

NATURE IN PRACTICE: THE OLMSTED FIRM AND THE RISE OF LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING 1880-1920

by

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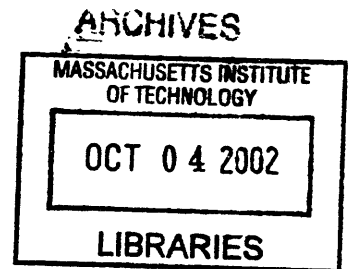
Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the development of the fields of landscape architecture and planning during the career of John Charles Olmsted. It attributes to him much of what happened in that period to standardize landscape architecture and planning practice. After Frederick Law Olmsted's retirement in 1895, the Olmsted Firm, under John Charles Olmsted, pioneered and led the development of landscape architecture and planning, working at both the large scale of national practice and at the smaller scale of office practice.

The Olmsted firm is well-recognized for contributions to the profession of landscape architecture and to the development of American cities, especially in the form of innovative and influential projects in cities and towns across the United States. With the burgeoning cities and suburbs across the United States and increased opportunities for work, Olmsted Brothers grew into the largest landscape architecture and planning firm in the country. In the office, the firm's attempts to manage an often unwieldy amount of production material led to the development of an office system that forms the basis of modern design practice. On the road, John Charles Olmsted expanded the firm's national practice and became the most sought-after expert called in to help plan cities and towns across the country.

Thesis Supervisor: Anne Whiston Spira

Title: Professor of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning

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## Chapter I: Introduction

This dissertation examines the growth of the fields of landscape architecture and planning during the career of John Charles Olmsted.<sup>1</sup> It attributes to him much of what happened in that period to modernize the landscape architecture and planning practice. After Frederick Law Olmsted's retirement in 1895, the Olmsted firm, under John Charles Olmsted, pioneered and led the development of landscape architecture and planning, working at both the large scale of national practice and at the smaller scale of office practice. With the burgeoning cities and suburbs across the United States and increased opportunities for work, the Olmsted firm grew into the largest landscape architecture/planning firm in the world.<sup>2</sup> In the office, the firm's attempts to manage an often unwieldy level of production material led to the development of an office system that forms the basis of modern design practice.

It was in the nineteenth century in the United States that the Olmsted firm and other practitioners began promoting public awareness of the landscape architecture/planning profession through standardization across the country, as well as by educational programs and technical journals. The prevailing view of the few professionals in the field to which the Olmsteds adhered was that until there were more competent practitioners and more public awareness, the profession would not develop and grow.

The change that came with the switch from a Frederick Law Olmsted-dominated office to one headed by stepson John Charles Olmsted occurred over a period of several years. Similarly, the transformation of business practices and the move from a small office to one with a large

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<sup>1</sup> During the time that John Charles Olmsted practiced, landscape architecture was defined primarily as a fine art. It was first defined in the 1915 catalogue at Harvard University as: "primarily a fine art, and as such its most important function is to create and preserve beauty in the adaptation of land to human service, whether in the functional planning of cities or in the development or preservation of the broader natural scenery of the country." Although the first courses in planning were offered in the School of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University from 1909, a Master in Landscape Architecture in City Planning was not offered until 1923. The field was first defined in the 1929-1930 catalogue. "City planning, which cannot be separated from regional planning, is comparatively new as a profession and the number of men who are adequately trained to practice it is very small. The subject is so broad that it might almost be said to be concerned with all the efforts of man to adapt his environment to his needs.

<sup>2</sup> Birnbaum, Charles and Karson, Robin. "Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.," Pioneers of American Landscape Design. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. P. 274.

national practice, involving increases in employees and expansion of physical space, also required years to unfold. Following the retirement of Frederick Law Olmsted, changes occurred as adaptations to practice and scale, not as a comprehensive overhaul from former methods of doing business. Trial-and-error served an equally important role with the adaptation of business practices from other professions. What did result was the modern professional office.

John Charles Olmsted's role in the development of the profession is largely unknown and unrecognized. Most planning and urban histories include and usually give considerable attention to Frederick Law Olmsted and sometimes, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. More often than not, the work of John Charles Olmsted is not mentioned, except in reference to a few projects in which he was involved, like the park systems in Seattle and Dayton.

In examining the achievements of John Charles Olmsted, his role in an important segment of the history of planning is revealed. He came to his position by first apprenticing with his stepfather, accompanying him in travels across the country. When he assumed the role of senior partner, he gradually saw the need to modernize the design practice. His writings reflected an increasingly systematic approach to the process of planning and design, from initial contact to finished job, as well as the process of doing business as a planner and designer. By studying the workings of the firm, an understanding of the evolution of the profession from the time when the Olmsted firm practiced planning in tandem with landscape architecture is gained. With the growth of cities and the development of technologies for doing business, planning came to be recognized as a separate profession.

This dissertation grew out of a research side trip. Initially meant to be an examination of suburban developments carried out by the Olmsted firm through John Charles Olmsted's career, I found that their methods of doing business were far more interesting than the jobs themselves. As the first large landscape architecture/planning firm, how did they set up the physical office? Without a model of business, how did the Olmsted firm organize itself? How did the Olmsted firm manage so many jobs at the same time? No one has ever undertaken a study of the firm's business practices nor studied the office methods for dealing with a job, a process which eventually formed the basis for the curriculum for the study of landscape architecture that

continues today.<sup>3</sup> While studying a particular job requires looking at correspondence and visual materials (plans and photographs), no standardized materials exist for the business workings. Even as an Olmsted client could expect a routine of correspondence, contract, preliminary plans, final plans and implementation, no complementary system existed for the business.

The reason for this lack after the many years that Frederick Law Olmsted ran the firm is that the Olmsteds kept experimenting with a variety of methods before settling on the one that forms the basis for modern design practice. What I discovered was that the addition of John Charles Olmsted to the practice of the Olmsted firm marked the beginning of the professions of landscape architecture and planning as known today. Having John Charles Olmsted join him in the practice allowed Frederick Law Olmsted to expand his business, while also prompting him to bring to the firm secretarial and accounting help, as well as people to help with the draughting.

Landscape architect Laurie Olin has written that all successful and important practicing landscape architects in the United States are no more than six degrees of separation from the Olmsted firm.<sup>4</sup> What this means is that a landscape architect today will have been taught by a professor who was taught by a professor who either worked for the firm or was trained by someone who had worked in the Olmsted office. The importance of a study of the Olmsted methods is that it provides the first chapter in the history of the office practices of the profession.

Both visual (over 1,000,000 items) and written materials exist and are available for study for most of the firm's 5,000+ jobs, including plans, maps, photographs, planting plans (over 150,000 items), and correspondence. While the Olmsted Firm was inconsistent in retaining materials, a researcher might find a variety of plans, topographical maps, and sketches relating to most Olmsted firm jobs.<sup>5</sup> After 1892 each job was numbered and a folder created for correspondence. The latter, which might have included an initial letter from the client to the firm, the firm's

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<sup>3</sup> Olin, Laurie. "Afterword" in Hise, Greg and Deverell, William. Eden by Design: the 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000. P. 288.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 288.

<sup>5</sup> During both WWI and WWII, the Olmsted firm answered the governments request for warehouse space by destroying some stored plans and freeing up the space. In some cases, materials are nonexistent. No correspondence exists to explain why certain materials were chosen to be saved and others not.

response, and subsequent correspondence relating to the job also included the time sheets and notes generated by the man working on the job.

Business records of the firm have and are currently being conserved. Travel diaries, employment records in different forms (1892-1976), office memoranda, business reports (1911-1924), check registers (spotty early records-1976), and financial records are available for most jobs.

Alphabetized written and visual materials on subjects relating to landscape architecture and planning jobs served as the reference file for jobs.<sup>6</sup> Almost 100 years of the Olmsted's personal correspondence is accessible, including 5,200 letters written from 1898 to 1919 between John Charles Olmsted and his wife, Sophia White Olmsted. Yet, there are also large gaps in the material. The firm did not save inter-office correspondence so John Charles Olmsted's letters to his wife give the clearest picture of the business of doing business.

### **Myths and Misconceptions**

Despite this overwhelming amount of information available on the firm's workings, myths and misconceptions about Frederick Law Olmsted, his nephew/stepson, John Charles Olmsted, and his son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., abide, along with misinformation concerning the various incarnations of the firm. To better understand the workings of the firm, these myths and misconceptions must be exposed and corrected.

The myths about the family and their work range from the, "I've got rhododendrons so it must be an Olmsted landscape," to incorrect and impossible attributions to Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. of jobs done long after his death. Many times John Charles Olmsted would be on the road reading a local paper that touted an Olmsted development in which the firm had had no part. Even today, mistakes occur and myths are perpetuated, be they misspellings of the family name and its property holdings to assumptions that an important landscape was certainly Olmsted-designed. Those mistakes add up and eventually work themselves into fictionalized accounts that pass for history.

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<sup>6</sup> The material for these files, called the NAB/NAC files came from a variety of sources. from photographs taken by firm members, to magazine articles, to pamphlets, among others.

Mistakes in citing the Olmsteds are not restricted to recent history. All during John Charles Olmsted's career, as he traveled from city to city, he wrote his wife, Sophia White Olmsted, about newspaper interviews that never happened. Reporters just made them up. When they did not make them up, he said they misquoted him. The range of mistakes went from the sublime to the ridiculous. In 1900, his half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., was identified in a photograph in a Boston paper as the assassin of King Humbert. "It is outrageous to carry journalism to the extent of such bold barefaced lies. I have often heard that the papers would publish any portrait when they hadn't one of a man or woman described but I didn't know the Herald would do it. Just think of the trouble such reckless lying might bring to innocent men," John Charles Olmsted wrote.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the fabrication of interviews, John Charles Olmsted wrote that he was never quoted correctly or photographed or drawn with any accuracy. And the spelling of the name! During the time that there was an Olmsted firm, more often than not, even their business contacts misspelled their name in correspondence as well as in local newspapers.

