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Auburn effectively touched them much as Bigelow and the other founders had hoped, even in the early years of its existence, people did not necessarily go there for moral uplift. From its inception, the cemetery was an immensely popular place for an outing, so much so that superintendents issued admittance passes and enforced rules restricting certain types of recreation. The same was true at Green-Wood, the Brooklyn cemetery where Manhattan residents flocked on Sundays for a holiday in scenic surroundings. Their evident enjoyment of this form of recreation caused some civic-minded New Yorkers to ask the question: why not a people's park devoid of reminders of mortality?



9.32. Sphinx, Mount Auburn Cemetery, designed by Jacob Bigelow and sculpted by Martin Milmore. 1871

IV. THE NEW METROPOLIS: FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED AND CALVERT VAUX AS PARK BUILDERS AND CITY PLANNERS

When Mount Auburn and Green-Wood were created, the country had not yet developed any public parks, museums, or other large-scale cultural institutions. Soon, however, voluntary associations of citizens began to found these, diminishing the cemetery's role as moral landscape and repository for monuments. Not surprisingly, Andrew Jackson Downing saw the rural cemetery as a transitional institution. In 1849, he editorialized in *The Horticulturist*: "The great attraction of these cemeteries . . . lies in the natural beauty of the sites, and in the tasteful and harmonious embellishment of these sites by art. . . . Does not this general interest, manifested in these cemeteries, prove that public gardens, established in a liberal and suitable manner, near our large cities, would be equally successful?"²² His tragic death three years later prevented him from advancing the park cause. But by this time, politicians had embraced it thanks to the well-reasoned passion with which he and others, such as the poet William Cullen Bryant, who served as editor of the *New York Evening Post* from 1829 to 1878, had advocated establishing public parks for the people. Calvert Vaux (1824–1895) stood ready to put his talent and training with Downing into the creation of America's first large-scale public park, Central Park, and luckily he found in Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903), erstwhile farmer, journalist, and editor, a collaborator capable of helping him found both the parks movement and the profession of landscape architecture in America.

NEW YORK'S CAMPAIGN FOR A PARK
Vaux left Newburgh and moved to New York in 1856 at a time when the city was beginning to develop a lively artistic culture. In addition to theaters and music

halls, department stores had opened their doors on Broadway, and shopping and promenading to enjoy both the commercial and the social spectacle had become a pleasurable routine for many New Yorkers. At the same time, the city's thriving port and commercial enterprises attracted a swelling volume of immigrants, particularly after the potato famine of the 1840s in Ireland and political turbulence in the wake of several failed revolutionary movements in Europe in 1848 stimulated mass exodus from countries abroad. New York reformers organized societies to minister to the needy, and although public health had been greatly improved after the Croton Aqueduct brought pure drinking water to the city in 1842, crowding now fostered both disease and vice. With few exceptions, New York had little to offer in the way of publicly accessible greenery. There was the Battery, the city's historic waterfront promenade at the foot of Manhattan Island; City Hall Park; Jones's Wood, an informal 160-acre picnic grove beside the East River between Sixty-sixth and Seventy-fifth Streets; and Green-Wood, the immensely popular rural cemetery in Brooklyn. The city's residential squares—St. John's Park, Gramercy Park, Union Square, Washington Square—were mostly fenced, with access restricted to neighboring property holders. Well-to-do New York businessmen—the city's civic leaders—traveling abroad noticed the parks in England, France, and Germany, which had been opened to the general populace as a matter of royal favor or *noblesse oblige*. It was obvious to them that to satisfy their recreational needs and especially those of their wives and children, as well as to establish their city competitively as a pleasant and civilized urban center of international importance, they should take responsible action to

improve it by constructing a public park. In this they were urged forward by women whose work in various charitable associations made them conscious of the importance of this type of environmental and humanitarian improvement for the poor and whose burgeoning cosmopolitanism made them long as well for an American version of Hyde Park or the Champs-Élysées where they could readily socialize in public. Uptown landowners stood to gain from the improvement a park would bring to surrounding real estate, so they were natural proponents in bringing the plan forward.

After much contentious debate, the state legislature passed a bill in 1853, authorizing the acquisition of land below the existing Croton Reservoir in the center of the island between Seventy-ninth and Eighty-sixth Streets and north of it where the large New Reservoir was being built between Eighty-sixth and Ninety-sixth Streets. Fernando Wood (1812–1881), New York's Democratic mayor after 1854, saw that a large public works project could assist immigrant laborers and, incidentally, his own bank account, inasmuch as he was heavily invested in park-side real estate. In what later historians would cite as his single heroic act, he exerted his leadership in favor of proceeding with the construction of Central Park between Fifth and Eighth Avenues and 59th and 106th Streets.

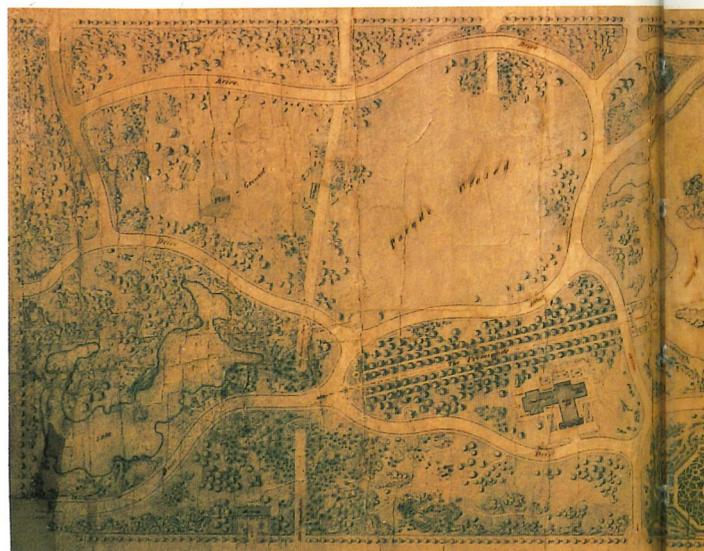
THE DESIGN AND BUILDING OF CENTRAL PARK

It was now necessary to acquire the land. Beginning in the fall of 1853, a commission surveyed and estimated the value of the building lots and improvements on the site of the future park, meeting numerous futile complaints, particularly from landowners within the park who felt they had invested more capital and labor in improving their holdings than the price they were being awarded. Even so, the \$5 million land acquisition cost far exceeded the cost that had been projected for the *built* park. As the parkland was exempted from the market, the surrounding property automatically went up in value. Regulations to curb certain activities considered to be nuisances such as piggeries and bone-boiling works were enacted, making the area surrounding the park desirable for the future as a place of fashionable residence. By October 1, 1857, with considerable hardship on the part of many former residents, including those clustered in an active African-American community known as Seneca Village on the west side of the park, the park site was cleared of inhabitants.

Anxious to wrest power from Mayor Wood, the legislature in Albany, which was dominated by the newly formed Republican Party, removed authority

over Central Park from the city and placed it under a state-appointed, eleven-member commission. Egbert Viele (1825–1902), the engineer Wood had appointed to survey the park, was reappointed by the newly formed Board of Commissioners. Vaux had seen the plan Viele had prepared in 1856 for the park, which Wood had approved, and he realized how inferior it was with respect to the opportunity at hand. Vaux had recently acted as a founding member of the American Institute of Architects, and he now organized a successful lobbying effort for a design competition in order to achieve a plan that, according to him, would not disgrace the city or the memory of Downing. On October 13, 1857, the commission announced the terms of the public competition, and Vaux now became instrumental on the first of two significant occasions in directing the talents of Frederick Law Olmsted into the service of landscape design.

Olmsted had previously met Vaux once when he called upon Downing in Newburgh. But at that time he had no idea that he would pursue landscape as a career. Having first established himself with his father's financial help on Staten Island as a gentleman farmer employing the scientific principles similar to those pioneered by Loudon, he had felt impelled to travel abroad in 1850 to study English agricultural practices at firsthand, recording his observations in a book, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*. Its critical success led him to pursue further journalistic endeavors based upon travel. Choosing the pen name "Yeoman," he dispatched a series of letters to the newly formed *New York Daily Times*, from various points along the routes he took through the American South and the frontier states as far west as Texas. His constant theme was the superiority of free labor over slave agriculture, but interwoven into his text were passionately vivid descriptions of the countryside. Self-taught in his uncle's library where he may



have first encountered the writings of Price and Gilpin, he was, like his father who had taken him on carriage rides as a boy in search of the Picturesque, a discriminating connoisseur of natural scenery. Now, however, the Panic of 1857 had forced the publishing house for which he worked to close. Being prevented from pursuing his literary career as a publisher and the editor of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, Olmsted was grateful to receive the job of superintendent of the clearing operations for Central Park under the supervision of Viele, the engineer-in-chief.

Vaux had learned a good deal about landscape design as he worked with Downing on the improvement of the public grounds in Washington, D.C., as well as on the private estates where they collaborated, but he realized that Olmsted's daily familiarity with the park landscape and his stature as an author and person of moral influence would make him an ideal partner in the design competition. Thus began the friendship of the architect and literary-man-turned-administrator as they paced together over the park's terrain and formed the vision embodied in the competition entry they labeled the Greensward Plan (fig. 9.33). By judiciously clearing away here and planting there, by moving earth to rearrange the land into gently rolling contours, by laying drains and converting swamps into ponds, there would emerge a landscape that was both pastoral and Picturesque.

To understand the Greensward Plan and the subsequent work of the two men after they became professional partners, one must attempt to enter the mind of Olmsted as fully as possible, for however much intelligence and design ability Vaux contributed, Olmsted's brand of nineteenth-century spirituality and democratic humanitarianism supplied something fundamentally philosophic to their common vision of the designed landscape. This vision was akin to Downing's in that it was rooted in a belief that parks

in cities and the domesticated middle landscape of freestanding homes set in parklike surroundings away from the crowded urban workplace would act as a civilizing force in society. But Olmsted's more comprehensive view of landscape was not derived from Downing or from Loudon, Downing's preceptor.

Downing had recast Loudon's concepts to suit the conditions of American society and the country's natural landscape, recommending a Picturesque and sometimes rustic architectural vocabulary to harmonize with and accent picturesque scenery. But, like Loudon, he was a horticulturist who valued plant display for its own sake. Olmsted—"Yeoman"—found the Gardenesque style a fussy distraction from the park's real purpose, which was the creation of rural scenery that evoked a poetic mood lifting one out of everyday care and ennobling the spirit with intimations of the divine. This kind of scenic contemplation was therapy for the overworked paterfamilias, a healthful occupation for women, a positive educational influence upon children, and a means of acculturation for the masses. Olmsted never presented himself as having botanical expertise, preferring plants arranged for their overall artistic effect to those presented as individual scientific specimens.²³ The task of incorporating the recently enriched botanical palette into garden compositions in which specimen trees or beds of flowers were objects of attention was for him irrelevant to the business of park making.

