenance of the Park for the enjoyment of Essex County residents and its many visitors from around the world. The goal of the Alliance is to raise public awareness, to support rehabilitation of Branch Brook Park and to insure that the historic Olmsted Brothers Farm landscape design endures well into the new millennium. Foremost among the projects of the Alliance is the preparation of a comprehensive Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) and a Management Plan for Branch Brook Park. This CLR will serve as the first step towards the Park’s restoration. Work on the CLR began early in 2002 when the firm of Rhodeside & Harwell was retained by the Branch Brook Park Alliance.

The 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Cherry Blossom Festival in the Spring 2001 and the 20th Anniversary of the placement of the Park on the National Register of Historic Places marked two significant milestones in the 106 year history of Branch Brook Park. Funds raised by the Branch Brook Park Alliance through this 25th Anniversary Cherry Blossom Festival will be applied to projects to renew and to restore Branch Brook Park and to insure that the vision of the early Newark and Essex County Park Commissioners continues to remain a reality.

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News from Around the Country

New Jersey
Newark/Essex County

Newark/Essex County has the spotlight in this issue of Field Notes because of the NAOP Conference in May. A theater company based in New Jersey has a production called “The Promise of the Park (An Historical Musical Fantasy)” that has been playing quarterly for the past year at The Museum of the City of New York in Manhattan and continues through 2002. This “fantasy” is about the creation and creator of Central Park and his time-travel into the present. The author of the “fantasy” (also the founding director of the company, Theatre in Motion) did a Public Service Scholar internship with the Central Park Conservancy in 1986-87. The performances at The Museum are a result of what the theater calls “a unique collaboration” between the museum (Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street) and the Central Park Urban Park Rangers.

Trenton

The City of Trenton, New Jersey, is celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Cadwalader Park with a four-day extravaganza of free, family-oriented events May 2-5. The 110-acre landscape was created from 1890 to 1892 by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. Cadwalader Park retains his characteristic curvilinear paths and spatial qualities. In the park is Ellarslie, an Italianate villa designed in 1845 by John Notman, now home to the Trenton City Museum. Other features include the elaborate Soldiers and Sailors Monument and a monument to the Roebling family of Brooklyn Bridge fame.

New York
Brooklyn

Prospect Park Alliance broke ground in early September on Phase II of the Parade Grounds restoration. Most of the capital funding for this $15 million, three-phase project comes from the Borough of Brooklyn, Howard Golden, President. On April 26, the Prospect Park Audubon Center opens at the restored Boathouse, which will also serve as the Park visitor center.

Buffalo

The annual meeting of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy was part of a 2-day regional conference in November in Buffalo called Olmsted in the 21st Century. The conference was open to the public and focused on the value of Olmsted parks in today’s cities. Author and professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania, Witold Rybczynski gave a lecture as part of the conference program. A fall semester project involving Cornell University design students may result in the restoration of Riverside Park to its original design. The Conservancy is offering a community urban forestry training program this Spring.

Rochester

Seneca Park is on the List of 10 Groups of Endangered Landscapes issued in February by the Washington, D.C.-based Cultural Landscape Foundation [www.tcl.org] because of the proposed expansion, tripling the size of the zoo located in the park and creating a 650-car parking lot.

Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh

The Schenley Park Visitor Center opened in December after a “rescue” of the near-collapse building and ecological restoration of the eroded landscape behind that took 2 years. This project is the second by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. The first was restoration of the Frick Gatehouse at the Reynolds Street entrance to Frick Park.

Illinois
Riverside (Chicago)

The Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside funded nearly $12,000 worth of trees and plants for planting along the river banks and parkways of Olmsted’s “first suburb” (1868); saw its tree protection ordinance for trees on construction sites on public land passed; and gave $500 rebates to Society members who took part in their Plant-A-Tree program.

Kentucky
Louisville

The River Road Estates of Louisville also appears on the List of 10 Groups of Endangered Landscapes; a proposed multi-laned bridge over the Ohio River would sever the three mile long collection of 21 continuous estates designed by noted landscape architects including the Olmsteds.

Washington
Seattle

Preparations continue for the Spring 2002 NAOP Conference in Seattle April 30 – May 4, 2003. The Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks, in partnership with the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, are celebrating the centennial of John Charles Olmsted’s arrival in Seattle and the start of almost 40 years of Olmsted Brothers’ influence on the landscape and urban development.