How does correcting these myths and misconceptions help in understanding the Olmsted firm? Righting them expands the knowledge of the history of landscape architecture and planning in the United States. And the correction of these long-time mistakes reveals that the history of the Olmsted firm and the history of landscape architecture and planning are richer than ever imagined. Examining the Olmsted firm's planning process in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century adds to the body of knowledge, not only about the Olmsteds, but of landscape architecture, planning and business history. It is the story of a profession evolving in a way that helped shape modern-day America.

Myths and misconceptions may be divided into three categories: the family, the business and the design work.

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<sup>7</sup> John Charles Olmsted to Sophia White Olmsted. John Charles Olmsted Collection, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. July 31, 1900.

## **The Family**

Much confusion has been generated by the Olmsted name. All three Olmsted men were talented designers and planners who sometimes worked alone and sometimes designed in collaboration with each other and with other members of the firm. Attribution for jobs and specific roles within the firm have blurred ever since Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed Central Park and Olmsted got the credit.

Myth: Frederick Law Olmsted lived for 150 years.

Reality: Frederick Law Olmsted lived for 80 years, from 1822-1903.

Frederick Law Olmsted started his practice in 1858 with Calvert Vaux. From 1858 to 1976, the firm had a succession of names: Olmsted and Vaux (1858), Frederick Law Olmsted (1858-1884), F.L. and J.C. Olmsted (1884-1889), F.L. Olmsted and Company (1889-1893), Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot (1893-1897), F.L. and J.C. Olmsted (again (1897-1898)), Olmsted Brothers (1898-1961), and Olmsted Associates (1961-1979).

In 1875 John Charles Olmsted joined the practice, becoming a full partner in 1884. He became officially the senior partner in 1895 and remained in that position until his death in 1920.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. joined the firm after his father's retirement in 1895 and was senior partner from 1920 until 1949. Some confusion about job attributions is explained by the fact that Frederick Law Olmsted's son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. dropped the "jr." five years after his father's death.

Myth: Frederick Law Olmsted had one son who followed him into the profession.

Reality: Two sons, one a stepson, followed Frederick Law Olmsted into the profession.

Although Frederick Law Olmsted and his wife Mary had five children, only two lived to adulthood, a daughter, Marion (1861-1948) and a son, Henry, whose name was changed when he was four years old to Frederick Law Olmsted Junior (1870-1957).



Prior to her marriage to Frederick Law Olmsted, Mary had been married to his brother, John Hull Olmsted (1825-1857). When John Hull died in 1857, he left a widow and three living children, Charlotte (1855-1908), John Charles or J.C. as he was known (1852-1920), and Owen Frederick (1857-1881). Because of their young age at their father's death, the children regarded Frederick Law Olmsted as their father and referred to him as, "Father." In the fall of 1910, John Charles Olmsted wrote to his wife that, "Miss Lee amused me by saying I looked like my father. I don't think I look in the least like him, but some others have made the same remark."<sup>8</sup> Since she met "his father" in 1884, and John Hull Olmsted had been dead for 27 years, "Father" refers to Frederick Law Olmsted. Although there is no substantiating record, Frederick Law Olmsted may have legally adopted his brother's children. In a 1948 letter to Laura Wood Roper, Frederick Law Olmsted's biographer, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. referred to John Charles Olmsted as being adopted by Frederick Law Olmsted.<sup>9</sup> It is unclear whether Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s use of the word, "adopted" was a social or legal term. The only public reference to an adoption occurred in one of John Charles Olmsted's obituaries. In the New Orleans Daily States, the obituary notes that John Charles was adopted by Frederick Law Olmsted.<sup>10</sup>

In his correspondence with John Charles, Frederick Law Olmsted always signed off, "Father." The only reference to John Hull Olmsted as "Father" was made by Sophia White Olmsted, John Charles Olmsted's wife. John Charles corrected her and wrote back that because he was so young when his father died, he thought of Frederick Law Olmsted as his father. Having a new father did not mean that John Charles Olmsted regarded his growing up as a time of happiness. On the contrary, he regularly made reference to growing up without love. In the fall of 1901, he wrote to his wife, "It troubles me very much that I am so cold and unresponsive. It is sort of an inherited curse that is upon me I feel. It is not only inherited but has grown far worse upon me and my devotion to my work has had a bad effect."<sup>11</sup>

Myth: John Charles Olmsted is not well-known because he did not make any serious contributions to the profession.

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<sup>8</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 13, 1910.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Laura Wood Roper, October 10, 1948. Unpublished. Laura Wood Roper Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

<sup>10</sup> Obituary of John Charles Olmsted. Daily States, New Orleans, LA. March 1920.

Reality: Besides having a "responsible share" in designing over 30,000 acres of parkland in 50 cities in the United States during his career, John Charles Olmsted created designs for many different types of public grounds and private residential commissions.<sup>12</sup> He also provided written and oral advice for many more. He designed more than 100 suburban developments as well as residential landscapes for individual clients. He designed additions to many college campuses. He planned parks and parkways and green spaces for growing cities.

Under his leadership, the size of the firm quintupled between 1895 and 1920. While Frederick Law Olmsted presided over a small family firm, John Charles Olmsted headed a national business with as many as 250 jobs underway at one time. He developed a model of design practice that is still used today. During his tenure, designers from all across the country and from Europe came to study the Olmsted firm's operations.

During his time as senior partner, John Charles Olmsted oversaw approximately 3,500 jobs. He worked at least ten hours a day, seven days a week for most of his working life. When he was 65 years old he still managed 50 jobs at one time. He worked as both a landscape architect and planner.

All through John Charles Olmsted's career as head of the firm, Frederick Law Olmsted was credited with doing work done by John Charles Olmsted. Similarly, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., known as Rick, was often given credit for John Charles Olmsted's work. John Charles Olmsted was a modest man who never complained about these slights, but his wife made reference to them in their correspondence. In the spring of 1904, she wrote to him,

Your mother asked Rick last evening why he did not go out to Seattle this year instead of you. I should dislike having you away for so long, but I think I am weak-minded enough to dislike still more to have Rick get the credit for your work as happens so often owing to his name being the same as your father's.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 4, 1901.

<sup>12</sup> Pray, James Sturgis. "John Charles Olmsted : A Minute on his Life and Service." prepared for the Board of Trustees of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Landscape Architecture, vol 12, no. 3 April 1922. P. 132.

<sup>13</sup> Sophia White Olmsted to John Charles Olmsted, March 30, 1904. John Charles Olmsted Collection, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA..

And that was before Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. dropped the "jr." from his name.

Occasionally in his letters to his wife, John Charles Olmsted would refer to a job that he had done that was thought to be his father's job. Writing while on a train in the winter of 1910, John Charles Olmsted mentioned that he was going by an unnamed Western university that he had designed, long thought to be one of Frederick Law Olmsted's greatest works.<sup>14</sup> John Charles Olmsted also made reference to a number of elements of the Emerald Necklace, the park system in Boston, Massachusetts, as being his own work, even though this work is usually attributed in history books to Frederick Law Olmsted.

Myth: John Charles Olmsted is unknown because he never wrote anything.

Reality: While it is true that John Charles wrote only seven articles, by his own admission, and no books, he wrote hundreds of park reports and wrote records of thousands of site visits. His articles set a tone of professionalism that became the standard. On the road, he wrote to his wife Fidie, at least once a day.

Besides revealing their relationship and how it evolved over the years he was traveling for the firm, these letters reveal how the practices of planning and landscape architecture grew, locally and throughout the country, what it was like to be a traveling professional carrying all the gear necessary for conducting business, living in hotels for months, working with a wide range of people, many of whom were elected or appointed amateurs. "I used not to be so neglectful of my health before I had the full responsibility of business upon me. But there is so much to do and there seems to be no one who can do it in a way that I can let pass, except Rick, and he is overburdened already."<sup>15</sup>

## **The Business**

During the time that Frederick Law Olmsted worked as senior partner, he was usually given the credit for the work of the firm. Even after he died this continued. The collaborative nature of the firm has not been fully understood.

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<sup>14</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 2, 1910.

<sup>15</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 24, 1900.

Myth: Frederick Law Olmsted worked alone.

Reality: Frederick Law Olmsted rarely worked alone.

Because of the collaborative nature of their work, Frederick Law Olmsted often received credit for work done by others. This was even the case when he had Calvert Vaux for a partner in designing Central Park. For whatever reason, Frederick Law Olmsted seemed unable to correct this problem. Vaux was bitter over this slight, and, ultimately, they parted company and dissolved their business partnership.

When Frederick Law Olmsted moved to Boston, he took on a succession of apprentices, including his stepson, John Charles, and also, Charles Eliot Jr., the son of Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard University. While Frederick Law Olmsted was the senior partner, most of the firm's work was collaborative. He was not a draftsman and so others in the firm interpreted his ideas on paper. Business diaries show that different partners visited the same clients at different times on the same job. After Henry Codman joined the firm, Frederick Law Olmsted had a card made that stated that both Henry and John Charles had been trained by him and that they were acting as his agents. He did this to calm clients who were expecting the master.