For the same reason, Olmsted held that architecture and sculpture should be subservient to landscape. Utilitarian and decorative elements should be placed within an overall impression of tranquilly beautiful and ruggedly Picturesque rural scenery. In later years, when he served as mentor to aspiring young landscape architects, he did not direct them to the works of the prominent nineteenth-century authors, Loudon and Downing, but rather to those of Price

9.33. Greensward Plan, Central Park design competition entry of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. 1857





9.34. Sheep Meadow, Central Park, New York City

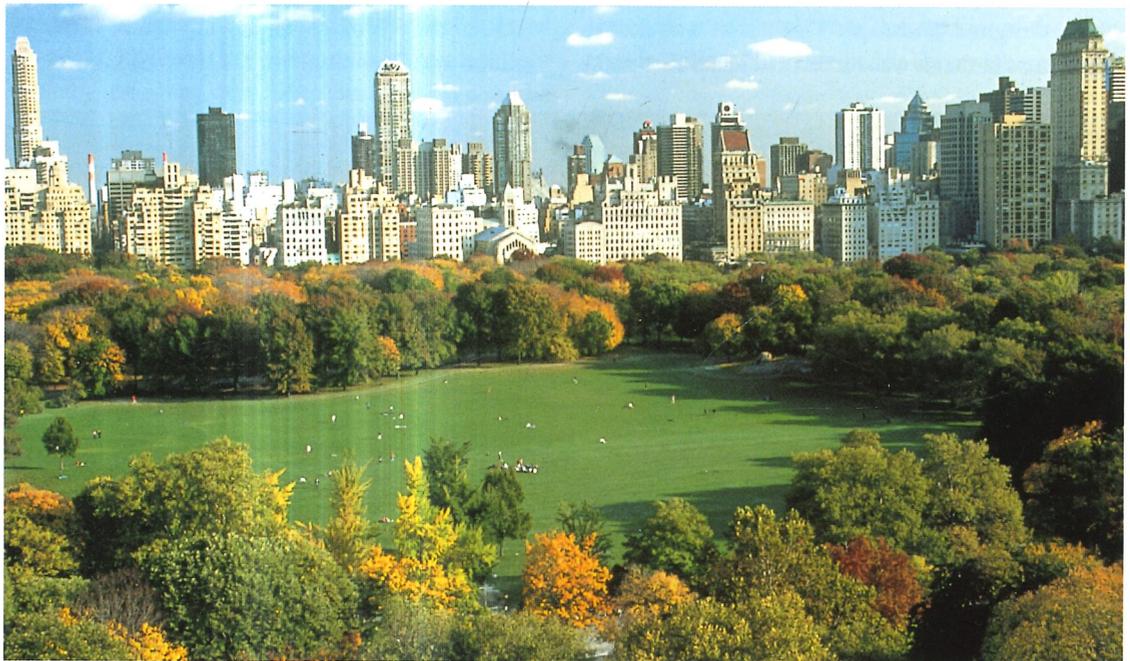
9.35. Sheep Meadow, Central Park, contemporary view. In keeping with the pastoral ideal embodied in this landscape, the sight of the surrounding city was screened from view by the park's topographic modeling and umbrageous border plantings. Olmsted and Vaux wanted to imply the nonexistence of the park's rectangular boundaries and the indefinite continuation of pastoral scenery, a successful strategy before the age of skyscrapers, which now loom dramatically along its borders, providing perhaps a new scenic category: the urban sublime.

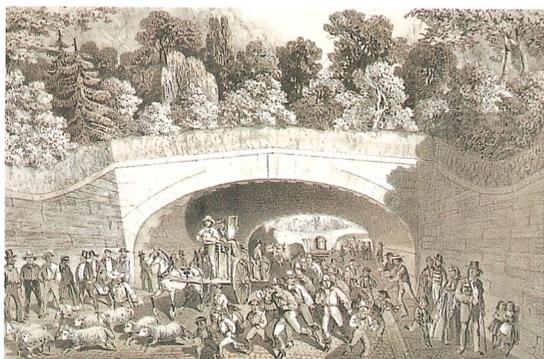
and Repton. Like these eighteenth-century writers, he saw landscape not as a collection of features artistically arranged for display, but rather as a shifting panorama, a sequence of views and vistas that opened up harmoniously as one moved through the countryside or city park. His own deepest religious experiences were, like those of his father, Wordsworthian and transcendentalist—rapt responses to the beautiful and sublime in nature. He also loved the rich, picturesque mystery of things half-concealed by overhanging vines. His keen emotional response to lush tropical effects caused him to attempt to simulate the scenery he had seen in the Louisiana bayous and on the Isthmus of Panama in an American-inflected version of the eighteenth-century English Picturesque. By exploiting such optical characteristics as the play of light and shade in the shadows cast by trees across a sunlit meadow, the atmospheric haze of

a distant umbrageous horizon line, and the mystery suggested by an intricate fringe of vines screening a shadowy entrance to a grotto, he created a design idiom that was both naturalistic and Romantic.

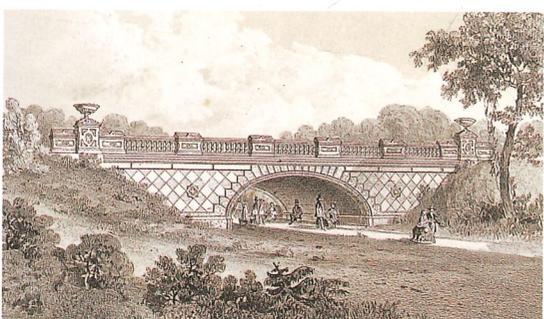
His immersion as a young man in the “green, dripping, glistening, gorgeous!” landscape of rural England—“enchantment indeed, we gazed upon it and breathed it—never to be forgotten”²⁴—had imprinted his mind with an imagery of pastoral beauty that served him as lasting inspiration, but the English class system that achieved this beauty for the advantage of a few aristocrats through the enclosure movement and the hard labor of the poor offended his sense of social responsibility. The sight in England that had impressed him most happily from a democratic standpoint was Paxton's Birkenhead Park: “Five minutes of admiration, and a few more spent in studying the manner in which art had been employed to obtain from nature so much beauty, and I was ready to admit that in democratic America, there was nothing to be thought of as comparable with this People's Garden.”²⁵ Now, thanks to Vaux's invitation to join him in the design competition for Central Park, he had the chance to work on a far grander scale to create a “People's Garden” in New York.

Because of Olmsted's daytime duties as superintendent and the many interruptions by an incessant stream of job seekers, he and Vaux did much of their collaboration on moonlit nights as they paced the future park, appreciating the scenic potential of its bold outcroppings of Manhattan schist, proposing certain topographical alterations in order to deepen swamps into lakes and mound soil into rolling meadows. They studied where to place drainage lines and discussed the configuration of carriage drives and the





Left top: 9.36. Archway carrying the carriage over a transverse road, Central Park, c. 1860



Left middle: 9.37. Pedestrians crossing beneath Carriage Drive, Central Park. Lithograph by Sarony, Major & Knapp, c. 1860



Left bottom: 9.38. Pedestrians separated from horseback riders by means of a stone bridge, Central Park. Lithograph by George Hayward, ca. 1860

Below: 9.39. Bow Bridge, Central Park

below-grade level made it inconspicuous, the Ball Ground was visually united with the 14-acre Sheep Meadow immediately north of it (figs. 9.34, 9.35). Together these two green areas served to portray as best possible the designers' scenic desideratum in the park's south end. To nourish a thick mat of turf for the grazing flock that would enhance the park's pastoral appearance they covered the Sheep Meadow with 2 feet (.6 meters) of topsoil. Grading the park's borders into low berms and planting trees "to insure an umbrageous horizon line"²⁶ was another feat of landscape legerdemain the designers employed in order to screen from view the future four-story houses that would rise along the suddenly valuable frontage lots.

The most ingenious aspect of the Greensward Plan was the engineering of four east-west crossings to carry workaday city traffic through the park along below-grade transverse roads (fig. 9.36). Here, too, low berms with plantings screened from park visitors' sight the carts and draft animals moving on these roads. In executing the Greensward Plan, Olmsted and Vaux carried the principle of grade separation of traffic one step further by segregating pedestrians from carriage traffic and riders on horseback. This gave Vaux, often in association with Jacob Wrey Mould, the opportunity to design a number of stone arches for paths and bridle trails carrying pedestrians and horseback riders beneath carriage drives as well as a handful of ornamental cast-iron bridges for paths spanning bridle trails (figs. 9.37, 9.38). Bow Bridge, at the narrow neck between the two lobes of the Lake, allowed pedestrians to cross from the foot of Cherry Hill to the Ramble, an intricately designed woodland for strolling. It constitutes Vaux's masterwork in this mid-nineteenth-century building material (fig. 9.39).

best vantage points for vistas. Friends gathered in the evenings at Vaux's house on Eighteenth Street to assist in the preparation of the pen-and-ink drawing. On March 31, 1858, the deadline for the competition, Olmsted and Vaux submitted their Greensward Plan, which now hangs in the Arsenal, the New York City Department of Parks headquarters in Central Park. On April 28, the commissioners announced their decision to award first prize and the announced premium of \$2,000 to the Vaux-Olmsted team.

The element that more than any other defines an Olmsted-Vaux landscape is a spacious meadow with gentle rises and scattered clumps of trees arranged about its periphery so as to lead the eye beyond its indeterminate boundaries into an illusionistic distance of seemingly unending rural scenery. It was difficult to achieve in Central Park because of its broken topography and narrow rectangular shape. Above Ninety-eighth Street, however, there was a piece of tableland that lent itself to becoming the North and East Meadows, while below the Sixty-Fifth Street Transverse Road the designers proposed blasting away bedrock in order to fill and level the surface for a Ball Ground. Because the transverse road's



9.40. Bethesda Terrace, Central Park. The carved panels encasing the grand double stairs descending to the Bethesda Fountain and the lakeshore depict a rich profusion of animal and vegetal forms symbolizing the seasons of the year. Ornamentation like this, using images depicting nature's abundance in a manner similar to that of medieval stonecarvers, owes a debt to the writings of John Ruskin, an important influence on the intellectual and artistic culture of Victorian England and its counterpart in nineteenth-century America.