NOTE: The newsletters of several conservancies included reflection on parks as places of solace and healing in the aftermath of September 11. The Louisville Conservancy’s Vistas quotes a local newspaper columnist who wrote about “walking off the pain” along the rim of Cherokee Park. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy president kept a September 14-speaking engagement about park restoration and youth programming and found that “in talking about parks restoration, a fostering of community spirit, and a spiritual reconnection with nature, we were discussing some very life-affirming things on a day when life desperately needed a feeling of affirmation.” And the Prospect Park Alliance president wrote “In these uncertain times, the value of our Parks has become even clearer. Immediately following the September 11 attack...our city parks became gathering places for solace and renewal, as they have time and again for the last 100 years.”
In December 2001, the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (NHS) acquired 5.35 acres of adjoining land from the Brookline Land Conservation Trust. The Trust donated the property to the National Park Service in order to ensure preservation of one of the few remaining open fields and woodland environments in Brookline. The acquisition, which was authorized by Congress in 1998, will protect Fairsted's historic viewshed along its southern boundary.

In March the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site and National Association for Olmsted Parks will complete a three-year grant project to develop the Olmsted Research Guide On-line. The Guide, which was funded by the National Center for Preservation and Technology and Training of the National Park Service, will be an Internet-accessible database of information about landscape design records held at Olmsted NHS and the Library of Congress for projects undertaken by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and the Olmsted firm. The Guide is currently being tested by a preliminary user group and will be available to the public in Spring 2002.

The three-year grant funded initial development of the database structure as well as data collection and data entry of Series B (Job correspondence files, 1990-1950) and Series A (Letterbooks, 1884-1999) for the Olmsted Associates records at the Library of Congress. At the same time, Olmsted NHS staff completed data entry for the job-related photograph albums collection and lithograph collection, as well as a significant portion of the Plans and Drawings collection. Collections at Olmsted NHS slated next for documentation and cataloguing include the firm’s post 1949 correspondence and the collection of planting lists maintained by the firm. As other collections are catalogued at Olmsted NHS, they will be added to the Guide.

In 2001, Olmsted NHS marked its twentieth anniversary with a series of celebratory events beginning with NAOP’s arrival in Boston in May. On July 4 Olmsted NHS sponsored a special Olmsted Day Celebration in partnership with the Boston Parks and Recreation, Jamaica Pond Project, Boston Community Partners, and the New England Aquarium. Drawing thousands of people from Boston’s diverse neighborhoods, the event included a wide selection of programs at Jamaica Pond and nearby Fairsted. Over 100 families opted to participate in a newly developed Family Landscape Exploration Program that included interactive activities designed to help adults and children appreciate and understand the landscape at both locations. Renowned storyteller Jay O'Callahan capped the anniversary year with a performance of “Pine Hill Stories” during which he wove his experiences of growing up in Brookline near Fairsted with the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted.

The Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in collaboration with Olmsted NHS is currently preparing a Record of Treatment to document the restored Fairsted landscape. The Record of Treatment will document implemented changes to the landscape to provide an accurate historical record. Olmsted NHS is one of the first national parks to have completed both its cultural landscape report and implemented landscape treatment work. Recommendations for long term maintenance of the restored Fairsted grounds are being addressed in a separate document, a Preservation Management Plan, also currently underway.

Technical Information Series

Working in partnership with the National Association of Olmsted Parks, the Olmsted Center has initiated the development of a new technical information series titled Clippings. The focus of this series will be on preserving historic landscape character through the application of specific management and maintenance techniques. The first publication in the series is Tree Planting Specifications, a brief technical bulletin illustrating how standard tree planting techniques are adapted to meet preservation and management goals for cultural landscapes. Completion of the bulletin is scheduled to coincide with the National Association of Olmsted Parks' annual meeting in May.

Arborist Training Program

The Olmsted Center recently graduated five participants in the Arborist Training Program. The program is an eighteen-month career development curriculum that enhances the capacity of parks to protect and preserve trees in cultural landscapes. The program includes classroom and home study requirements, along with field training projects designed to build practical skills. Successful completion of the program qualifies the participants for professional certification through the International Society of Arboriculture and state certification programs.
A Reply from The Architect of the Capitol

The Architect of the Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

December 7, 2001

Faye B. Harwell
Morton J. Baum
Co-Chairs
National Association for Olmsted Parks
19 Harrison Street
Framingham, MA 01702-2313

Dear Ms. Harwell:

Thank you for your letter of September 17, 2001, regarding the design of the Capitol Visitor Center. I appreciate the efforts that your organization has made to assist us in developing the best possible design for this historic addition to the U.S. Capitol and I am glad that you recognize the critical importance of the CVC project, especially in light of the events of September 11.