On the road for as long as nine months at a time, John Charles Olmsted vacillated between finding it easier to do the designing on site and hiring local draftsmen to draw the plans, and sending work back to Brookline and not having to deal with local draftsmen, who were untrained in the Olmsted methods. He enjoyed designing, but often found it frustrating to deal with local engineers and architects. As he aged and the jobs got bigger, he traveled with a draftsman from the firm. In time, senior draftsmen also traveled for the firm, but no one was away from the office as long as John Charles Olmsted

He did worry about the long times amounts of time he was away. He wrote his wife that he was sorry to be away so much. but as long as his half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was teaching at Harvard University, that he would have to keep up the business in the Midwest and West Coast. When Charles Eliot was with the firm, Eliot objected to being away so much

because he was married. At the time, John Charles Olmsted was the bachelor of the firm and it fell to him to do the western business. “I made a good reputation in the Chicago and Louisville Parks so people knew me and want[ed] me personally.”<sup>16</sup>

This conflict between work and home life was a theme in John Charles Olmsted’s letters. Two years later (1908) he wrote to his wife that he knew that he was away for long periods of time, but he thought that he could do nothing about his absences. If people wanted his advice, he could not refuse to give it. Because of his heavy travel schedule, having Sophia White Olmsted and the children move out West would not solve the problem of long absences from home because he traveled from city to city and did not stay in one place for very long. He guessed that he came home enough to prevent tales of desertion arising.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Design Work**

Neither John Charles Olmsted's individual design work nor the general collaborative nature of the firm has been recognized.

Myth: Frederick Law Olmsted designed great things up until the official time he retired.

Reality: John Charles Olmsted’s role in the firm increased as Frederick Law Olmsted slowed his pace of work in the 1890s when he first got symptoms of the dementia that would later seize him. He had a variety of other chronic ailments, ranging from insomnia to extreme nervousness. He believed in the artistic qualities of his work and almost never allowed his plans to be changed. That is, he rarely tolerated the changing of his plans. On a number of occasions, he withdrew from jobs rather than acceding to changes proposed by clients.

As his career waned, a change of scenery, a vacation, all were thought to be cures for Frederick Law Olmsted's troubles. John Charles Olmsted commissioned the design of a house, Felsted, in Deer Isle, Maine, for Frederick Law Olmsted. That did not work, nor did an extended trip to England.

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<sup>16</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 23, 1906.

<sup>17</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 29, 1908.

Traveling became extremely difficult for the older man. He could not sleep on trains. He was fortunate to have the work at Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina. G.W. Vanderbilt, the client for the job, built a house for him on the grounds, and Frederick Law Olmsted stayed there. As his illness progressed, he became easily agitated and then despondent when Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. threatened to take on a different profession. After Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. joined the firm, his father, in a demented state, wrote letters to him saying that the son should be careful because John Charles Olmsted was trying to take over the business.

Myth: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was the planner, meaning large scale public jobs, and John Charles Olmsted was the designer, referring to small scale private jobs.

Reality: Both Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted worked as planners and designers but Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. took what turned out to be the more high profile planning jobs.

None of the Olmsted men liked the study of plants.<sup>18</sup> To make up for a deficiency he acknowledged, Frederick Law Olmsted tried to make sure that both John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. learned the names and uses of garden plants. Both balked at the idea and each, in their turn, threatened to take up new professions rather than study plants. While both brothers complied with Frederick Law Olmsted's wishes, their lack of knowledge haunted them in later years. In 1909, John Charles wrote his wife, "For a landscape architect, I am extraordinarily ignorant as to garden flowers. I am often ashamed to be in a garden with people who assume that I know everything. You see I wasn't brought up in a garden or on a farm and I used to know more botanically than I did of garden flowers."<sup>19</sup>

While neither Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. nor John Charles Olmsted considered themselves experts at planting plans, both designed such plans. Both were designers and planners. It may be said that part of John Charles Olmsted's genius lay in his ability to straddle both the 19th and 20th centuries, to combine romanticism with efficiency, using the latest office and business techniques. His ability to adapt to his client's desires was a quality with which his father had

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<sup>18</sup> Both Frederick Law Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. suffered from moderate color blindness, and John Charles Olmsted to a lesser extent, which made the study of plants difficult.

great difficulty. He enjoyed the process of design. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. designed more in a formal style, most often characterized as the city beautiful style.

Myth: The Olmsteds had one style of design-the picturesque.

Reality: The Olmsteds designed using many styles; they prided themselves on being able to use a particular style to fit a particular job. John Charles Olmsted wrote in relation to the design style for an industrial village in Winnipeg:

I altered the plan considerably and completed it more and at last he was satisfied. He wanted something attractive as a paper plan. In other words the French style of planning suits him much better than the late German or the late English ideas. He has had an Englishman named Cole make a plan. He embodied some recent English ideas but I criticized them as not being very practical from a real estate point of view though having some merit. Being familiar with and ready to work in all three styles and finding his taste inclining toward the Frenchy I was able finally to suit him.<sup>20</sup>

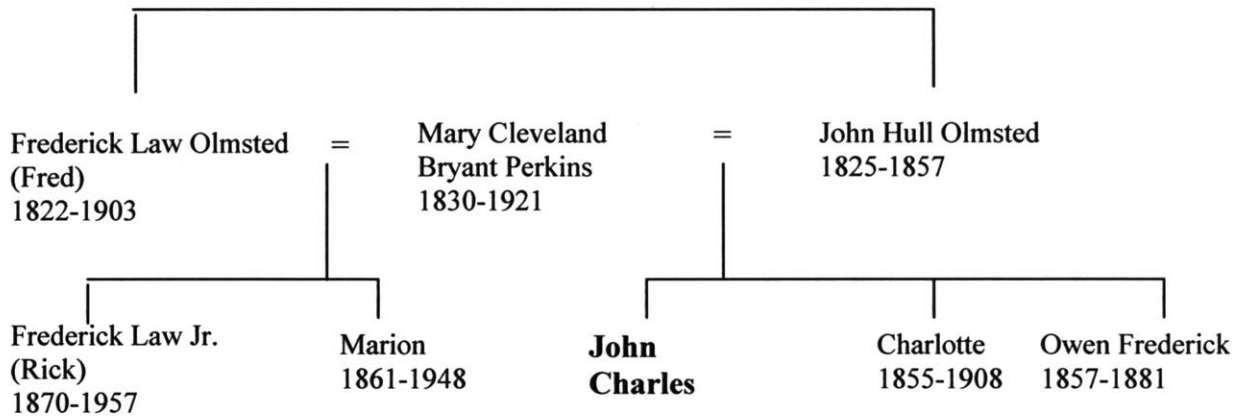
Unlike his stepfather, John Charles Olmsted was a practical man.

Understanding what is myth and what is reality allows the reader to evaluate the work of the firm and the history of the business of landscape architecture and planning. But that's getting ahead in the story. The first task for the handful of landscape architects in the late nineteenth century was to gain a recognition of landscape architecture as a profession.

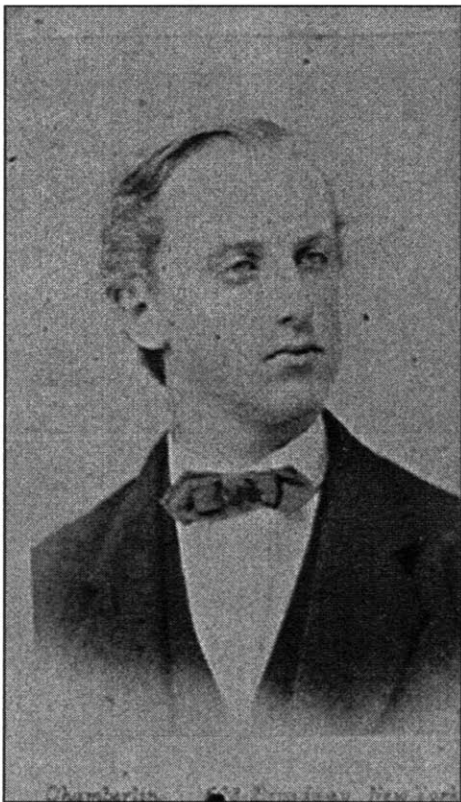
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<sup>19</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 12, 1909.

<sup>20</sup> John Charles Olmsted . September 27, 1911.



### The Olmsted Family Tree

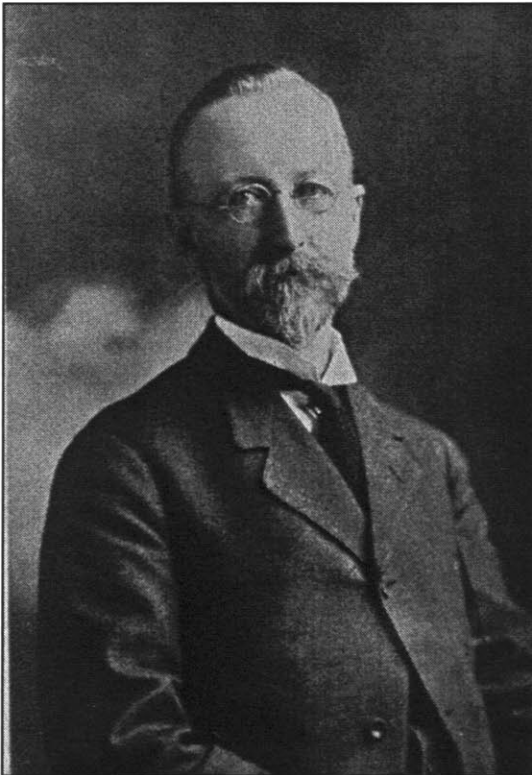


John Charles Olmsted during his college years. This is the only photograph of the adult John Charles Olmsted without his beard. While sledding with family friends, the Braces, in Dobb's Ferry, New York, in the early 1870s, he had a bad accident that left him with many painful scars on his chin. He never shaved again. Photographer unknown. College years, date unknown. *Olmsted Family Photographs*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.