Today Olmsted and Vaux are sometimes criticized as being the carriers of patrician values and the agents of elitist objectives because they created a park for scenic viewing by carriage and on horseback — as well as on foot — and did not cater to a greater degree to more populist pastimes involving games and sports. This viewpoint imposes a later value system on their objectives and ignores the fact that, at the time they designed Central Park, the physical recreational movement still lay in the future. For their romantically inclined generation, scenic strolling was a healthful pastime much enjoyed by all classes. They were sincere in their belief that this pleasure, which Olmsted deemed to be akin to being moved by poetry, would soften the lives of the less fortunate members of society, which included many newcomers from other countries. They were convinced that the park's pastoral and Picturesque scenery would serve as an informal public school, instructing immigrants through an unconscious process of scenic enjoyment in the shared values, which were still predominantly agrarian, of the new democratic society-in-formation.

It is undeniable that there were certain prospective users who felt few transcendental stirrings in the presence of scenery and who saw the park merely as a social arena, a place to parade their wealth and marriageable daughters, often exercising ill-disguised class prejudice. But this did not mean that the idealism expressed in the vision of Olmsted and Vaux was not genuine. They did not discourage such immediately popular activities as ice-skating and boating on the Lake, and the rules Olmsted promulgated as superintendent were designed to protect the park from over-

use and abuse rather than to discriminate against a class of users. Most important, the Greensward Plan was supple in its ability to absorb new uses over the years. Unlike many of the landscapes presented to the public by the twentieth-century park builder Robert Moses, which typically consist of single-purpose recreation facilities, the spaces Olmsted and Vaux created are able to serve a variety of purposes. In his writings, Olmsted divided the park's landscape into two kinds of space: "neighborly" and "gregarious," the former being for small groups consisting of families and friends who came to the park to picnic and enjoy scenery, while the latter was designed to serve the parade of strangers who congregated in the manner of Parisians on boulevards to enjoy the spectacle of one another. The park was thus intended as a place in which to delight in both nature and one's common humanity.

Absent from the Greensward Plan were Downing's proposed "noble works of art, statues, monuments and buildings," although in 1880 Vaux built the first structure housing the Metropolitan Museum inside the park near Fifth Avenue and East Eighty-second Street. In addition, a conservatory originally planned near Fifth Avenue and East Seventy-fourth Street was constructed in 1899 in the north end of the park near Fifth Avenue and East 105th Street on the site where Olmsted had set up a temporary nursery and botanic garden. Throughout the park, the rural motif ruled in the predominant interest of "neighborly" recreation, but an important area was reserved for "gregarious" purposes: the elm-arcaded Mall, a straight concourse extending from Sixty-fifth to Seventy-second Street, which was set on a diagonal axis

to detract attention from the park's rectilinear boundaries. Focused upon Vista Rock in the distance, which Vaux later crowned with the neo-Gothic, castlelike Belvedere, this grand promenade, designed for sociable congregation, leads strollers to a broad stairway and through the Arcade beneath the Seventy-second Street Cross Drive to the lakeside Terrace, Vaux's architectural masterpiece (fig. 9.40).

Here, with his collaborator Mould, Vaux designed a pair of monumental staircases carved with ornamental panels, profuse with motifs of vegetation and wildlife representing the four seasons. These grand stairs provided an alternative means of reaching the Terrace, useful for those alighting from carriages parked on the Cross Drive rather than passing on foot from the Mall through the Arcade. In the center of the circular Terrace, a jet sent a plume of water into the air until it was replaced in the 1870s by a fountain surmounted by a sculpture representing the angel that bestowed healing power upon the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem.²⁷ This work by Emma Stebbins (1815–1882) celebrated the public health benefits brought to the city a generation earlier by the Croton Aqueduct, and the figures at the fountain's base symbolize the blessings of Temperance, Purity, Health, and Peace. Two tall poles with ornamental bases and crossbars for long vertical fishtail banners stand next to the Lake where the designers effected a seemingly effortless transition from modest grandeur to Picturesque simplicity. This achievement is evident also in the way the designers made the geometric lines of the Mall and Terrace merge gracefully with the curving paths and naturalistic scenery alongside them.

In the south end of the park, the designers paid particular attention to the needs of women and children, visitors who might not wish to wander far from its principal entrance at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. Immediately south of the Sixty-fifth Street Transverse Road and serviceable from it, Vaux constructed the Dairy, a small building of rusticated stone with an ample wooden loggia providing shelter from the sun and inclement weather. Here children could play with toys furnished by a park attendant or drink fresh cow's milk. The designers christened a large nearby outcrop of Manhattan schist the Kinderberg. Polished by glacial scouring to form a natural slide, it had broad steps carved into its base and a rustic shelter crowning its top. The fenced playgrounds that are popular attractions in today's park were added after 1934 by Moses, but in the nineteenth century, park workers set up portable swings and seesaws in season.

In the original Greensward Plan, the northern border of the park is at 106th Street where an arboretum was specified but never built on the east side, while on the west side there was nothing beyond the

Great Hill, which Olmsted and Vaux encircled with an appendage to the West Drive to afford carriage riders panoramic prospects from this high point in the park. The commissioners soon realized that the topography between 106th and 110th Streets would not readily permit urban development because it was both too elevated by bedrock protrusions and too swampy where the resistant Manhattan schist gives way to the easily erodible Inwood marble that underlies the Harlem plain. They wisely acquired this additional land in 1863, increasing the park's size from 750 acres to 843 acres. This allowed Olmsted and Vaux to save the sites of several fortifications left from the Revolution and the War of 1812, to promote as a forest of native American trees an already wooded area, and to create the Harlem Meer in the park's new northeast corner, a much larger water body than the Pond in the southeast (fig. 9.41).

An army of a thousand workers, directed at first by Olmsted, moved nearly 5 million cubic yards, or approximately 10 million one-horse cartloads of stone, earth, and topsoil out of or into the park between 1858 and 1873. In addition, Olmsted supervised chief landscape gardener Ignaz Anton Pilat in planting a rich variety of trees, shrubs, and vines. Moreover, he promulgated park rules and oversaw the training of a cadre of park keepers responsible for maintaining order and educating the public to respect the landscape. All the while, to his intense irritation, he was subjected to the oversight and penny-pinching curtailments imposed by the park commission's comptroller, Andrew Haswell Green.

In 1861, the Civil War interrupted the partners' collaboration on the ongoing creation of Central Park. Olmsted, who prided himself on his administrative abilities more than his landscape artistry, accepted a position as the executive secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the

9.41. Harlem Meer and the Charles A. Dana Center, Central Park



American Red Cross. He desired to serve the Union cause, and reasoning that moving nurses and supplies to the front was a managerial task similar to moving men and materials in the park, he departed for Washington, leaving Vaux in charge of the work in the park, which continued throughout the war.

OLMSTED IN TRANSITION

Until 1863, when he accepted a position as the resident manager of the Mariposa Mines in California, Olmsted helped reorganize the Army's Medical Bureau, took charge of distributing food and goods collected from branches of the Sanitary Commission in the North, and oversaw the evacuation of wounded Union soldiers on hospital transport ships. In California, while supervising the Mariposa operations, he served as the head of a commission to make recommendations on the management of the Yosemite Valley as a public preserve. Although Anglo-Americans had discovered its spectacular scenery only sixteen years before, Yosemite was already a tourist attraction. Congress had the previous year withdrawn it from the public domain and deeded it to the state of California "for public use, resort, and recreation," the first area in the nation to be set aside for this purpose. Olmsted's preliminary report on *The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees* is a landmark enunciating the individual's right to enjoy public scenery and the government's obligation to protect citizens' exercise of that right.

At this period in his life, Olmsted still considered landscape design merely as a sideline. As the fortunes of the Mariposa mining venture sank, he considered returning to a career in journalism. At the same time, Vaux, who had been forced by political pressure to resign his Central Park position, wrote Olmsted saying that they had been offered reappointment as landscape architects—the title they chose for their profession—in Central Park and that there was another important commission awaiting collaboration: Prospect Park in Brooklyn, named for the ele-

vation known as Mount Prospect.

Olmsted, loath to subject himself again to the kind of "squabbles with the Commission and the politicians" he had experienced in Central Park, was reluctant to accept Vaux's second entreaty to enter into collaboration. Vaux, however, urged him as persuasively as possible: "I am perhaps deficient in personal ambition—but I can feel for it in others. If you do not see that you are honored by developing this fitness for art work of course—don't come. It must be the art of landscape architecture and the art of administration combined. Think this over. We are neither of us old men you know. To me it seems & always has seemed a magnificent opening. Possible together, impossible to either alone."²⁸ Olmsted was still reluctant to consider himself an artist but thought that he could "do anything with proper assistants, or money enough—anything any man can do. I can combine means to ends better than most, and I love beautiful landscapes and rural recreations and people in rural recreations—better than anybody else I know."²⁹ Still uncertain that he could make a living in this line of work, he nevertheless decided to return to New York and join Vaux in the continuing construction of Central Park and the design of the park that Brooklyn's civic leaders wanted to build in emulation of it.