As you consider this response to your letter, it is particularly important that you also recognize that I am charged with balancing a number of complex and often competing needs for this project. Some of the conflicts are obvious. On the one hand, the U.S. Capitol belongs to the people of this country whose rights to visit the building and participate in the process of government should not be impinged. On the other hand, the building, as both a symbol and the home of the institution it represents, must be protected from the threat of attack. More subtle is the conflict between the need for providing appropriate visitor facilities and our desire to integrate those facilities into the historic context of the Capitol and its landscape. I firmly believe that the design for the Capitol Visitor Center strikes the best possible balance between these competing needs.

My staff and our design consultants have considered and analyzed the specific points raised in your letter, and we have taken some action to modify the design in response to your comments. In addition, we are still in the process of developing a full report on the historic landscape - an effort that I hope will soon be completed. Formal completion of the report notwithstanding, the research that has been completed has shaped the direction of the design and has been a useful supplement to the research that had already been done by the design team. With regard to your letter, I have the following responses to the recommendations made therein.

Consider relocating the entrances away from East Capitol Street. For over ten years the Architect of the Capitol has been studying all manner of entry into the Capitol building and into different versions of the proposed visitor center. I am convinced that the current design of the CVC entrance is the superior solution. It strikes the proper balance between providing a graceful entry to the Capitol and respecting the historic context of the original building and the grounds. It is true that the entrance ramps and walks are wider than in previous designs, but the extra width provides the gracious entry that the facility deserves. The East Capitol Street extension and the ovals, which truly define the character of the East Grounds, remain at grade and virtually unchanged.

Reduce the overall size of the floor area within the project. The size of the proposed building has been reviewed and approved by the Congress through the Capitol Preservation Commission. It is based on a program that meets the specific needs of the ever-increasing volume of visitors that must be accommodated as well as the needs of the Congress. I do not believe that the Congress will entertain any significant modification of the program, nor am I persuaded that such a modification should be recommended. As you may be aware, the funding of the project is no longer an issue as the CVC has now been fully funded through a combination of Congressional appropriations and private fund-raising.

Relocate new utilities out of the ovals. The design team has spent significant time and resources investigating the placement of electrical vaults and air intakes/exhausts. As I hope you realize from our July meeting, that effort yielded significant results when we determined that the

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outside air intakes for the CVC could be located atop the Capitol rather than in new structures that would have been built on the grounds. Since that meeting we have also revisited the location of the electrical vaults and have concluded that they must remain as planned within the ovals. I must point out that we are carefully designing these at-grade structures and the surrounding landscape to be as seamless as possible. Furthermore, all construction within the ovals is being designed so that it does not preclude planting deep-rooted vegetation in areas so designated for such planting by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.

Reconsider the paving design. There is real merit in your recommendation and I have therefore worked with the design team to clarify both the intention of the paving design and the specific use of historic paving materials. I trust that you will agree that our revised approach is a significant improvement.

A Cultural Landscape Report should be prepared for the entire grounds of the Capitol. I agree that a thorough report on the historic landscape of the Capitol would be a beneficial resource for the future management of the grounds and planning has begun for such a study in the near future. With specific regard to the CVC design, the report has not been finalized but the draft materials we have received so far and the review meetings held to date have been very informative and helpful in the design process. I do not expect the report to contain formal recommendations per se, but I will be happy to share it with you once it has been submitted and reviewed by my staff and our landscape design consultants.

In conclusion, I sincerely value the input and opinion of the NAOP and have modified the CVC plans as appropriate to take those concerns into account. I hope you will recognize the wisdom of proceeding with the design as we have refined it and as the Congress has approved and funded it. As you are aware, Frederick Law Olmsted himself recognized the role of the landscape in the overall context of the Capitol complex and the business of government. In the AOC Annual Report of 1882 he wrote to my predecessor, Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark “The ground is, in design part of the Capitol but in all respects subsidiary to its central structure. The primary motives are therefore that, first, of convenience of business of and with Congress...and, second that of supporting and presenting to advantage a great national monument.”