John Charles Olmsted (right) and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (left) in Scandinavian sledging costumes. Brookline, MA. December 1886. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Volume L3.



Studio portrait of John Charles Olmsted, 1909 at 57 years old. Photographer unknown. *Olmsted Family Photographs*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

## Chapter II: Professionalizing Landscape Architecture and Planning

During John Charles Olmsted's tenure as head of the Olmsted firm, the professions of landscape architecture and planning grew from small and varied practices to nationwide professions with standards of practice and educational opportunities for its would-be practitioners. This professionalization came about in three ways: establishment of standards, development of educational programs, and publishing of professional journals.<sup>1</sup> All three methods were connected to each other; they were not exclusive.

Establishment of standards followed the birth of the professional organizations, the American Society of Landscape Architects, of which John Charles Olmsted was the first president, and the National Conference on City Planning of which Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was the first president. These organizations both defined their professions by setting standards for membership that, in turn, promoted a high level of expectation for achievement. John Charles Olmsted encouraged the standardization of the education of landscape architects and a few years later, for planners. He applauded his brother's role as head of the program for college-level landscape architecture programs, both for undergraduates and later for graduate students at Harvard University. In 1901, the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Landscape Gardening and Horticulture for Women in Groton, Massachusetts was started to give women an opportunity to study landscape architecture too. Garden and Forest (1888-1897) and Landscape Architecture (1910-present), journals for the professions of landscape architecture and planning, created a forum for practitioners and an interested public. John Charles Olmsted was a contributor to these publications.

While many professions developed specialties, such as engineering's mechanical, civil, naval, etc., landscape architecture remained a singular profession through the first nine years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until an increasing number of landscape architects spent their time in the

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<sup>1</sup> During the time that Frederick Law Olmsted and John Charles Olmsted practiced, the fields of architecture and engineering made strides in professionalization, although not exactly parallel to the field of landscape architecture/planning in timing and scope. For the purposes of this study, I have restricted this discussion to the

subset of planning, that the planning profession grew, due in part to the growth of cities and the development of civic improvement organizations. In 1909, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., as chairman, convened the first National Conference on City Planning. The annual conferences addressed a number of issues relating to design, engineering, and social issues.

## **Background**

When Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux submitted their plans for Central Park in 1858, there was no established profession of landscape architecture in the United States.<sup>2</sup> In recalling that time and the state of the profession when he entered it, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote that landscape gardening had been previously restricted to small-scale improvement of scenery and public works directed to the creation of “wooded picturesque scenery in the formation of rural cemeteries.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, he pointed out that landscapes for individual estates were very different from the good design of parks where thousands of people had to be accommodated.<sup>4</sup>

## **Indecision on a Name for the New Profession**

Even the term “landscape architect” was not in use in the mid-1800s.<sup>5</sup> Almost thirty years after the Olmsted and Vaux plan for Central Park was submitted, the state of the profession had not much improved. In a letter to the park commissioner in Rochester, New York, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote that he had reluctantly adopted the term, landscape architect. “I much objected to it when it was first given me. I [now]prefer it because it helps to establish the important idea of the distinction of my profession from that of gardening, as that of architecture from building—the distinction of an art of *design*.”<sup>6</sup>

Using the term, landscape architecture made good business sense, too. Frederick Law Olmsted compared the growth of landscape architecture as a profession to the development of the architecture profession. As people learned that it made economic sense to employ architects

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organizations, schools, and publications in which John Charles Olmsted, and to a lesser extent, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. had a part, and as background, the contributions of Frederick Law Olmsted.

<sup>2</sup> Kimball, Theodora. “American Landscape Gardening in 1857,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 12, no. 2, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Kimball, Theodora. “American Landscape Gardening in 1857,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 12, no. 2. P. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Practitioners called themselves either landscape gardeners or landscape artists.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 99.

instead of amateurs, he imagined that it would be the same with landscape architecture. The more work a good landscape architect was able to do, he reasoned, the more work there would be, and it would be more profitable too. “The profession is a common wealth,” he wrote to Charles Eliot, a former apprentice who had opened his own business. “I prefer that we should call ourselves Landscape Architects, following the French and Italian custom, rather than landscape gardeners following the English, because the former title better carries the professional idea. It makes more important also the idea of design.”<sup>7</sup> The term, “gardener” was associated with manual labor; the term, “architect” was not. “Hence it is more discriminating and prepares the minds of clients for dealing with us on professional principles.”<sup>8</sup>

No matter the title, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote that out of 100 current practitioners, only one other had the right to call himself a landscape architect. Indeed, Frederick Law Olmsted’s view of the landscape architecture profession in 1886 was a group of men and a few women confining their work to horticulture, botany, and small-scale decorative work. “Even of landscape gardening rightly so called, the practice of most has been at best upon small ground or upon grounds in which the convenience and probable wants of but a single family and its selected guests were to be considered.”<sup>9</sup> In his essay for Appleton’s *New American Cyclopaedia* (1860), he wrote that Birkenhead Park outside of Liverpool, England, “though small, is by its admirable plan the most complete, and for its age the most agreeable park in Europe. ... In the United States there is, as yet, scarcely a finished park or promenade ground deserving mention.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite his gloomy assessment of the profession’s accomplishments, Frederick Law Olmsted singled out for faint praise a few of the leading practitioners among his peers. Among these were R. Morris Copeland and H.W.S. Cleveland, practicing under the name, Copeland and Cleveland, who were engaged in laying out mostly suburban and country estates.<sup>11</sup> Although Charles Follen in his pamphlet, *Suggestions*, written for estate owners, referred to himself as “architect and

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<sup>7</sup> Olmsted, Frederick Law. “A Letter Relating to Professional Practice from F.L. Olmsted, Sr. to Charles Eliot, October 28, 1886.” *Landscape Architecture*. Vol. 11, no. 4. P. 189.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Kimball, Theodora. “American Landscape Gardening in 1857,” *Landscape Architecture*. Vol. 12, no. 2. p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Despite Frederick Law Olmsted’s dismissal of their work, Copeland was an early advocate for a park system in Boston and Cleveland designed a system of parks for Minneapolis, Minnesota.

landscape gardener,” he too mostly confined his work to the design of private estates. Adolph Straud was remembered for his design of Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio, but the field in the western United States was similar to the East in that most works were restricted to private grounds.<sup>12</sup> While Frederick Law Olmsted was familiar with the good work of a few practitioners, he knew the shortcomings of so many more. His criticism was not of their ability but of their inability to see beyond the ground they laid out. “I have seen much of two of the most accomplished gardeners in the United States but I never saw either of them look at anything a stone’s throw away or show any interest in or understanding of landscape. There is nothing to prevent them from presenting themselves in good faith as landscape gardeners.”<sup>13</sup>

### Frederick Law Olmsted’s View of Literature on Landscape Architecture

Frederick Law Olmsted also thought that literature being published in the United States about landscape gardening was sorely lacking in both quantity and quality. While he praised the work of English authors, he had good words only for one American writer on landscape, Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852).<sup>14</sup> His own early writings on parks first appeared in Downing’s magazine, Horticulturist, and Downing was one of the early proponents of a public park in New York City. Along with this magazine, Downing’s book, Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, served as the leading publications until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Reflecting the national desire for interesting plant specimens rather than picturesque compositions, Downing’s work reflected the taste of the period for a horticultural style.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Kimball, Theodora. “American Landscape Gardening in 1857.” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 12, no. 2. p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> Among the English texts he praised were: William Gilpin, Observations on several parts of the counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex; also on several parts of North Wales: relative chiefly to picturesque beauty in tours; the former made in the year 1769; the latter in the year 1773 1809; Sir Uvedale Price. Essays on the Picturesque; William Shenstone; Richard Payne Knight, The landscape: a didactic poem in three books addressed to Uvedale Price, esq.; Humphry Repton, Observations on the theory and practice of landscape gardening including some remarks on Grecian and Gothic architecture, collected from various manuscripts, in the possession of the different noblemen and gentlemen, for whose use they were originally written; the whole tending to establish field principles for the respective arts; J.C. Loudon’s garden visits; Joseph Paxton, The cottager’s calendar of garden operations; and Edward Kemp’s How to lay out a garden: intended as a general guide in choosing, forming, or improving an estate (from a quarter of an acre to a hundred acres in extent) with reference to both design and execution, 1850

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Kimball, Theodora. “American Landscape Gardening in 1857.” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 12, no. 2. p. 102.

### Frederick Law Olmsted's Education

While Frederick Law Olmsted had no formal training in landscape architecture because no training existed, he did have two years of engineering at Yale University, experience as a farmer, and many years as an observer of the landscape. He viewed the education of men who called themselves, "landscape gardeners" as being, "further from it than the average citizen of fair general education."<sup>16</sup> He reasoned that an education devoted to "matters horticultural, botanical, and on a small scale decorative" was so narrow that it excluded a true appreciation for the landscape, a literal inability to see the forest for the trees. He remembered that the "term landscape gardening was first used to describe the process of obstructing out a view."<sup>17</sup> By concentrating on the elements, these men could not appreciate the scenery in any artistic sense.

Frederick Law Olmsted's dim view of his fellow practitioners, their education, their work, and their writings did not soften during his long career. To mitigate these shortcomings in the profession and that of the public with its underdeveloped taste, Frederick Law Olmsted took steps to professionalize the field of landscape architecture. He took on apprentices for training, encouraging them to read the texts he found so valuable himself. These apprentices worked in the office, putting on paper Frederick Law Olmsted's ideas for designs. They traveled with him, observing his relations with private estate owners and city governments. He encouraged them to travel abroad, giving them a list of private estates and public gardens to visit. Three of these apprentices, John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920), his stepson, Charles Eliot (1859-1897), and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957), his son, became the profession's leaders after Frederick Law Olmsted retired.