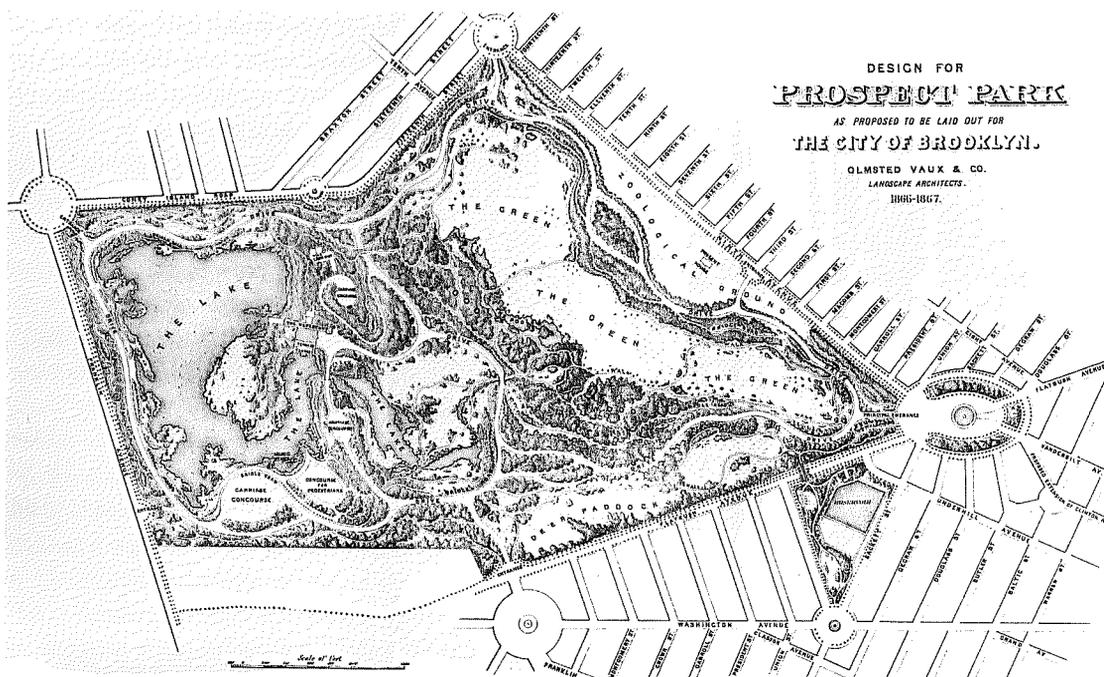
CREATING PROSPECT PARK

Vaux had already convinced James Stranahan, the president of the park board, that the original site authorized by the state legislature—350 acres straddling Flatbush Avenue—was less desirable than the western portion of this site plus a large tract of adjoining farmland where there existed the opportunity to create an illusion of infinitely extensive rural space and a large lake. The popularity of ice-skating in Central Park made an even larger Prospect Park lake competitively attractive, and the park commissioners agreed to divest themselves of the portion of their original site east of Flatbush Avenue—land now occupied by the Brooklyn Museum of Art and Brooklyn Botanic Garden—and to purchase the site recommended by Vaux, bringing the park's total acreage to 526.

The park did not have prominent, ice-polished rock outcrops like the ones that picturesquely accented the scenery in Central Park, but it was situated on a glacial moraine. This provided a naturally rich soil and a gently rolling terrain as well as glacial erratics—large boulders left after the ice melted. The designers artfully employed these as compositional elements when they built the Ravine between the Long Meadow and the Lake (figs. 9.42, 9.43). In creating the 75-acre Long Meadow, they were not constrained by the disposition of the park's boundaries

9.42. Long Meadow, Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The Long Meadow illustrates the kind of scenic unfolding of pastoral landscape that constitutes the essence of Olmsted and Vaux's park ideal. The eye threads a passage through clumps of trees, passing over a series of gentle undulations to a hazy horizon line that appears to extend beyond the park's confines.





9.43. Plan of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. 1871

Below: 9.44. The Ravine, Prospect Park, Brooklyn. c. 1870

as they had been in Central Park where they were hampered by the firmly rectilinear shape dictated by the 1811 grid plan for Manhattan. Also, in Prospect Park they were free of the necessity of providing transverse roads for nonpark traffic. Thus they were able “to connect a series of dis severed and isolated patches of comparatively level ground, into one sweep of grass-land that is extensive enough, to make a really permanent impression on the mind.”³⁰ On the perimeter of the Long Meadow—considered by many as the quintessential Olmstedian landscape—they mounded earth into berms and then created spacious vaulted tunnels, a design master stroke that orchestrates the passage of visitors in a manner that induces surprise and heightens sensory awareness and appreciation of the long vista of gently undulating rural scenery. The pleasure of the experience is heightened by the park’s urban context.³¹



As in Central Park, the designers created a space for “gregarious” recreation in the elegant concert grove with ornamental stonework by Vaux similar to that which distinguished Bethesda Terrace in Central Park. The concert grove is flanked by an upper and a lower carriage concourse accessible from the park’s sinuous circuit drive, and the whole ensemble constituted an informal amphitheater oriented to face the small Music Pavilion located on an island in Prospect Lake, now covered over by the Wollman Rink. The Ravine’s stream with waterfalls spilling over rocks and profusely planted slopes, which has recently been restored, simulated the rugged picturesqueness one might find on an outing in the Catskill Mountains (fig. 9.44).

THE EXPLODING METROPOLIS

As walled cities became things of the past after the formation of nation-states and as industrial technology provided means of transportation that effectively shrank distance, making it possible to commute between widely separated places of work and home, the spatial envelope of cities became greatly enlarged. In spite of a lingering Jeffersonian bias in favor of a predominantly agrarian destiny for America, manufacturing and commerce were breeding increasingly large urban populations, and this fostered an unprecedented growth in the size of cities. Public sanitation victories through the kind of engineering technology represented by New York’s Croton Aqueduct system and other Industrial-Age improvements such as smooth macadam roadbeds instead of cobblestone paving made large cities more livable than before.

But they still presented many difficulties for their inhabitants, the most notable being deprivation of contact with nature as the countryside became

increasingly distant from the city. Olmsted and Vaux felt that a single park's role as a civilizing influence, ameliorating the noise and hectic pace of the metropolis, was still somewhat limited. They envisioned the carriage drives within parks being extended to become parkways, tree-canopied transportation corridors connected to other parks, the whole forming a new framework superimposed over the grid, a green skeleton guiding the city's expansion. They saw, moreover, that roadway layout necessarily dictated the pattern and nature of urban growth, with residential development of a more elegant nature being spawned by a circulation system that segregated private estates from commercial through traffic. In their grasp of the city as an evolving regional organism they were the country's first urban planners.

The parity implied by the 1811 grid plan for New York City was congenial to the expressed democratic values of the new republic. Moreover, it was a practical convenience for developers. Nevertheless, Olmsted wrote scathingly about its disadvantages. He felt the New York grid to be especially uncongenial to the needs of people because the block sizes dictated by its street layout forced property to be divided into deep lots, usually no wider than 25 feet (7.6 meters). This resulted in rows of cramped narrow houses with poor light and ventilation. He wished to remedy this condition by carrying the park influence to the level of a system, with greenery easily accessible throughout the metropolitan area. Where land had not yet been platted, lots for homes could be created that would permit healthful cross ventilation, penetration by sunlight, and a green lawn. Unlike the grid with its straight streets intersecting at right angles and static perspectives, the parkway system would

conform to topography and scenic opportunity, which could be captured by the kind of curving alignments that allowed the landscape to unfold from a series of ever-changing vantage points.

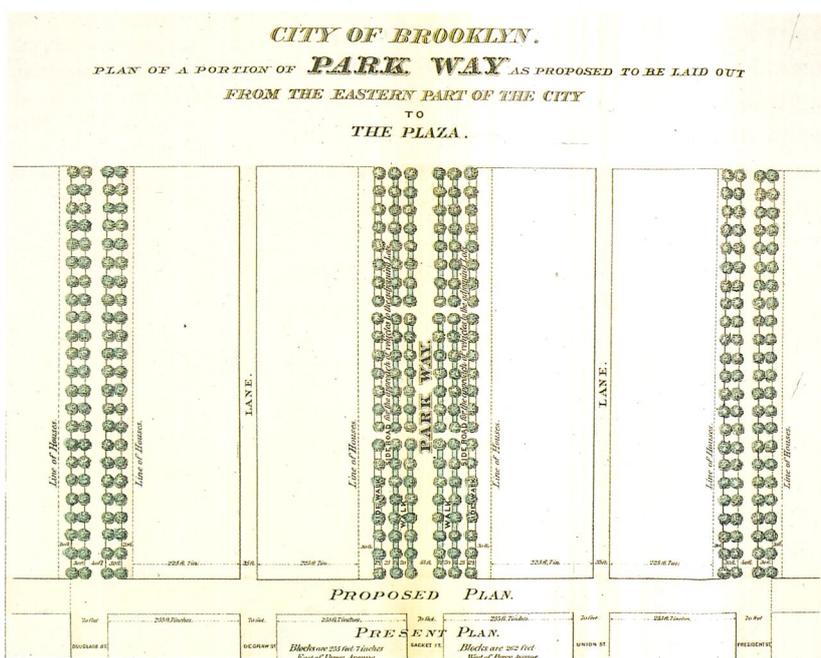
THE FIRST PARKWAYS

The creation of the Brooklyn park offered Olmsted and Vaux the opportunity to advocate a more comprehensive vision for the metropolitan landscape. In their preliminary report to the commissioners dated January 24, 1866, they articulated under the heading "Suburban Connections" the desirability of a pleasure drive connecting Prospect Park with the beach on the Atlantic Ocean. Imaginatively, they saw how another drive could run east along the beach, then pass through undeveloped countryside, continuing parallel with the East River until it touched the shore at Ravenswood, Queens, where either by ferry or high bridges as yet unbuilt it would connect with one of the wide crosstown Manhattan streets leading to Central Park. Further, they envisioned this extensive greenway dedicated to pleasure driving extending west from Central Park to the Hudson River, where it could run for a distance parallel to that river with views of the Palisades on the opposite shore and, in the distance, the blue outline of the Shawangunk Mountains.

Two years later after work on the park had begun, Olmsted and Vaux used the report they delivered to the board as an opportunity to expound this metropolitan-scale planning concept. They now proposed a scheme, which went beyond their original one of a recreational parkway linking two major parks with the region's ocean beaches and extensive river waterfront, to encompass the notion of Brooklyn's destiny as an ideal residential community. Even allowing for shipping and commercial activity equal to that of Manhattan across the river, much of the city—although it had not yet become a borough of Greater New York—could function as a bedroom suburb. "Brooklyn is New York outside the walls,"³² they wrote, an implied reference to the faubourgs that had earlier sprung up outside the walls of Paris and other walled cities in Europe.

In their report Olmsted and Vaux detailed the history of urban street plans from medieval times to the present, citing the missed opportunity when Wren's plan was ignored in the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666. They proposed for Brooklyn the first elements of a major arterial system that took into account the need for smooth roadbeds for the increasingly numerous light spring-suspension carriages, which were "quite unfit to be used in streets adapted to the heavy wagons employed in commercial traffic."³³ At the same time, they realized that

9.45. Plan of a portion of Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, New York. 1868. Six rows of trees were to be planted along the length of the parkway, dividing the 260-foot (79-meter) right-of-way into a center drive for carriages, with two lanes on each side, one of which was designated a pedestrian walk, while the other served as a side road for the approach of vehicles to the adjoining house lots. These were to be 100 feet (30.4 meters) in width, allowing for the construction of freestanding "villa" residences with private gardens. Service lanes where horses could be stabled, goods delivered, and garbage removed were to be located in back of the house lots.



delivery carts and other kinds of commercial traffic could not be banned from abutting residential property altogether.