I share Mr. Olmsted's vision for the Capitol and the design for the Capitol Visitor Center is true to that vision. I trust you will agree, and I thank you for sharing your perspectives on this most important addition to the U.S. Capitol.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Hartman, FAIA
Architect of the Capitol
Doc No. 010921-09-01CVC
New Publications

Writings about Olmsted and parks comes not only in books, but also in chapters of books with broader subjects, in periodicals, and in newspapers. The publications below fall into these categories; we're playing catch-up by starting back in 1999.

The Veil of Nature: H.H. Richardson and Frederic Law Olmsted

By Francis R. Kowalsky, in H. H. Richardson: The Architect, His Peers, and Their Era. Edited by Maureen Meister. 153 pp. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999. $24.95. North Easton, Massachusetts became the Mount Parnassus of Richardson studies in 1996 when a colloquium there featured all the best-known scholars in this field. This book was the result, a deluxe production with extra-wide margins and a velvet cover. Francis Kowalsky, known for his biographies of Frederick Clifton Withers and Calvert Vaux, contributed a review of the professional and personal association of Richardson and Olmsted from 1865 until Richardson's death in 1886, when Olmsted, older by 15 years, found himself in the position of untangling his Brookline neighbor's financial affairs. Kowalsky notes in particular Richardson's series of suburban railroad stations, for which Olmsted provided park-like natural settings, in contrast with the municipal flowerbeds of most station "landscaping."

Critique: Olmsted's informal landscapes fit far better in a chaotic democracy than their formalist counterparts

By Witold Rybczynski, Architectural Record, Vol. 187, no. 11 (Nov. 1999), pp. 29 & 30. Rybczynski's book A Clearing in the Distance accounted for many of the mentions of Olmsted in periodical literature in 1999. In this brief piece, the author himself attempts to define the Olmsted style by comparing the 1885 plan for Lawrenceville School in New Jersey with the 1920s extension by Delano & Aldrich. He finds that "Olmsted's picturesque and informal approach reflects a better understanding of America's pluralistic, often chaotic society."

APT Bulletin, The Journal of Preservation Technology published a special issue in 1999. "Landscape Preservation Comes of Age," edited by Shary Page Berg. Included were three articles about Olmsted resources:

Leimert Park's Plaza: Cultural Landscape Rehabilitation in Community Revitalization

By Noel Dorsey Vernon and Charles E. Loggins, pp. 9-14. A small formal plaza originally designed in the 1920s is being rehabilitated as the centerpiece of a larger plan to re-vitalize the business core of a stable middle-class African-American neighborhood in Los Angeles.

A Case Study in Ecosystems and Preservation: Lessons Learned from New York's Central Park

By Ian Firth and Marianne Cramer, pp. 15-20. Making the Ravine and Harlem Meer useful parts of Central Park after years of "predominantly anti-social and often destructive" activity there demonstrated that preservation has to be an ongoing engagement and not a one-time treatment.

Restoring Landscape Character at Fair midfield, the Frederic Law Olmsted National Historic Site

By Lauren G. Meier, pp. 29-36. This summary of the splendid restoration of the Olmsted site in Brookline by the senior technical advisor at the Olmsted Center, reprints the treatment plan drawing and includes a bibliography. Meier gives special attention to the need to re-establish an equilibrium between the tree canopy and the understory plantings.

The magazine Landscape Architecture, as might be expected, frequently features Olmsted work:

On the Boards

By Paul Bennett. Landscape Architecture, April 1999, p. 18. Peter Lindsay Schaudt, ASLA, has been commissioned to design a memorial garden at the west end of the Midway Plaisance, the linear park connecting Jackson and Washington Parks on Chicago's south side. His challenge is to reconcile the open vistas intended by Olmsted with the wall-like presence of Lorado Taft's Fountain of Time.

Practice: Care of Character

By Kim A. O'Connell, Landscape Architecture, June 2000, pp. 28-35. The American Society of Landscape Architects gave the restoration of Fair midfield a merit award in design in 1999, but only for the quality of the restoration, because the original "never really was much of a landscape design" in the words of one of the jurors. Another juror greeted the complex work needed to return the
vines to the house with the complaint, "they put the damn wisteria back."