### Education of John Charles Olmsted

In an effort to assure his legacy and the future of the profession, Frederick Law Olmsted exposed his stepson to a variety of landscapes as well as to the business during his youth. Frederick Law Olmsted remembered fondly his own childhood, where the walks he had with his father, a storekeeper, were "really tours in search of the picturesque."<sup>18</sup> While John Charles Olmsted

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> Olmsted, Frederick Law, Jr. and Theodora Kimball, ed. Forty Years of Landscape Architecture 1822-1903, 2 vols. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922-1928, 1(1922). P. 46.

never wrote with any affection about his childhood, his exposure to a variety of American landscapes, including three years with his family (1862-1865) at the Mariposa Estate in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada mountains, gave him an understanding of and an appreciation for the landscape, both picturesque and grand. John Charles Olmsted, at the ages of seventeen and nineteen, went back west during the summers of 1869 and 1871 to work with Clarence King's geological exploration and mapping of the 40<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Here, he learned surveying and visual reading of the landscape as to topography.

After graduating from the Sheffield Scientific School of Yale University in 1875, John Charles Olmsted joined his stepfather's practice on 46<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. When initially confronted with Frederick Law Olmsted's study and knowledge requirements for becoming a member or partner of the firm, John Charles Olmsted questioned whether he wanted to join the profession.<sup>19</sup> This became particularly worrying to Frederick Law Olmsted because he assumed that John Charles Olmsted would join him in his practice. On a study trip to Europe two years later, Frederick Law Olmsted gave him a list of gardens, estates, and practitioners to visit. In comparing the English to the Americans, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote to John Charles Olmsted, before a second trip, that the English middle-class's taste in landscape design was worth study. "One gets the best education in simply observing the ordinary English middle class home out of doors: the arrangement of yews and alley, statues, outhouses, fences, lawns and gardens... gives most instructive examples in this way."<sup>20</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted's involvement with his stepson's education continued even after he had made him his partner.

While Frederick Law Olmsted despaired over the lack of suitable practitioners, one of his main contributions to the professionalization of landscape architecture and planning turned out to be the education he gave to John Charles Olmsted and to his son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., as well as the standards he set in his own work.

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<sup>19</sup> The Olmsteds used the term, "member" to denote a partner in the firm.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to John Charles Olmsted August 7, 1894. John Charles Olmsted Collection, Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Cambridge, MA.

## **John Charles Olmsted's Early Views of the Professionalizing of Landscape Architecture and Planning**

The history of the firm after Frederick Law Olmsted's retirement in 1895 was marked by continuing strong commitment towards professionalization of the fields of landscape architecture/planning. John Charles Olmsted addressed these three areas in an undated letter to an unidentified person. It is probably an early letter to Samuel Parsons Jr., a landscape architect, in reference to his Parsons' desire to set up an association of landscape architects.<sup>21</sup> As enthusiastic as Parsons was about forming a society of landscape architects, John Charles Olmsted was just as adamant about not setting up one. He gave three reasons that all fell under the rubric of absence of professionalism in landscape architecture.

While John Charles Olmsted cited Garden and Forest: a Journal of Horticulture, Landscape Art and Forestry as a technical journal that helped to educate the general public, he believed that the magazine's circulation was insufficient to foster widespread understanding that the landscape architect was just as important as the architect.<sup>22</sup> He reasoned that until the public recognized the importance of hiring a landscape architect, few men would be motivated to enter the profession.

Further, he pointed out that because of a lack of formal education, landscape architects came to the profession from different backgrounds, such as draughtsman, surveyor and gardener. He wrote that even if these men read the same books, because of their difference in backgrounds, they would formulate different ideas about the same subjects and therefore their views of the profession would be at such variance with each other and they would not be able to cooperate with the degree of cordiality necessary to have a successful organization.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. Quoted in, "Historical View of ASLA," ASLA Bulletin, no. 177. [May 1969]. Parsons joined Calvert Vaux in a partnership, Vaux and Company after Vaux left Frederick Law Olmsted. In 1881, Vaux became the landscape architect in the New York City Department of Parks. His work with Parsons included redesign and new developments in Central Park, which did not please the Olmsteds.

<sup>22</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. Quoted in, "Historical View of ASLA," ASLA Bulletin, no. 177. [May 1969] Garden and Forest, published between 1888-1897, was edited by Charles Sprague Sargent, founding Director of the Arnold Arboretum, and Charles Stiles.

<sup>23</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. Quoted in, "Historical View of ASLA," ASLA Bulletin, no. 177. May 1969



## **Professionalization of Landscape Architecture**

### **Standardization**

#### *Organizations*

By the time the American Society for Landscape Architects (A.S.L.A.) was founded in 1899, there were already a number of peripheral organizations concerned more or less with the art of landscape design: Massachusetts Horticultural Society (1829), American Society of Civil Engineers (1852), American Institute of Architects (1857), American Nursery and Landscape Association (1876), the Society of American Florists (1884), American Park and Outdoor Art Association (1897), and the Massachusetts Forestry Association (1898), among others. While all of these organizations had missions that included the betterment of the landscape, none of them was dedicated solely to the practice of landscape architecture.

#### **Early American Practitioners**

Until the twentieth century, anyone could practice landscape design, from engineers to nurserymen to amateurs and enthusiasts interested in the field. And many of these did, with mixed results. Elizabethan and Dutch formal gardens appeared in the United States before the American Revolution. So did “landscape gardens” in the tradition of 18<sup>th</sup> century pastoral English gardens and estates.<sup>24</sup> By 1771, Thomas Jefferson was making notes about embellishing nature with the use of native plants. While Minister to France, Jefferson spent three weeks in England visiting gardens (1786), recommended in Thomas Whately’s, Observations on Modern Gardening. Years later, writing to his friend William Hamilton, Jefferson asked him to visit Monticello, Jefferson’s estate, “where you will have an opportunity of indulging on a new field some of the taste which has made the Woodlands the only rival which I have known in America to what may be seen in England.”<sup>25</sup>

Between Jefferson and Frederick Law Olmsted, a few gifted advocates of the landscape appeared, including Andrew Jackson Downing, whose magazine, The Horticulturist, nurtured a growing public interest in the American landscape. By the 1890s there may have been as many

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<sup>24</sup> Kimball, Fiske. “The Beginning of Landscape Gardening in America,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 7, no. 4. P. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Thomas Jefferson to William Hamilton. July 1806. Quoted in “The Beginning of Landscape Gardening in America,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 7, no. 4. P 186.

as 50 landscape designers in the United States, some engineers, some plantsmen, and others, self-taught.<sup>26</sup> While growing interest in the field contributed to the idea of a professional society, it was the dual pressure of pursuing professional competence and personal animosity that finally spurred John Charles Olmsted to favor the notion.

#### Parsons Pursues Idea of National Organization/Boston Group Forms Local Association

In the late 1890s, Samuel Parsons, Jr., now a partner in Vaux and Company, agitated for a professional organization.<sup>27</sup> He wrote to Warren Manning, who had left the Olmsted firm to establish his own office in the Boston area, to ask him if he or any of his colleagues might be interested in joining a professional organization for landscape architects.<sup>28</sup> He asked Manning to write to his colleagues. Among others, Manning wrote to Charles Eliot, a partner with Frederick Law Olmsted and John Charles Olmsted in Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot, to ask his opinion about forming a national organization.

Eliot wrote back, telling Manning that he did not agree with the idea of a nationwide society, citing the small number of practitioners and a lack of public recognition of the profession.<sup>29</sup> Instead, Eliot suggested a larger-based group of interested individuals, amateurs, writers, park superintendents, land-owners, engineers, foresters, gardeners and anyone else who paid membership fees.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, H.W.S, Cleveland, another of the consulted designers and Frederick Law Olmsted's contemporary, who practiced in Chicago, thought that a national organization was not only desirable, "but imperatively demanded as the only means of maintaining the dignity and respectability of the profession." Cleveland advocated the idea that "none but strictly

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<sup>26</sup> Pond, Bremer. "Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA." Landscape Architecture. Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 59.

<sup>27</sup> Newton, Norman. Design on the Land: the development of landscape architecture. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971. P. 386.

<sup>28</sup> Manning, the son of a Massachusetts nurseryman, had worked for Frederick Law Olmsted from 1888-1896, assisting him in the planting plans for the World's Columbian Exposition and Biltmore, as well as planting for smaller jobs.

<sup>29</sup> Simo, Melanie. 100 Years of Landscape Architecture: Some Patterns of a Century. Washington, D.C.: A.S.L.A. Press 1999. P. 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* P. 21.

professional men” be allowed to join.<sup>31</sup> In Boston, John Charles Olmsted and other local practitioners formed a local association, the Repton Club. According to John Charles Olmsted, the Repton Club had no organization but met four or five times during the winter months for a dinner meeting where they discussed plans and sketches of each other’s current works (the Club disbanded in 1905).<sup>32</sup>

John Charles Olmsted wrote to Parsons in July 1898 to tell him about the local Boston organization and to express his opinion and those of the Club members that the time was not right for a national society. “The general conclusion is that it is entirely unlikely that any such comprehensive and elaborately organized professional association as you seem to have in mind will be successful until there are more experienced and well recognized practitioners willing to join it.”<sup>33</sup>

#### First Meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects (A.S.L.A.)

Parsons continued to push for a national organization, convening meetings on the subject and corresponding with leading practitioners. On January 4, 1899, John Charles Olmsted traveled to New York City for another of Parsons’ meetings of landscape architects called to form a national society. John Charles Olmsted was not enthusiastic about the meeting and doubted that there would be “enough desirable numbers to make it a success.” He still favored waiting to set up an organization until there were sufficient numbers of competent practitioners. However, because many of his fellow landscape architects were afraid that Parsons would set up and want to head the organization for the sake of promoting his own practice, John Charles Olmsted was drafted to the cause and was voted the new organization’s first president.<sup>34</sup> The name chosen was American Society of Landscape Architects (A.S.L.A.).