Taking inspiration from the new avenue de l'Impératrice (now avenue Foch), which Olmsted had seen on a trip to Paris in 1859, and Berlin's great tree-lined avenue, Unter den Linden, each of which was connected to a large park while simultaneously serving as "an intermediate pleasure-ground [rather] than a part of the general street system,"³⁴ the designers sketched the route of Ocean Parkway leading from Prospect Park to the beach at Coney Island and that of Eastern Parkway running from the park toward the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn (fig. 9.45). A third parkway was proposed to link the park with Fort Hamilton and the site of the future Marine Park overlooking the Verrazano Narrows to the south.

The designers further remarked that new public transportation improvements made possible the occupation of a much larger urban area at lower densities than heretofore. Separation of residence and workplace was a corollary of this enlargement of towns. Brooklyn, "set apart and guarded by nature as a place for the tranquil habitation of those whom the business of the world requires should reside within convenient access of the waters of New York harbor"³⁵ was ideally situated to become a pleasant residential suburb. Olmsted and Vaux hoped that with its domestic character established by the parkway and street system recommended in their report, the kind of energetic self-made young men who had left their leafy country towns for the commercial opportunities of the city would be drawn to purchase property in Brooklyn's new middle landscape. It was a model that could be replicated as Brooklyn and other cities grew, extending themselves to encompass their surrounding rural countryside. The loss of that countryside to urbanization was compensated for by the abundant greenery of the now more loosely woven fabric of the metropolitan landscape with its parkways connecting city dwellers to the generously scaled new urban parks filled with rural scenery.

BUFFALO'S PARK SYSTEM

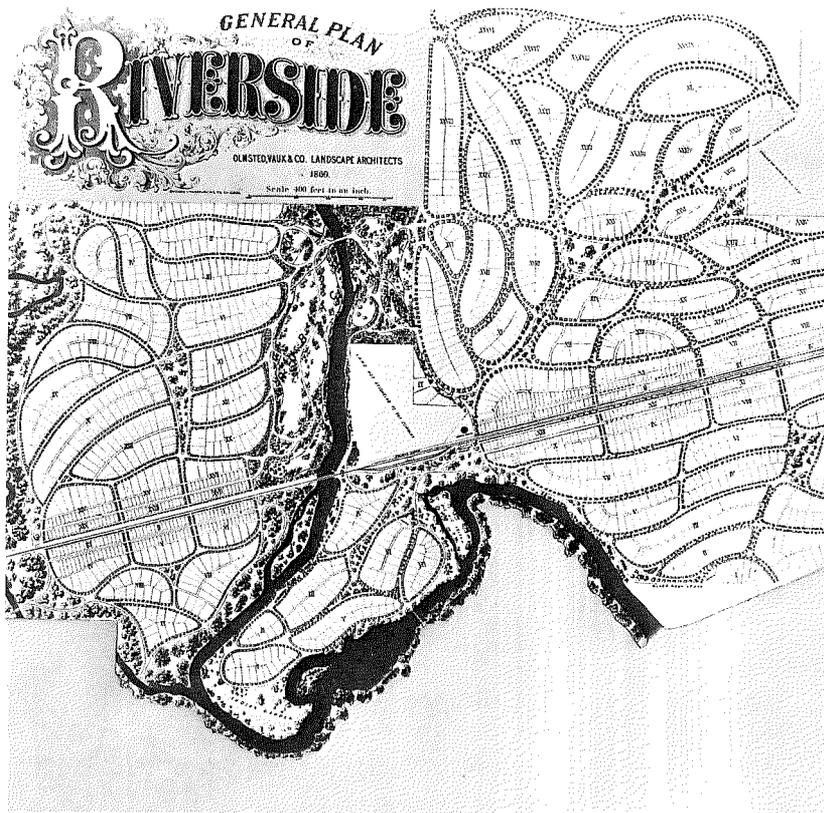
The firm that Olmsted and Vaux had formed was now called upon to consult in other cities. Even as they were writing their report to the Brooklyn commissioners outlining their parkway concept, they were advising the city of Newark, New Jersey, that large cultural institutions such as museums were extraneous to rural parks and should be built outside them and that, in considering the acquisition of land for a public park, the town fathers should also consider purchasing strips of land for future construction of pleasure drives and walks. They gave similar advice to



clients in Philadelphia and Albany. It was in Buffalo, however, that the partners got to implement an entire park-and-parkway system. There, in 1804, Joseph Ellicott, brother of Andrew Ellicott, Pierre L'Enfant's chief surveyor for Washington, D.C., had laid out a city where a radial street plan was focused upon a central square.

A group of citizens in Buffalo, New York, summoned Olmsted in the fall of 1868 to examine three sites under consideration for a park. He traveled to the city for a site meeting and admired its departure from the grid in its layout. He then proceeded to sketch a plan that grafted onto this street pattern a system of parkway-linked parks. The new plan thus consisted of not one, but all three park sites with parkways connecting them to one another (fig. 9.46). The 350-acre Delaware Park gave the designers an opportunity to create a large meadow and a 46-acre lake and to provide an extensive circuit drive with grade separation of intersecting pedestrian paths as in Central and Prospect Parks. A second park, the Front, occupied 36 acres overlooking the Niagara River near its entry into Lake Erie and was designed as a viewing terrace, which could also accommodate large gatherings. The Parade, a 56-acre tract on elevated land near the eastern edge of the city, where military functions took place, included children's play equipment and Vaux's large refectory. The parkways, 200-foot-wide (61-meter-wide) landscaped boulevards, now lined with handsome residences, remain a much-

9.46. 1868 Plan of Buffalo Park System, 1876 map



9.47. Plan for Riverside, Illinois, 1869

appreciated Buffalo amenity. In 1874, on land contiguous to Delaware Park, Olmsted prepared a plan for "Parkside," the city's first residential suburb, which had curving streets lined with trees and large lots for fine homes with landscaped grounds.

RIVERSIDE, ILLINOIS

Almost simultaneously, in Riverside, Illinois, on the Des Plaines River 9 miles (14.5 kilometers) west of Chicago and accessible to commuters by train, Olmsted and Vaux had the chance to employ their principles for laying out residential communities (fig. 9.47). Here was an opportunity to demonstrate on 1,600 acres of farmland the truly metropolitan character of their vision, which was far different from Downing's merely suburban ideal. In doing so, they went beyond the explicit commission of the Riverside Improvement Company to design a parkway connecting city and suburb. They wanted to create a transportation alternative to the railroad, providing a recreational amenity not only for Riverside families, but also for carriage-owning Chicago residents who wanted a pleasant outing in the countryside. Like the Brooklyn parkways, the Chicago parkway—several miles of which were constructed—had segregated lanes, with pedestrians and horseback riders occupying the lane next to the central roadway and carts and wagons the outside utility lane.

For the circulation system within the community, the designers created curving, well-drained, tree-lined roads with sidewalks bordering lawns, which

they specified to be 30 feet (9.1 meters) deep and planted with at least two trees. Like a New England town, Riverside had its common. There were, moreover, because of the configuration of the road system, many triangular pieces of land that were intentionally exempted from the process of parceling house lots, and these served as additional public green space. But the largest reservation of land for common recreational enjoyment was the 160-acre stretch of land paralleling the Des Plaines River, envisioned as a waterfront park.

Management difficulties and financial problems made the partners resign their commission in 1870. A thousand acres east of the river and a small piece of land to the west were eventually developed according to their plan, but many half-acre lots were divided into two lots, and the large park remained unbuilt. Today, however, this leafy suburb, which is now surrounded by ordinary grid-style urbanization, stands out as an example of the intelligent approach to the design of the new American metropolitan landscape in the middle of the nineteenth century when Olmsted and Vaux infused the process of real-estate development with social and recreational considerations of lasting consequence.

CHICAGO PARKS

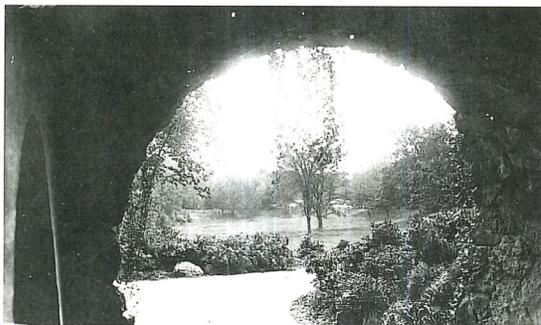
At the same time that the partners were working on Riverside, Chicago was becoming a commercial dynamo vigorously seeking the civic symbolism that would assert its supremacy within the Union. The state legislature had recently passed a bill authorizing the creation of three large parks, two of which had received approval in a voters' referendum. Separate commissions were created to oversee each park, a fact that served to prevent the comprehensive urban planning approach taken in Buffalo.

William LeBaron Jenny, a French-trained architect, was chosen to design the western recreational complex consisting of Douglas Park and Garfield (originally Central) Park, while Olmsted and Vaux were hired to design the united Washington Park and Jackson Park for the South Park Commission (fig. 9.48). Unfortunately, the fire of 1871, which destroyed much of Chicago, prevented the construction of these parks from moving forward at the time. Even if begun, the parks on the South Park Commission's flat, unpromising site adjacent to Lake Michigan offered little opportunity for realizing Olmsted and Vaux's ideal scenery of rolling meadowland. In addition, because Chicago had a district-based rather than a city-wide park system, the designers were called upon to fit more elements into their plan for the two parks than would have been the case had they been able to adopt an integrated metropolitan approach,

9.50. Meadow with Schoolmaster Hill, Franklin Park, West Roxbury, c. 1900, an example of the type of gently undulating rural scenery that Olmsted sought to provide as a means of preserving pastoral ideals within rapidly growing nineteenth-century industrial cities



Right: 9.51. Ellicott Arch, Franklin Park, 1892



Below: 9.52. Moraine Farm, Beverly, Massachusetts, open field, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted

the parks effort were impressed by comments made by landscape architect Horace William Shaler Cleveland (1814–1900) of Chicago to the effect that what Boston needed was not a “central” park, but rather a surrounding greenbelt including drives and scenic areas for public use. On February 25, 1870, Olmsted lectured at the Lowell Institute on “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns,” presciently anticipating large-scale urban growth and advocating a similar metropolitan vision. Five years of often heated public debate and several planning proposals ensued. A commission set up in 1875 solicited Olmsted’s advice on site selection. From this beginning, which led to a series of commissions lasting the rest of his professional life, he was able to project a bold planning vision of parkway-linked parks: a metropolitan-scale “Emerald Necklace” (fig. 9.49).³⁹

Working with Charles Sprague Sargent, the director of the Arnold Arboretum, Olmsted was able to effect the transfer and leaseback arrangements between Harvard University, the owner of the Arboretum, and the city, which allowed jointly funded improvements and operations on the 120-acre site, one of the gemstones of the necklace. The two men disagreed about ways to plant the public parkland next to the Arboretum in Brookline. Sargent, the botanist, favored a taxonomic approach and the use of native plants only, while Olmsted, the artist, felt that including exotic plants would enhance the effects of light and shade, gradations of color, contrasts in texture, and compositional arrangement of forms he envisioned. Olmsted, who saw botanical display as a

perversion of the principles of park making, which he felt should always be directed toward creating broad stretches of naturalistic scenery, ironically found himself advocating a more diverse botanical palette than that of the professional botanist.