Details: A New Twist on Trellis Design

By Meg Callins. Landscape Architecture, June 2000, p. 20. Following up on O'Connell's article above, Callins explains the clever system that was devised to permit vines to envelop the south facade of the house at Fairlawn while permitting needed inspection and maintenance.

Just Rewards: With assistance from the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, cultural landscapes get their due

By Kim A. O'Connell. Landscape Architecture, December 2000, pp. 34-37, 82-84. The work of the Olmsted Center extends far beyond the achievements of the Olmsted firm, and this article reviews some of it, ranging from a plan for Liberty Island to the history of fruit trees.

Prospect Park: This urban garden in Brooklyn is being restored to its former glory

By Catherine M. Brown. The American Gardener, September/October 2000, pp. 49-52. Prospect Park is one of the most inspiring success stories of Olmsted park restoration, and NAOP stalwarts Tupper Thomas and Mary Fox deserve much of the credit. This "recreation of an entire forest ecosystem in the middle of a city" as Michael Crewdson calls it, is also Brooklyn's back yard.

Rants and Raves

By Gina Crandell, et al. Land Forum 10 (2001), pp. 34-37. A course at Harvard Design School called "Dredging Dredging" has produced this collection of five brief but pointed critiques of current restoration plans for Muddy River in the Back Bay Fens of Boston. Crandell, the course's instructor, states the thrust of the essays: "Shouldn't a twenty-first century park express its management and its ecology rather than sustain a painterly illusion?"

Make urban parkland a growth industry

By Peter Harrick. Philadelphia Daily News, July 6, 2001. Harrick, the director of the Green Cities Initiative for the Trust for Public Land and author of Inside City Parks, calls not just for the restoration of existing city parks but the creation of new ones, reminding us that the great parks have resulted not simply from setting aside open space but by a process of construction, "just like every other structure in the city."

Critic's Notebook: For Rebuilders, Inspiration All Around

By Herbert Muschamp. New York Times, Friday, October 5, 2001. In the early discussion about how the site of the World Trade Center might be rebuilt, the architecture critic of the Times chose Central Park to head a list of New York City sites that he considers "progressive," using them as cover to snipe at historic preservation, Jane Jacobs, and traditional design.

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**Education**

- **The National Preservation Institute**
  The National Preservation Institute (Alexandria, VA) offers a range of seminars in historic preservation and cultural resource management in a number of different cities. Check their web site www.npl.org for specific details or call 703-765-0100.

- **Garden History and Landscape Studies**
  A new graduate program called Garden History and Landscape Studies has been announced by The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture in New York City. Elizabeth Barlow Rogers is director. Information via the Web site www.bgc.bard.edu; phone 212-501-3063; email landscape@bgc.bard.edu.

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**NAOP Trustees on the Educating Front**

Trustee Patrice Kish, of Boston, conducted a session on Olmsted's Emerald Necklace: Unique Partnership in Urban Landscaping at the Restoration & Renovation Exhibition and Conference in Boston March 20-23.

Trustees Charles Birnbaum and Ethan Carr are presenters at the symposium Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture & Making Post War Designs Visible at Wave Hill (Bronx, NY) and Columbia University in New York City April 5-6.

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Strategic Planning Framework for NAOP

by Jerry Baum

Thirty-three current and former board members held a productive and active strategic planning session last year in mid-November. It produced a consensus on redefining the organization's mission and established a set of goals and principles to guide NAOP's development of a short term and long term implementation plan. Defining and approving this implementation plan will be the main business of the board's next meeting in May. (You may request a full copy of this strategic plan from NAOP's office.)

Redefine Mission

NAOP advances Olmsted principles and the legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people's lives.

Goals

Advocacy

NAOP, a coalition of the national experts on the work of the Olmsteds and their colleagues, will take strong and effective stands against activities that would damage Olmsted landscapes.

It will use its influence and provide direct assistance to local groups to strengthen their efforts to save endangered historic landscapes. It will rally the advocacy resources of its members and partners to advance the cause of historic landscapes at local, state and national levels.

Education

NAOP will lead an effort to disseminate the knowledge and understanding of the importance of the historic landscape legacy to the present and future vitality of communities.