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Simo, Melanie. 100 Years of Landscape Architecture: Some Patterns of a Century. Washington, D.C.: A.S.L.A. Press, 1999. P. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Pond, Bremer. “Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 59.

<sup>33</sup> Pond, Bremer. “Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA.” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Olmsted, John Charles to Sophia White Olmsted. John Charles Olmsted Collection, Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University Design School, hereafter, John Charles Olmsted . January 4, 1899.

## **Original Fellows**

John Charles Olmsted wrote home that night that the meeting had been a pleasant one, perhaps affected by his election as President. Nine invited practitioners attended. The group decided that they knew nine more landscape architects whom they would invite to join without further investigation and six more who were worth investigating. In all, eleven “original Fellows” joined: Nathan F. Barrett, Beatrix Jones, Daniel W. Langton (secretary), Charles N. Lowrie (treasurer), Warren H. Manning, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., John Charles Olmsted (president), Samuel H. Parsons Jr. (vice-president), George Pentecost Jr., O.C. Simonds, and Downing Vaux, son of Calvert Vaux. Langton and Lowrie wrote the Constitution and By-laws that were adopted in March 1899.

Of the original eleven, nine were based on the East Coast, with Langton practicing in the South and Simonds practicing in the Midwest. Parsons at 55 years old was the oldest; Pentecost at 24 years old, was the youngest. John Charles Olmsted was 47 years old. Since there were no educational programs in landscape architecture, the members came to the profession in a number of ways. The Olmsteds and Vaux were brought up by landscape architects; Barrett, Manning, and Parsons started in family nurseries and Manning had been to business school too; Lowrie and Simonds were university-trained civil engineers; Miss Jones, the only woman, had early private training under Charles S. Sargent and made study trips to Europe; and Langton and Pentecost were self-taught. John Charles Olmsted was president of the A.S.L.A. from 1899-1901 and 1904-1905. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. presided over the Society from 1908-1909 and 1919-1922.

At the end of the first year, one new fellow was elected -- Elizabeth Bullard, probably the first woman landscape architect, along with three Junior Fellows: Arthur A. Shurtleff, F. Maitland Armstrong and Albert B. Bushnell. Under the Society’s Constitution, Junior Fellows included “students who are preparing to practice the profession;” these were not allowed to vote nor were they eligible for office and were required to be at least 21 years old. Ten years after election to Junior status, they were eligible to be Fellows.<sup>35</sup> This process of moving up loosely followed the

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<sup>35</sup> Pond, Bremer. “Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 62.

process of advancement in the Olmsted office, although becoming a member often required more than ten years.

### **Rules and Regulations**

Requirements for membership were the first issues that the association addressed. Besides using the model of the Olmsted firm's hierarchy to some extent, the A.S.L.A. adopted the firm's prohibition against mixing nursery business with landscape architecture.

Without any standards for the education of a landscape architect, how could they judge who would be eligible to join? How would they structure the organization? Would a potential member be asked to apply? Membership was divided into three categories: Fellows (regular members), Associates (non-practitioners, such as writers, some engineers, and architects) and Junior members. To be admitted into the Society as a Fellow, a person had to have practiced landscape architecture for at least five years. No landscape architect, no matter how long he had practiced would be admitted if he took commissions from nurserymen. A landscape architect's duty was to his client and the right plant for the right place, rather than the most expensive one. Firms employing men whose families owned nurseries were not allowed to use those particular nurseries for their work either. Of course, there were no educational requirements at the beginning because there were no educational programs for landscape architects.

In 1903, John Charles Olmsted chaired a Committee on Schedule of Charges and Practice, along with Barrett and Manning. John Charles Olmsted sent letters to all persons practicing landscape architecture in the United States to query them about their methods of charging customers. He received 76 replies and produced a confidential report. Unlike architects who charged clients a percentage of the cost, landscape architects generally charged fees for visits and by the job or in large jobs, by the acre. This report was never made public, so its uses are unclear.

As president, John Charles Olmsted chaired monthly meetings during the winter at the Manhattan Hotel in New York City. These dinner meetings included speeches and presentations of work by the members, as well as Society business. Guest lectures were given on a number of topics. John Charles Olmsted frequently gave presentations of his work and read reports of the

various committees he chaired. In March 1903, he complained in a letter to his wife that because of the regular business and discussion during the reading of his report, that he had only been able to read eleven of the 76 pages. Despite the serious attitude he took towards the A.S.L.A. and his presidency of the organization, he tried to introduce the long report with a couple of jokes but they fell flat. He did get a laugh from the group after his reading when he told them that he had made a requisition to the Secretary for several hundred sheets of paper (for his report) and he had been sent only eleven sheets.<sup>36</sup>

In 1905, the A.S.L.A. had an unprecedented summer meeting in Boston. The three-day meeting reinforced the dominance of the Olmsted firm in the profession. A program was produced with a schedule of events, including a description of the Olmsted office. The meeting was considered important enough to be covered in the local newspapers. Members were conducted on a tour of Fairsted, the Olmsted office, along with a walk through the Fens and Riverway, both Olmsted designs. John Charles Olmsted gave a 34-page lecture on the Boston Parks System. Since John Charles Olmsted had a “more or less responsible share and at all times took part in the designing of the parks,” his talk was both descriptive and full of personal insights.<sup>37</sup>

By 1907, the Society looked outward, making educating the public one of its missions. This was accomplished in part by reprinting some of the classics of landscape design with editorial remarks by the Society. Humphry Repton’s The Art of Landscape Gardening, Including his Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening and Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, edited by John Nolen, appeared in 1907. Hints on Landscape Gardening by Prince von Pückler-Muskau, translated by Bernhard Sickert and edited by Samuel Parsons Jr., was published in 1917.<sup>38</sup>

The Society continued to grow, from eleven charter members, to 38 members in 1904 and 68 members by 1910. By 1912, there were 75 members and the numbers grew as education in

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<sup>36</sup> John Charles Olmsted, March 18, 1903.

<sup>37</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. “The Boston Park System”—a talk given to the meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects, summer meeting, July 7-10, 1905. John Charles Olmsted Collection. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University Design School

landscape architecture increased. By 1920, there were 127 members. Local chapters sprang up all over the country, with the Boston chapter being the first, in 1913. Although women were members of the A.S.L.A., at least one of the Fellows wrote the Secretary that he thought that, “it was a mistake to encourage women to enter the Society. I hope some action will be taken in this matter,” he wrote.<sup>39</sup> None was taken.

In 1910, a quarterly magazine, Landscape Architecture was launched by three graduates of the Harvard University landscape architecture program, thus giving a voice to the profession.

Education, not only of the public but of prospective landscape architects continued to occupy the Society’s attention. In 1914, Ferruccio Vitale wrote to the American Academy in Rome about setting up a fellowship in landscape architecture.<sup>40</sup> The Academy agreed to the idea with the stipulation that the Society raise the funds. In a campaign lead by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., the money was raised. The fellowship was supported for ten years by the Society and then taken over by the Academy. Other landscape architecture fellowships at the Academy were established in the 1920s.

## Education

### *Frederick Law Olmsted’s Education of His Sons*

When Frederick Law Olmsted led the firm, people frequently wrote to him to ask advice about how to become a landscape architect. His own education had been varied and he did not become a landscape architect until his late 30s. Through his stepfather, John Charles Olmsted had gained much early exposure to the profession, and it was Frederick Law Olmsted’s wish that he join him in the business. After graduation from Yale University, and two years of apprenticing with him,

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<sup>38</sup> Humphry Repton(1752-1818) was an English author and landscape designer: Prince von Pückler-Muskau (1785-1871) was an eccentric German prince who became a landscape designer. Both men advocated the picturesque style of landscape design.

<sup>39</sup>Pond, Bremer. “Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA,” Landscape Architecture. Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 62.

<sup>40</sup> The American Academy of Rome was created of by a group of architects, painters and sculptors who had worked together on the World’s Columbian Exposition. The first program(1894) was for architects and other arts followed. The lack of landscape architects at the beginning reflects the lack of professionalization in landscape architecture at the time.

Frederick Law Olmsted sent John Charles Olmsted on a study tour to Europe with a list of places to see and landscape architects to visit.

“First, you are to search all parks and public grounds for me, taking full notes and making careful and specific reports. ... This is not discretionary,” Frederick Law Olmsted wrote to John Charles Olmsted.<sup>41</sup> In addition, he told him to visit zoological gardens and to “examine closely and accurately all small architectural objects adapted to park work. ... If you find anything novel and good, especially in plan and arrangement; make sketches and be prepared on return to make full drawings. All discretionary, of course.”<sup>42</sup> “... In the old parks, steep your mind as much as possible in their scenery so as to fix strong, permanent impressions of their special charm and of the constituents and conditions of it in play of surface, distribution of foliage, etc.”<sup>43</sup>

It was clear that Frederick Law Olmsted had given great thought and consideration to the education of his stepson. This study trip was to serve him for a lifetime. Frederick Law Olmsted wrote to John Charles Olmsted every two weeks with more advice and suggestions for study. He also addressed John Charles Olmsted’s ability to make conversation, telling him that his experiences would help him socially, too, that “the appearance, ways and manners and social qualities of men of mark always form subjects of interest in conversation and like a good stock of anecdotes, are a form of social currency in which you should seek to be as rich as by reasonable address in using your opportunities as you can.”<sup>44</sup> These social aspects of being a landscape architect proved to be most difficult for John Charles Olmsted during his career. He was a shy man who found social occasions to be challenging, and he often wrote to his wife complaining that he had not performed well in this capacity.