In 500-acre Franklin Park, considered by Olmsted to be the principal jewel, where the natural terrain of West Roxbury gave him the opportunity to create a broad rolling meadow and a grade-separated circulation system that allowed pedestrians to approach it through handsome rustic arches, he achieved a good approximation of his scenic park ideal (figs. 9.50, 9.51). Now, in 1884, with Vaux no longer at his side, he built these of natural stone boulders instead of the dressed and carved stone that made his former partner’s arches in Central Park and Prospect Park works of ornamental architecture. Here the meadow was also conceived as a baseball field, with boulders for bleachers and a rustic changing area nearby. This is an early instance of sports permitted on an Olmsted park meadow, a harbinger of the future transformation by others in much less sensitive design terms of many existing Olmsted lawns and meadows into spaces for organized recreation.

OLMSTED, RICHARDSON, AND ELIOT

While Olmsted still nominally held the title of consulting landscape architect to the Parks Department, he was thoroughly disgusted by New York’s political milieu, so in 1881, he transferred his office and home to Brookline, Massachusetts. His friend and neighbor there was the noted architect Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886), and during the five years before Richardson’s death, the two had several opportunities for intensely sympathetic collaboration, in which Richardson’s neo-Romanesque yet original style encouraged Olmsted’s increasing boldness in the use of boulders and rough fieldstone. Olmsted still harbored a penchant for trailing vines and found the combination of these and massive rustic stone walls pleasing.





At Moraine Farm, the estate of John C. Phillips in Beverly, Massachusetts, on the banks of Wenham Great Pond, he had the opportunity to design a 275-acre American version of a *ferme ornée* where a beautiful hayfield with clumps of deciduous and evergreen trees at the edges performed the same aesthetic function as the Long Meadow in Prospect Park (fig. 9.52). Here, on the east side of the house designed by the Bostonian architects Peabody and Stearns and overlooking the pond, he built a long sinuous terrace banked by a retaining wall of natural boulders, beneath which masses of laurel and rhododendron cascade down to the edge of the water (fig. 9.53).

Olmsted was now the undisputed leader in the profession of landscape architecture in America. His services were heavily in demand, and he found himself traveling back and forth across the country by train to serve a wide clientele, designing park systems for Rochester, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky. In 1879, he assisted in preparing the report that led in 1885 to the scenic preservation of Niagara and of the abundant botanical diversity of Goat Island between the American and Canadian Falls. He and Vaux teamed up again to develop an environmentally sensitive plan that would allow visitors to fully appreciate this scenic wonder without the distraction of tawdry commercial development.

With his young partner, Charles Eliot, Olmsted was able to extend the concept of Boston's municipal park system to a broad metropolitan scale. Eliot, the son of the president of Harvard, was instrumental in forming the Trustees of Public Reservations (now known as the Trustees of Reservations), an early example of a conservation organization dedicated to preserving wilderness areas in New England. In addition to small publicly accessible properties held by the Trustees, Eliot envisioned large reservations in the public domain, for which a metropolitan commission was needed. He worked tirelessly with Sylvester Baxter, a writer turned regional planner, to develop political consensus among the communities within and

the jurisdictions outside the boundaries of the municipality of Boston for a Metropolitan District to acquire and improve parkland within a 10-mile (16.1-kilometer) radius of the city. Their survey of the area took in the islands in the harbor, beaches, forests, three river basins, several hills, five ponds, and other sites they found desirable as nature preserves or suitable for public recreation.

The Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners appointed under the 1892 act was created to a large degree as a result of their work. This Board read the Eliot-Baxter report and plan, which was published the following year. In it, Baxter outlined their recommendations for restoring tree cover, guiding real-estate development, reducing water pollution, making transportation accessible, and designing small local community playgrounds. Eliot's report, with accompanying maps and diagrams, summarized the area's physical and historical geography and described the opportunities awaiting the commission's subsequent actions in the well-watered and hilly glaciated terrain of metropolitan Boston. Thus, as he neared the end of his active professional career, Olmsted was able to rejoice in the success of his young protégé in carrying forward his own peculiarly American mission of promoting civilization through landscape preservation. Tragically, Eliot's life was cut short by death only four years later. In addition, there were new forces at work in American society, seeking to promote civilization in more conspicuous ways.

OLMSTED IN A NEOCLASSICAL CONTEXT

The movement to shape cities according to the monumental model provided by Paris and other European capitals emerged from the generation of architects after Vaux, who trained abroad in a variety of Neoclassical styles derived from the French Renaissance and its Italian models. These younger men converted some of the nation's growing industrial wealth into mansions for the wealthy and civic grandeur for the public at large. Among these was Richard Morris Hunt (1828–1895), the first American of renown to design in the style called Beaux-Arts after the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris where a number of aspiring architects from the United States went to study in the second half of the nineteenth century. Olmsted and Vaux were not happy when a newly formed Committee on Statuary, Fountains and Architectural Structures invited Hunt to propose alterations to the Arsenal in Central Park in 1860; the Civil War caused these plans to be shelved for the duration. More upsetting was Hunt's proposal, drawn up at the committee's request, for a series of monumental Neoclassical gateways at the park's four southern entrances. Vaux's

9.53. East Terrace, Moraine Farm, Beverly, Massachusetts, estate of John C. Phillips, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. c. 1880



9.54. U.S. Capitol, Terrace on the west front, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. 1873

opposition persuaded the park commissioners not to construct these monumental entrances.

Olmsted felt that statuary in the park should be confined to the Mall and Bethesda Terrace, and he expressed his fear of other monumental Beaux-Arts architectural encroachments by Hunt on the park's pastoral landscape. Nevertheless, Olmsted was able to work within the context of a Neoclassical design vocabulary when necessary. In 1873, he accepted the commission of the Senate Committee on Buildings and Grounds to design the 46 acres around the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. In this case, it was obviously necessary to ignore his precept of fitting buildings inconspicuously into the landscape, as the chief purpose of the project was to heighten the monumentality and dignity of the nation's most important public building. In addition to banning Gardenesque effects, which he considered fussy distractions from this principal object, he built the massive terrace that forms a podium along the Capitol's north, south, and west sides and unifies the building with its surroundings (fig. 9.54).

In the two final commissions of his career, Olmsted worked directly with Beaux-Arts architects. In 1888, twenty-five-year-old George Washington Vanderbilt commissioned him to design the grounds at Biltmore, his estate near Asheville, North Carolina. Here Hunt was the architect of a palatial mansion resembling a French Renaissance *château*. Olmsted's plan encompassed 2,000 acres of mountainous landscape. Inasmuch as the site did not lend itself to becoming a park in the pastoral and Picturesque tradition, Olmsted recommended that Vanderbilt should devote most of it to scientific forestry. The millionaire eventually increased his holdings to 120,000 acres and hired America's first professional forester, Gifford

Pinchot, who later became the founding head of the United States Forest Service. Olmsted also convinced Vanderbilt to create an arboretum.

At Biltmore, Olmsted's particular genius as a landscape designer expressed itself in the estate's road system: a 3-mile (4.8-kilometer) approach road, the borders of which he enhanced with "varied forms of vegetation . . . all consistent with the sensation of passing through the remote depths of a natural forest."⁴⁰ Here, as in Central Park and elsewhere, he wanted to plant lush masses of many species of rhododendron and a rich variety of other woodland shrubs in order to create the "sense of the superabundant creative power, infinite resource, and liberality of Nature"⁴¹ that tropical scenery had always evoked in him. The long approach road at last brings the visitor, who has had no anticipatory view of what lies ahead, to a rectangular grassy esplanade, beyond which Hunt's immense *château* of Indiana limestone looms suddenly into view. At Moraine Farm, the view of the lake was not revealed until one passed through the house onto the terrace overlooking it; so, too, at Biltmore, Olmsted withheld the panoramic scenery of the Great Smokies with Mount Pisgah in the distance until one had passed through the house onto the terrace there. Thus, although more architecturally elaborate than the rustic terrace built earlier in Massachusetts, the terrace at Biltmore serves the same purpose as a viewing platform for a heretofore concealed spectacle of nature at its most glorious.

At the same time that he worked at Biltmore, Olmsted became a member of the design team, headed by the architect Daniel H. Burnham, that was planning the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 for Chicago. This World's Fair, like the expositions organized first in England and then in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, was intended as an international showcase of the products of industry. But unlike the earlier fairs, which had produced technologically innovative structures—notably the Crystal Palace and the Eiffel Tower—Burnham and his Beaux-Arts-trained colleagues wished to put the architectural stamp of Neoclassical grandeur, rather than of modernity, upon this one. Olmsted was consulted on site selection and, with the assistance of his talented young protégé and partner Henry Sargent Codman, chose the still-unimproved site of Jackson Park. This gave him an opportunity to revisit the 1871 design he had prepared in partnership with Vaux. Now, however, it was necessary to adopt a much more pronounced orientation toward "gregarious" recreation, with the further understanding that, as at the United States Capitol, the grounds would showcase the buildings. The large lagoon he had planned twenty years earlier was still possible and desirable if



9.55. Central Basin (Court of Honor), World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in collaboration with Daniel Burnham. 1893

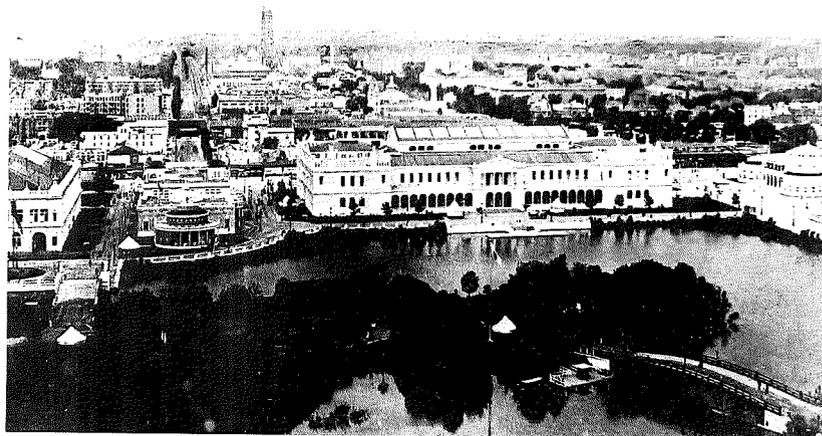
Below: 9.56. Lagoon and Island, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. 1893

it were treated as a series of waterbodies, some of which were to be given a geometric architectural treatment to complement the buildings. With their uniform cornice lines and white color, the largest of these made an impressive grouping around Olmsted's most conspicuous water feature, a long central basin with a canal leading to other parts of the lagoon system, each of which served as a watery foreground for another composition of fair buildings (fig. 9.55).