Networking and Communications

A major conference will be held biannually that focuses on Olmsted work and brings historic landscape professionals and advocates to a community to dialogue with its public officials, funding sources and citizens. It will feature workshops that share information on how historic landscape resources can be protected, cared for, and developed. Smaller conferences and workshops will be held in off years. Information will be communicated to members through the semi-annual newsletter and the website, www.olmsted.org.

Research

Research will be implemented to establish the extent to which the built Olmsted legacy was realized and what still exists, determine its present condition, and ensure that this information is accessible to landscape professionals and advocates, decision makers, scholars, educators and the general public.

Organizational

An assessment was made of the current organizational structure and effectiveness of NAOP, which is now a volunteer-led organization. It was recommended that NAOP develop its organizational infrastructure and broaden and increase its financial resources. Strategies are being put in place to strengthen the board, expand individual and affiliate memberships significantly, expand development outreach and hire part-time and consultant assistance in the short term and permanent staff in the long term.

Did You Know?

England's only American World War II cemetery has been added to The Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. The Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial is located at Madingley, 3 miles outside of Cambridge. The American landscape architect Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, MA,

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Letters Welcome! Send to naop@resource-network.com

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"Improvements" Cause "Controversy"

Audubon Park in New Orleans

by Estley Hamilton

Bulldozers have been hard at work in Audubon Park over the last year, reconfiguring the golf course and building roads to the new club house. The Heymann Memorial Conservatory has been demolished for a parking lot, and the picturesque bridge across the lagoon has been barricaded. While other communities around the country are endeavoring to restore their parks along Olmsted principles, these changes to Audubon Park respond to entirely different goals, of which generation of revenue is one of the most important. Park officials downplay the extent of opposition to their plans, putting the word "controversy" in quotation marks. But the issues opponents have raised have resonated not only in New Orleans but around the country. Susan M. Rademacher, president of the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Inc. wrote to officials back in October: "I urge all parties to recognize what is at stake in Audubon Park. Now is the time for decision makers to have the courage to defer the current golf course project until a historically sound master plan is developed, and an effective format for ensuring ongoing public participation is instituted." Since that time, the work has continued unabated, but so has the opposition. Save Audubon Park, which started last September as a Web site (www.saveaudubonpark.org), has incorporated as a not-for-profit.

The emphasis on fund-raising in the management of Audubon Park goes back to its origins, which were described by L. Ronald Forman and Joseph Logsdon (with John Wilds) in their 1955 book, Audubon Park: An Urban Eden. It was acquired by the State of Louisiana in 1871 for $800,000, more than twice its estimated value, and the resulting public outcry thwarted development for a generation. It was then a low and featureless wedge of land extending inland from the river about five miles west of downtown, enlivened in places by the now magnificent oaks that had been planted by the Foucher family when this was their plantation. Activity came to the park in 1884 when the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition erected a group of enormous exhibition buildings, one enclosing 32 acres. But the fair failed to attract the anticipated audience, and its chief promoter, Major Edward A. Burke, fled the country. The city took some responsibility for the park in 1886 by creating a 24-member park commission but specifically prohibited them from spending any city funds. Ten years later, the state mandated a minimum annual expenditure by the city, and that emboldened the commissioners to engage the Olmsteds.

John Charles Olmsted had just become the head of the firm, following the incapacity of his stepfather and the death of Charles Eliot, and Audubon Park became one of his first independent works. He made an initial report in 1897 and completed his plan the following year, but it wasn't released to the public until 1902. By that time the commission had turned over almost a third of the park (31%) to the private Audubon Golf Club, which landscaped it without reference to Olmsted. The struggle to realize the remaining plan was set back in 1903 when the president of the commission was murdered, and work did not get underway in earnest until 1916.

John Charles succeeded in giving the northern portion of the park much of the character he intended. This area of about 150 acres has its formal entrance on St. Charles Avenue, where it faces the campuses of Loyola and Tulane Universities, and extends south to Magazine Street, which bisects the park. Construction of a winding lagoon produced enough fill to shape a picturesque landscape with long vistas, some of them extending across the golf course, which substituted for the planned central meadow. Charles E. Beveridge, series editor of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, has written that the result was one of the finest of the many parks designed by the firm in over a hundred years of practice. Following J. C. Olmsted's death in 1920, FLO Jr. continued the firm's connection with Audubon Park for another thirty years, opening the 190-acre section below Magazine to more active recreational facilities, including the swimming pool (whose vices could be the subject of another article) and the Audubon Park Zoo. Audubon Landing is the third area of the park, 45 acres between the levee and the Mississippi River. Both John and Frederick Law Olmsted Junior had produced plans for the "batture," as this tract is called, but it was not developed until after 1952, when the courts ruled against construction there of a state-owned port facility.