Frederick Law Olmsted required his stepson to do an enormous amount of work on the study trip. The itinerary included visiting gardens, estates, and well-known English landscape designers, such as William Robinson, and making detailed sketches of all he saw. Problems arose when he wrote John Charles Olmsted that it was necessary for him to have a good working

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<sup>41</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted to John Charles Olmsted, October 15, 1877. John Charles Olmsted Collection.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted to John Charles Olmsted, November 24, 1877. John Charles Olmsted Collection.



knowledge of plant material, too. Frederick Law Olmsted thought that his own plant knowledge was deficient and wanted to make sure that his sons did not suffer for this lack. But John Charles Olmsted balked, writing back that perhaps landscape architecture was not the right profession for him; maybe he should be an architect or engineer.

A few weeks later, Frederick Law Olmsted returned home from a business trip to find several letters, totaling 80 pages, from John Charles Olmsted. He wrote back, “There is no doubt that ... you have been taking a very good course and have been fortunate with respect to a liberal education and general advancement in art knowledge and art wisdom.”<sup>45</sup> John Charles Olmsted never complained again.

### *Plan for Education of Others*

Along with John Charles Olmsted, Frederick Law Olmsted had taken into the firm a number of apprentices and guided their process of learning. In a letter to a friend, Frederick Law Olmsted explained the apprentice process, saying that after completing college, potential apprentices were advised to take special courses in architecture, engineering, and freehand and mechanical drawing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and courses in botany and horticulture at the Bussey Institute and Arnold Arboretum Schools affiliated with Harvard University. Further, he wanted the students to visit the Boston Art Museum and make themselves familiar with good paintings and good architecture. After their course work and studies, they worked in the Olmsted office for two or three years, followed by a study tour in Europe of well-known gardens, parks and estates.<sup>46</sup>

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was more explicit six years later in 1897 in his letter to Karl Webb, a young man who wanted the firm’s opinion on what courses to take to become a landscape architect. “The study of principles of art which underlie landscape design and the study and analysis of the beauty of natural landscapes are the most essential elements in the training of a landscape architect.”<sup>47</sup> This part of the training was to be accomplished by reading and personal

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted to George Curtis, August 22, 1891. Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, Frederick Law Olmsted Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Karl Webb April 12, 1897. Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, Olmsted Associates, Series H3.

study and analysis of naturally beautiful or untouched landscapes, parks, pleasure grounds and gardens.

While the advice had not changed since Frederick Law Olmsted's tenure, it had expanded technically. Specifically, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote that a thorough knowledge of topographical surveying, general acquaintance with constructive engineering, detailed knowledge of road construction and the handling of earthwork, a good grounding in botany, a familiarity with the commonly used trees and shrubs, and acquaintance with the conditions of their growth, and a good comprehension of geological forms and processes were crucial to becoming a landscape architect. He urged the man to study architecture. He closed the letter by saying that what he had outlined was more training than his father had. "But the training which suffices for a great genius is often not enough for the rest of us."<sup>48</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote this letter a year after he had joined the firm in Brookline. One wonders if his own technical shortcomings influenced the contents of this letter.

The Olmsted firm received many letters over the years addressing the subject of education for landscape architects. John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. were the leaders of the profession so it was natural that both individuals and institutions sought their advice. They also received letters from libraries asking for help in choosing books on the subject of municipal improvements and city parks. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. sent to the librarian of the public library in Helena, Montana, a list of recommended reading for the public. He wrote that he knew of no popular books dealing with the subject, but sent a list of technical books.

#### *Plans for Degree Program in Landscape Architecture*

Despite the growing interest in landscape architecture, by the end of the nineteenth century, as shown by these letters, no degree programs existed for landscape architects. John Charles Olmsted envisioned a time when as few as 30 or 40 men would share the same education and come together, "... with a good appearance of unanimity and vigor, which alone would command the attention and respect of the public." He observed that the similarities in education of architects

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

had helped the profession gain public recognition more than any other thing.<sup>49</sup> A year later, in 1898, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. began communicating with professors at Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology(M.I.T.) about starting a degree program in landscape architecture.

Writing to Professor F.W. Chandler of M.I.T., Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. divided the work of a landscape architect into two areas, construction and planting--differing in the type of materials used, and the nature of specific and general information required as a foundation and instruments for design and implementation of designs. He classed this needed information into two groups, engineering and horticulture. He wrote that most landscape architects came to the profession from architecture or engineering and as such, suffered from the same defect, "a common inability to successfully manage their planting, which in the majority of cases, counted for fully half the design." According to him, many excellent designs were ruined by bad planting. On the other hand, bad designs could be hidden by "an interesting detail of vegetation." Even if a man had no education except that of horticulture, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. reasoned that these men could produce better work because they knew how to achieve the effects by good planting.<sup>50</sup>

Softening a bit from the letter he had written to Karl Webb, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. outlined the process of entering the Olmsted firm as an apprentice, relaxing a bit on the technical side. He wrote that some acquaintance of architectural history was important as well as freehand drawing. Because no course yet existed in landscape design, the student would have to spend more time studying architecture for the sake of training in the principles of design than he would if a course in landscape design existed. Because of the Bussey Institution and the Arnold Arboretum, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. suggested that Harvard would be a better place for a landscape design program than M.I.T. unless the two schools could cooperate in one program. "I want to see something done, and I want to see the expended energy applied most effectively for the

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<sup>49</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. Quoted in Pond, Bremer. "Fifty Years in Retrospect: Brief Account of the Origin and Development of the ASLA," *Landscape Architecture*, Vol. 40, no. 2. P. 62.

<sup>50</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to FW Chandler, August 12, 1898. Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, *Olmsted Associates*, Series H3.

advancement of my profession. I am ready to put my shoulder to the wheel where it will do the most good. What is your opinion?" he asked.<sup>51</sup>

Professor Chandler's response must have directed him to Harvard because four days later, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote to President Charles Eliot, father of Charles Eliot, who was once an apprentice and later a partner, on the subject of establishing a possible course of lectures on landscape architecture. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. went to great pains to point out that the suggested subjects were not yet fixed and that it would take him a year to prepare a proper list. He arranged the courses by city, not topic. "I think that it would be more instructive to arrange the matter as I have in the case of the several cities mentioned than to follow the logical divisions of the subject and dodge back and forth from one city to another. The same would apply to the private places, the treatment of which I have not even blocked out in my notes."<sup>52</sup>

### Managing Work and Teaching

Realizing the amount of work such a program would entail, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. questioned whether he had the time to devote to the creation and maintenance of a four-year course in landscape architecture. How would he manage such a program and his own design work? He certainly could not confine business trips around the school year schedule. Adding up his time away from the firm, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. figured that, "25% were on account of work within reach of Boston by day, 28% on account of work to which visits could be made with more or less difficulty by traveling at night in both directions (including everything about New York), and 47% on account of work that could not be visited without giving upwards of two days to it."

He wrote that the "distant work" was mostly done by his brother John Charles Olmsted, just as it had been during Charles Eliot's time at the firm. Not being able to attend to distant work on an emergency basis would seriously reduce his value as a member of the firm. Further, he reasoned that after the period of acquisition of land and the designs for it were over, there would be diminished work for him with the Metropolitan District Commission and that would mean that

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

he would need to travel more. “Aside from the loss of personal professional income, I have to consider the possibility of my brother’s health failing, thus leaving the family dependent on me, and necessitating my dropping any outside work in order to carry on the business of the firm.”<sup>53</sup>

Writing to Professor Warren at the Bussey Institute at Harvard a few weeks later, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was still trying to work out how he could juggle teaching and private practice. He reckoned that three half days in a week with an occasional whole day would be the theoretical minimum time, but that practically it would amount to very near three whole days a week with a large slice of the evenings. What he found hard to estimate was whether this sort of work was likely to interfere with his private practice out of proportion with the actual time consumed by it or not. “Can you out of your experience suggest the probability in my case should I become an instructor?,” he asked.<sup>54</sup>

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. could consider taking the time off needed to teach and to manage a university program only because his brother was running the business. Although Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.’s salary would be put into the business account of the Firm, it was small at first, \$88.00 a quarter. The money lost to the Firm was weighed against the amount of money that his half-brother brought into it, along with the public good that came from setting up an educational program in landscape architecture.