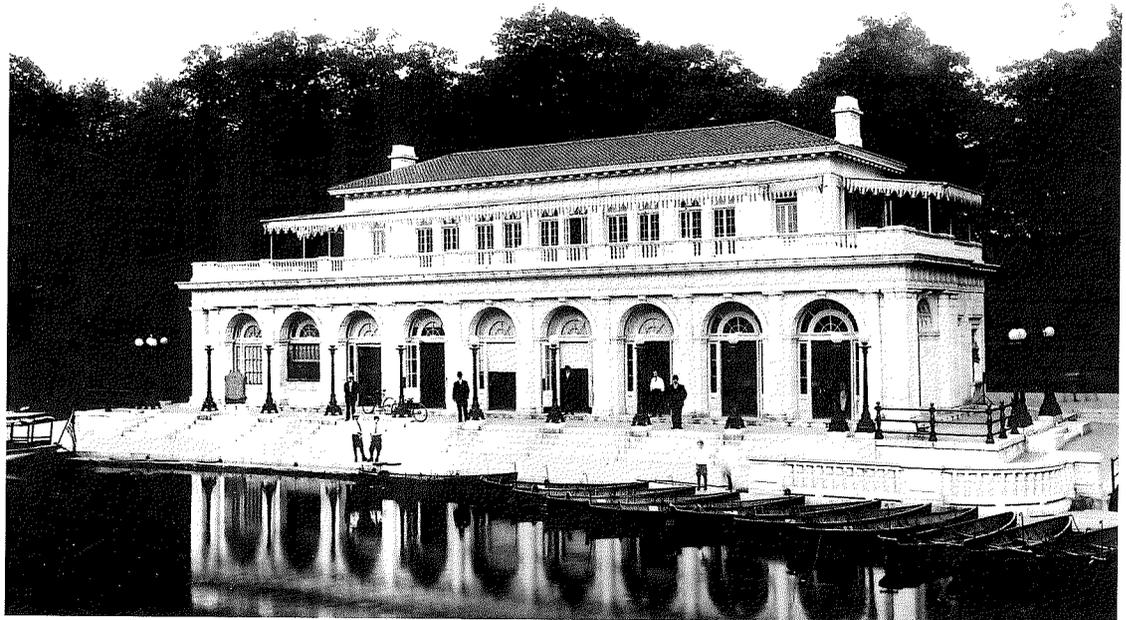
Still, Olmsted found an opportunity to provide relief from the noisy crowds and architectural grandiloquence of the fair in the wooded island in the center of the lagoon. There he tried within the short growing period before opening day to create an air of poetic mystery and the appearance of a natural bayou by establishing a rich aquatic vegetation and dense shoreline growth (fig. 9.56). Here, fair visitors could find a ramble of sinuous paths and the illusion of nature in the midst of the hubbub and excitement of the fair. Olmsted wished to keep the island free of structures, protesting when a music hall was contemplated in that location. Praising the achievement of the Chicago World's Fair as the grounds were being completed, the writer on architecture, gardens, and landscape design, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, told future visitors, "You will already know that much of the ground immediately beneath you was not even solid, ugly prairie, but treacherous marsh. And looking over this ground now—here with its straight, stately, wide canals and architectonic terraces, and there with its irregularly-shaped lagoons and islands—you will understand how a great artist like

Mr. Olmsted can absolutely create in a way which almost equals Nature's own."⁴²

Olmsted, overworked and ailing, was now called upon to add his influential voice to those opposing a speedway in Central Park, one of many proposed encroachments over the years. A six-month holiday abroad with his daughter and son for the purpose of regaining his health gave him the opportunity to revisit with renewed delight the English countryside he had first admired as a young man. At the same time, he deplored the contemporary Victorian obsession with horticulture. As we shall read in Chapter Eleven, a controversy was raging between Sir Reginald Blomfield, author of *The Formal Garden in England* and proponent of a return to geometrical



9.57. Boathouse, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York, designed by Stanford White and Frank J. Helmle. 1905



planning principles, and William Robinson, the ardent foe of topiary and ornamental floral bedding-out and prolific author of *The English Flower Garden*, *The Wild Garden*, and other books and articles championing herbaceous borders artfully composed of casually intermingled perennial plants. Although the trailing vines recommended by Robinson exactly suited Olmsted's taste and he found *The Wild Garden* useful in selecting plants for such places as the Ramble in Central Park, he was now more convinced than ever that he had been right to take what was useful from the writings of Gilpin and Price and to have developed an American landscape style emphasizing broad, overarching scenic themes. He even made a pilgrimage to the church at Boldre where Gilpin had been vicar, and he traveled along the route beside the river Wye that Gilpin had described in one of his books. Visiting Paris, where he examined the grounds of the exposition of 1889, he hoped that in Chicago the "petty effects and frippery" of ornamental floral display would be avoided. He admired, however, the "fitness for their purposes" of the buildings left in the wake of the Paris fair and expressed reservation about those of the White City, as people called the collection of temporary buildings made of staff—plaster and fiber laid over timber forms—then rising on the shores of Lake Michigan. He hoped that the Chicago buildings were "not going to look too assuming of architectural stateliness and to be overloaded with sculptural and other efforts for grandeur and grandiloquent pomp."⁴³

But for now, thanks to the influence of the

Chicago World's Fair, the field belonged to Daniel Burnham and other Beaux-Arts practitioners. The achievements of Calvert Vaux were overshadowed by these architects, and the former partners' belief in the overriding therapeutic and spiritual values of naturalistic landscapes in an urban setting was denied by the Gilded Age's desire for monumental grandeur. While he still held the position of landscape architect to the board in charge of New York City parks, Vaux had protested against the design of a speedway planned now for the edge of the Harlem River, but his objections were high-handedly brushed aside, and he died under mysterious circumstances in 1895. Olmsted fell victim to dementia, retired from public life, and was confined during the five years preceding his death in 1903 in the McLean Hospital at Waverly, Massachusetts, where he had designed the grounds. But before his intellectual powers were eclipsed, he had seen clearly that the Beaux-Arts architects' appetite for monumentality was antithetical to the older ideal of a republican America that he and Vaux had tried to embody in their parks.

In 1894, Stanford White (1853–1906), the most fashionable Beaux Arts architect in the generation after Hunt, was approached to build a tennis house in Prospect Park. It was not constructed until 1909 by his former associate, Frank J. Helmle (1868–1939), also the architect in 1905 of the Prospect Park Boathouse (fig. 9.57). Designed after the Library of St. Mark in Venice by Jacopo d'Antonio Tatti, called Sansovino (1486–1570), the Boathouse, though handsome in its own right like the Tennis House, is alien to the spirit

of the park's rustic and rural-seeming landscape. Further aggrandizing what was intended to be a pastoral refuge from city life, the firm of McKim, Mead and White carried out in Prospect Park what Hunt had failed to do in Central Park. Here they erected three monumental Neoclassical entrances (fig. 9.58). Not unreasonably, Olmsted felt that White and his Beaux Arts colleagues were "trying to establish the rule of motives that are at war with those that ruled in the original laying out of Brooklyn Park."⁴⁴ All the same, instructed by France, American tastemakers of the time were committed to the values of opulence expressed by the later term denoting the period as the Gilded Age, and the emulation of European urban grandeur was well established as a dominant motive underlying civic beautification. Instructed by France in another regard as well, they were also embarked on a course of Industrial Age urban modernity.



9.58. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, New York, designed by John H. Duncan, architect, with architectural embellishment by McKim, Mead and White and sculpture by Frederick MacMonnies, Thomas Eakins, and William O'Donovan. 1889–1901

NOTES FOR CHAPTER NINE

1. The term *ecological* as used to describe the relationship between organisms and their respective environments was coined in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel, a German zoologist, in *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*. See David Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), ch. 13, p. 283, and footnote 41.

2. I am indebted to Melanie Louise Simo for her good analysis of Loudon's career and influence. See Melanie Simo, *Loudon and the Landscape: From Country Seat to Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

3. Bernard de Jussieu (1699–1777) and his nephew Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu (1748–1836), the principal competitors of Linnaeus, based their system of plant classification on the physical forms of plants rather than on their reproductive structures.

4. *Gardener's Magazine*, vol. XVI (1840), p. 620. As discussed in Chapter Thirteen, Christopher Tunnard, champion of the modern garden, developed a similar theory whereby elements were to be composed asymmetrically along an invisible axis so as to achieve "occult balance." See Christopher Tunnard, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (London: The Architectural Press, 1938), p. 92.

5. See Hazel Conway, *People's Parks: The Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 229. I am indebted to this excellent source for this and much other valuable information regarding the early public parks movement in Great Britain.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

7. David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew*

Jackson Downing 1815–1852 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996). I am indebted to this historian's intimate knowledge of nineteenth-century landscape design and designers in the following discussion of Downing and the development of the "middle landscape," the extension of the metropolis into rural areas with the creation of the first suburbs, and a new architectural vocabulary of suburban villa design. See also Judith K. Major, *To Live in the New World: A. J. Downing and American Landscape Gardening* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997) for a good discussion of how Downing adapted contemporary English design principles and horticultural practices to the conditions of American society and the character of its natural landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century.

8. Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 6th ed. (New York: A. O. Moore & Co., 1859), p. 25.

9. *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, p. 65.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

13. *Rural Essays* (New York: Levitt and Allen, 1856), pp. 147–53 *passim*.