Because of its unusual history, the pressure to produce private sources of funding has remained a feature of Audubon Park's management to an unusual degree, to the detriment of the Olmsted ideal of uncompromised natural beauty. "A true Olmsted park would prove to be an impossible dream for Audubon, or for any other modern park, for that matter," Forman and Logsdon wrote in 1985. "The lack of cash-generating activities resulted in dependence on governmental funds that never would cover maintenance and improvements." Beginning with the nationally acclaimed but locally controversial rebuilding and expansion of the zoo in the 1970s (now 23% of park land), the efforts of park management have increasingly been focused on fund-raising, and Ron Forman has been in
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the forefront of this. He became executive director of the zoo in 1977 and in 1988 president and chief executive officer of the Audubon Institute, which was incorporated in that year from the earlier Friends of the Zoo. The name became Audubon Nature Institute in 2001. Forman likes to say that Audubon Park has not received any public monies for operational support for more than twenty years. In fact a special property tax has supported the zoo since the 1970s, and the park does not have a separate budget. For capital projects as opposed to operations, the Institute received almost $6 million from various governments in 2000 alone.

The question of whether Audubon Park was city or state property engaged the courts for many decades, and many people still think that the park's governing body is a state agency. In fact, the state legislature attempted to take over governance of the park in 1982 and 1983 but was overruled by the courts, and the city's Audubon Park Commission remained in charge. After the Audubon Institute was created, the Commission's responsibilities grew far beyond the bounds of the park.

Today the Institute operates a total of ten parks and museums scattered all over the metropolitan area, including the aquarium and IMAX theater at the foot of Canal Street, the park between there and Jackson Park, the nature center on Reed Boulevard, and two centers for species survival on 1,200 acres of the West Bank. The Audubon Insectarium will open in 2003. The city charter was amended effective 1996 to drop the word "Park" from the Audubon Commission's name and to add mention of these other facilities. Last fall, the Commission combined its four operating agreements with the Institute into one, lasting ten years, authorizing capital expenditures of up to $150,000 without the Commission's approval, and giving the Institute's CEO (Ron Forman) authority to execute documents on behalf of the Commission. Decisions affecting the park are thus three steps removed from any publicly elected official.

One reason that the golf course project has produced such a heated response is that it appears to be a replay of the Zoo expansion a generation ago, with the same tactics and many of the same players but without the extenuating circumstance of suffering animals (suffering golfers don't attract much pity). The urgency of the cause may be greater now, because as Charles Beveridge has observed, the proposed changes "threaten to cause harm to the park that may well prove to be irreversible." Plans for the $6 million project have resulted in selling the old golf clubhouse, which was outside park property, and replacing it with a larger facility in the Olmsted part of the park. Two cherished walkways are being compromised, the Meditation Walk, which runs north from Magazine Street, and the Hurst Walk, which crosses the park at the north edge of the golf course and connects with the gracefully arched bridge. Due to flying golf balls, the Hurst Walk may not reopen. The golf course itself has been radically reconfigured, with shorter but more spacious fairways around four new lagoons, erasing the meadow effect Olmsted wanted.

The outcry over the lack of public participation has resulted in some modifications; the clubhouse will be slightly smaller than originally planned and relocated to avoid the need to run a road through a grove of oaks. As the bulldozers reach the end of their "improvements," however, the "controversy" seems sure to continue, with litigation threatened on both sides.

May Conference Preview

The Olmsted Legacy: Social Consciousness and Environmental Impact

If you haven't received your conference mailer, let us know at 504-820-7676. Check out the NAOP web site for detailed information (www.olmsted.org).

In 1992, a group of joggers decided to do more than run through Weequahic Park. They decided to stand up for their park (and sit and listen and talk...and put their hands to the land) with the goal of bringing it back to life. At the NAOP Conference hosted by the Weequahic Park Association, you can hear the particular story of Weequahic Park. Speakers and sessions will focus on parks as community assets, historic research, abolitionism and community development, parks and watershed management, support for parks. Short walking tours also included.