14. As quoted in Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste*, p. 192.

15. As the garden historian John Dixon Hunt points out, John Claudius Loudon was the first to apply the term *landscape architecture* to the work of landscape designers. In 1840, Loudon republished Repton's *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1803) under the title *The*

Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphrey Repton. See Hunt, *Greater Perfections* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 217. But neither Repton nor Loudon after him seems to have employed the term in presenting themselves to clients. Repton had christened himself "Landscape Gardener" upon entering professional practice, and Loudon considered himself to be primarily an agronomist, botanist, horticulturalist, and author. Olmsted and Vaux wished to distinguish between their kind of work—which often involved extensive engineering and significant reformation of the land to produce a naturalistic effect akin to that of rural scenery—and Loudon's kind of ornamental horticulture and that of Repton late in his career when he deemed appropriate a Gardenesque treatment in areas adjacent to the house. Nevertheless, the notion that they were *artists*, not simply engineers or administrators, was important to them. In discussing the use of the title with Olmsted, who apparently objected to it as being too vague, Vaux said as they were about to reenter partnership in 1865, "I have always liked the title Landscape Architect because—the specialty was fairly embodied. A title that could as easily be transferred to an inartistic public work is not as satisfactory. . . . The term Landscape Architect does not suit you, well I am sorry for it. I think it is the title. We want to set art ahead and make it *command* its position, administration, management, funds, commission, popularity and everything else—then we have a tangible something to stand on." (See Charles C. McLaughlin *et al.* *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. V, pp.

363, 373–74.) The earliest instance of their use of *landscape architect* as a professional title came in 1860 when they were so described in their appointment to advise on laying out streets in northern Manhattan. (See *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. III, p. 267, note 1.) Olmsted deferred to Vaux's preference for the term when they reestablished their partnership in 1865 as Olmsted, Vaux, & Company, Landscape Architects. At this time, they were reappointed by the Executive Committee of Central Park to serve as "Landscape Architects to the Board."

16. For the following discussion of landscapes of memory, those containing monuments and memorial grave sites, and of the movement from burying ground to rural cemetery I am particularly indebted to Blanche Linden-Ward, *Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989).

17. Circular letter, July 1823, as quoted in Linden-Ward, *Silent City on a Hill*, p. 124.

18. The developer of the Quincy granite quarries, Gridley Bryant, was instrumental in building the first railway in America in 1827 in order to transport the blocks of stone to the shore for transport to the monument site in Charlestown near Boston.

19. William Wordsworth, "Essay upon Epitaphs." *Friend 25* (Feb. 1810): 408. Reprinted in *The Excursion: A Poem* (New York: C. S. Francis, 1850). Quoted in Linden-Ward, *Silent City on a Hill*, p. 61.

20. Dearborn, who had no further direct involvement at Mount Auburn, went on to help found and design in 1846 another rural burial ground in the Boston area, the Forest Hills Cemetery in Roxbury.

21. James Smillie, drawings, and Cornelia W. Walter, description, *Mount Auburn* (New York: R. Martin, 1851), p. 18.

22. Andrew Jackson Downing, "Public Cemeteries and Public Gardens" (July 1848) in *Rural Essays*, p. 157.

23. When Olmsted visited England for the second time in 1859, he corresponded with William Jackson Hooker (1785–1865), botanist and director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, deploring how "the old simple formal fashion of gardening . . . [and] the peculiar landscape beauty of old English places . . . is sacrificed to botanic beauty and variety and the interest of frequent contrasts & surprises." (Letter, c. November 29, 1859, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. III, ed.) Charles C. McLaughlin, Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, p. 232). In the essay "The Spoils of the Park," written in February, 1882, after he had left New York, Olmsted expressed in even stronger terms his aversion to the Gardenesque: "During the last twenty years Europe has been swept by a mania for sacrificing natural scenery to coarse manu-

factures of brilliant and gaudy decoration under the name of specimen gardening; bedding, carpet, embroider, and ribbon gardening, or other terms suitable to the house-furnishing and millinery trades. It was a far madder contagion than the tulip-mania, or the morus-multicaulis fever of our youth." In *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Being the Professional Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Senior*, ed. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Theodora Kimball (1922; reissued 1970, Bronx, New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc.), p. 143.

24. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), p. 87. As an Anglo-American experiencing a sense almost of homecoming, Olmsted is rhapsodic about his first encounter with the English landscape. He continues, with details of sensory appreciation, describing a scene that might have been a painting by Constable: "We stood dumb-stricken by its loveliness, as, from the bleak April and bare boughs we had left at home, broke upon us that English May—sunny, leafy, blooming May—in an English lane; with hedges, English hedges, hawthorn hedges, all in blossom; homely old farm-houses, quaint stables, and haystacks; the old church spire over the distant trees; the mild sun beaming through the watery atmosphere, and all so quiet—the only sounds the hum of bees and the crisp grass-tearing of a silken-skinned, real (unimported) Herford cow over the hedge."

25. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

26. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, *Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park: "Greensward" in Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City*, ed. Albert Fein (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 71.

27. According to Scripture, "Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." John 5:2–4, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized (King James) Version.

28. Letter from Calvert Vaux to Frederick Law Olmsted, May 12, 1865, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. V, ed. Charles C. McLaughlin, Victoria Post Ranney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1990), p. 364.

29. Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to Calvert Vaux, June 8, 1865, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. V, p. 390.

30. "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents" (January 1870), *The*

Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: vol. VI, ed. Charles C. McLaughlin, David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer, p. 357.

31. For a detailed description of the sensory experience of entering the Long Meadow through the Endale Arch, see Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 28–36.

32. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents to the President of the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, Brooklyn (1868)" in Fein, *Landscape into Cityscape*, p. 153.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

36. Quoted without citation in Victoria Post Ranney, "Olmsted in Chicago" (Chicago: The Open Lands Project, 1972), p. 27.

37. The term *plaisance* was used by Olmsted to denote a landscape with paths and grassy areas defined by shrub-planted borders, a part of a park intended for picnicking and strolling during daylight hours but one that, because of security issues posed by its dense plantings, was fenced and closed at night. See *Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Supplementary Series*, vol. 1, p. 218.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

39. Cynthia Zaitzevsky is the author of the definitive study of Olmsted's creation of the Boston park system. See Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982).

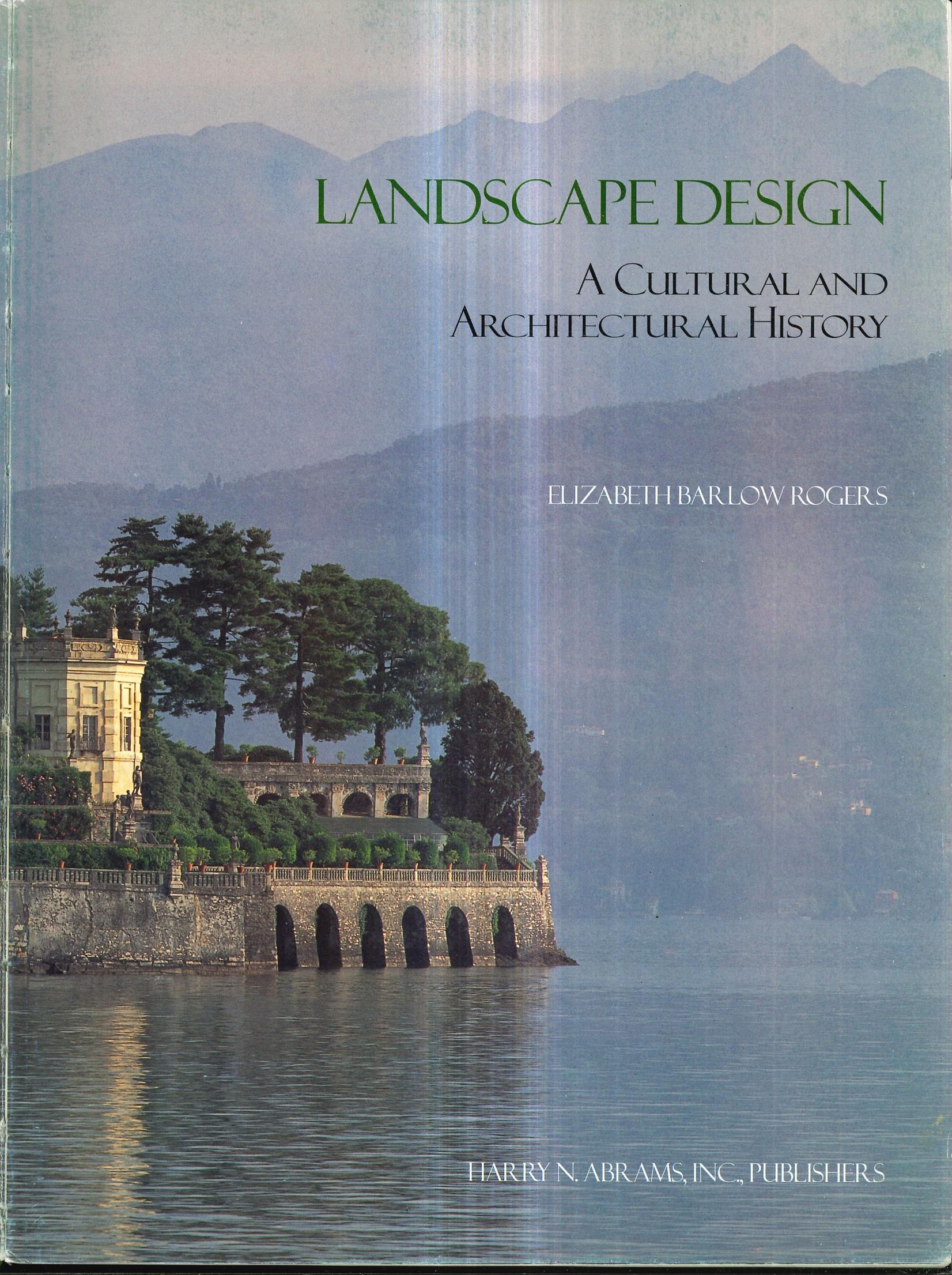
40. Frederick Law Olmsted to George W. Vanderbilt, July 12, 1889, as quoted in Charles E. Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), p. 226.

41. Letter to Ignaz Anton Pilat (1820–1870), head gardener of Central Park, September 26, 1863, in McLaughlin *et al.* *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. V, p. 85.

42. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "The Artistic Triumph of the Fair-Builders" in *Accents as Well as Broad Effects: Writings on Architecture, Landscape, and the Environment, 1876–1925*, ed. David Gebhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 71.

43. According to Charles E. Beveridge, editor of Olmsted's papers, this quotation comes from a "letter with no salutation or date, but internal evidence indicates that Olmsted wrote it to his partners John Charles Olmsted and Henry Sargent Codman in April of 1892." Letter to the author, January 17, 2000.

44. Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to William A. Stiles, March 10, 1895. Citation courtesy of Charles E. Beveridge, letter to the author, January 17, 2000.



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