#### *Harvard University Announces Degree Program*

Although the salary was considerably less than he could earn on design and planning jobs, the amount of work that John Charles Olmsted accomplished plus the benefits to the profession outweighed the doubts. In March 1900, Harvard University announced a four-year program in landscape architecture at the Lawrence Scientific School. “The object of the course of study... is to provide the instruction in the elements of technical knowledge and the training in the principles of design which form together the proper basis for the professional practice of

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<sup>52</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Charles Eliot, August 16, 1898. *Olmsted Associates Collection*, Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, Olmsted Associates, Series H3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Professor Warren, September 20, 1898. Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, Olmsted Associates, Series H3.

landscape architecture.”<sup>55</sup> The courses offered were: four courses in design (the second and third courses used sites in the Cambridge area), architecture, botany and horticulture, fine arts, geology, geography, engineering, agricultural chemistry, and English (rhetoric and composition), German, French, thesis. It was also recommended that students take the summer course in topographical and railroad surveying at the Harvard Camp.<sup>56</sup>

*John Charles Olmsted's Opinion on Education for Landscape Architects*

At the meeting of the A.S.L.A. in May 1913, John Charles Olmsted was asked to give his opinion on education for the would-be landscape architect. He started off by saying that he was far from an authority on the matter of college courses for the landscape architect and that the man they should talk to was his brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., the head of the program at Harvard. Although John Charles Olmsted did not have much to do with the program, he saw its benefits in the employment of graduates at the Olmsted firm. He said that a number of graduates of the Harvard program had entered the office. He could see that they had benefited from the training and were better equipped for the practice of landscape architecture as a fine art than others who had matriculated through similar programs at other universities. “I can also see that these students in the landscape course at Harvard University also have acquired enough technical knowledge to appreciate a good deal of the criticism.”<sup>57</sup>

While John Charles Olmsted was one of the primary advocates of a university program in landscape architecture, he thought that the admission requirements were too easy at Harvard and other colleges. He complained that some of the men who had been accepted into programs were not suited to be successful landscape architects. He noted that landscape architecture was not the sort of profession that having a degree would automatically assure a good living, especially if

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<sup>55</sup> Harvard University School of Landscape Architecture annual pamphlets. 1900-1923/24. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University.

<sup>56</sup> The program initially was intended for students who had already completed a first degree but was not a graduate program. In 1906, it was elevated to a graduate program in the newly established Graduate School of Applied Science and the degree of Master in Landscape Architecture was created. In 1908, Landscape Architecture, previously in the Department of Architecture, became a separate Department of Landscape Architecture. Special instruction in the Principles of City Planning was announced in 1909. The School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture was organized as a separate school under the Faculty of the Graduate School of Applied Science in 1912. And in 1914, the School of Landscape Architecture was established as a separate entity.

<sup>57</sup> Olmsted, John Charles. Transcript of Minutes of A.S.L.A. Meeting May 1913. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University.

they were mediocre designers.<sup>58</sup> “I feel that the primary need that should be taken into consideration is really the mental fitness, the qualities of mind of the men; I think that is really of more importance than the technical knowledge they may be assisted in acquiring through their collegiate course.” He added that it would be cruel to let students into a program who had no chance of becoming good designers. “Such a student might make a living as a gardener or superintendent or in some other line of work when he would not earn his board as a designer.”<sup>59</sup>

### *Program for Women*

Women were not allowed in the Harvard program during this time, but a year after it was established, the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Gardening and Horticulture for Women was opened in Groton, Massachusetts.<sup>60</sup> Although no women worked in the Brookline office of the Olmsted firm as designers, John Charles Olmsted had employed landscape architect Elizabeth Bullard of Bridgeport, CT, to supervise the implementation of jobs for the firm.<sup>61</sup> He had no objections to women entering the profession.

Requirements for admission to the Lowthorpe School were only a high school education and normal health. No entrance examinations were given but successful passing of tests was required for the diploma. The two-year program was remarkably similar to the program at Harvard. The option of the Gardening or Horticulture program eliminated the need to take engineering, design and drawing, leaving more time for greenhouse and garden work.

A student matriculating in the latter programs was imagined to be looking for work in supervising gardens in summer and of greenhouse and conservatories in winter, on estates where a head gardener is not employed. This was a practical response to the perceived need for service by owners of small estates. During his career, John Charles Olmsted despaired over the lack of good supervision for small estates and he must have welcomed this new program. Other schools for women, such as the Cambridge School of Domestic Architecture and Landscape Architecture

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Women were not allowed into Harvard College at this time into any program.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Bullard's father, Oliver, had worked for Frederick Law Olmsted in the implementation of several jobs, including Prospect Park. To aid his knowledge of plant materials, John Charles Olmsted had been sent to work with Oliver Bullard.

for Women (1916), started up during this time period and modeled themselves on Harvard's program.

### Professional Journals

When John Charles Olmsted wrote to Samuel Parsons Jr. as to why the time was not right to form a national organization for landscape architects, he mentioned the "technical journal," Garden and Forest, as one of the few ways the public was exposed to the profession.

### Garden and Forest

From the beginning, Garden and Forest, published between 1888-1897, and Landscape Architecture, 1910-today served both the public and the professional practitioner. From the first issue of Garden and Forest, where Marina van Rensselaer in "Landscape Art -- A Definition," laid out landscape-art, as she called it, as a fine art to Warren Manning's article in the second year of Landscape Architecture, "The Field of Landscape Design," both magazines sought to define and to bring to the public's attention the importance of landscape architecture.

John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted contributed articles to Garden and Forest. While Frederick Law Olmsted and later, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., wrote extensively on subjects relating to the profession, John Charles Olmsted's six articles (and a few for other magazines) were confined to technical problems, such as the tennis lawn, suggestions for the improvements of cemeteries, slopes and banks, etc.

Besides practicing landscape architecture in an exemplary manner, writing articles on subjects of interest to other practitioners as well as to the public was one of the major ways the Olmsteds believed they could contribute to the profession. These articles reinforced the position of the Olmsteds in the profession and elevated the prevailing thinking on the subjects on which they wrote.

The bulk of John Charles Olmsted's articles were published in Garden and Forest. In an editor's note about a reprint in an English magazine, The Garden, of John Charles Olmsted's article, "Hints About Lawns," he pointed out that the article was published with the following editorial



note. "If landscape-gardening were as true and clear as the above sketch, that art would not now be the horror it is to sensitive men." The editor of Garden and Forest noted that landscape gardening was not a horror in the United States. "Horror is excited only when the land-owner himself tries to do an artist's work, or when he mistakes for an artist some one who has no better title to the name than lies in the fact that he can grow plants successfully," wrote the editor.<sup>62</sup> This promotion of the profession was a theme throughout the magazine's life. The challenges were the same as addressed by those who started the A.S.L.A. and the landscape architecture program at Harvard.

Marina van Rensselaer, Charles S. Sargent, the editor of the magazine, and Charles Eliot wrote about the profession. In the second month of the magazine's publication, an article appeared, "Landscape Gardening as a Profession," by an author only identified as Horticola. This anonymous author took an indignant view of the profession. Part of the problem was the public; they needed to be educated. Was the lack of good landscaping due to the bad taste of the public or the lack of good landscape designers to do the work?

Horticola reserved particular wrath for work done by non-professionals.

So long as the public are satisfied with parks constructed by engineers, and with terraces and embankments like those of railways or fortifications, and are content to have their private ground filled with meaningless serpentine walks by some Irish laborer, ...just so long men of taste avoid a profession in which they would starve, while the ignorant pretender and the mathematical park-maker waxed fat.<sup>63</sup>

The author despaired over the popularity of beds of flowers in parks and the neglect of Andrew Jackson Downing's landscapes. Until these problems were resolved, Horticola worried that no "young men of education and taste" would enter the profession. "I fear that the few who do really good work can easily do all the good work called for," he wrote.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Editor's note, Garden and Forest. Vol. 2, no. 57. P. 146.

<sup>63</sup> Horticola. Landscape Gardening as a Profession, Garden and Forest. Vol. 1, no 8. P. 87-88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

The range of articles set the parameters for the profession. Worrying about the mass immigration flow into the cities and the migration of the middle-class out to the suburbs, Charles Eliot wondered how roads and large buildings could be built out in the country without marring the very landscape that the “counter-invasion” sought. This issue precipitated the “special modern need of an art and profession of landscape-gardening.” Eliot wrote that “only special study and long observation will fit a man to solve successfully these problems of landscape gardening.” He agreed with the English author John Ruskin who said that art could not be learned in spare moments nor practiced when nothing better was to be done. A man must give his life to it. Eliot outlined the various duties of a landscape-gardener, from designing a formal plan for a city-square to the picturesque planning of a park.<sup>65</sup>

Articles calling for more professionalism, and including many, “if onlys” appeared throughout the history of the magazine. Educating the public, and providing education for the person who wanted to learn the art, were constant themes. Employing the professionals rather than the amateurs was also a constant theme.

### Landscape Architecture

Landscape Architecture was first published eleven years after the A.S.L.A. was formed and ten years after Harvard starting offering courses in landscape architecture. It filled a need of the profession and was started by three graduates of the Harvard program and the Olmsted office. Unlike Garden and Forest, which was published weekly, Landscape Architecture was published quarterly, and later monthly. The big difference between these magazines is that when Landscape Architecture was first issued in 1910, the profession of landscape architecture with university training and professional organization existed whereas Garden and Forest began at a time when writers were still calling for respect and employment of professionals. Interestingly enough, some of the same themes appear in Landscape Architecture too. But there were differences....

Principles of professional practice provided a popular theme for articles in Landscape Architecture. So was the issue of cooperation between architect and landscape architect. Articles

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<sup>65</sup> Eliot, Charles. “The Landscape Gardener.” Garden and Forest. Vol. 2, No. 51 P. 74-75.

appeared on the history of the profession, on Thomas Jefferson and Frederick Law Olmsted, thus establishing a pantheon. There were articles on university programs and notices of new schools of landscape architecture. Reviews appeared of books of interest to landscape architects as well as an article on gardening books for the client (interestingly, not the same books). There were articles on how to get business as well as on the ethics of business advertising. For the larger firms, there was an article on how to arrange reference material and another on how to choose business account forms.

## **Conclusion**

As one of the pioneers in the field, John Charles Olmsted contributed greatly to the professionalizing of landscape architecture and planning. His writings helped to elevate the profession of landscape architecture as a fine art. His designs made a valuable contribution to the landscape. In fitting park systems into existing and growing cities, his planning work directed the growth of many cities.

Serving as the first president of the first professional society and chairing the committee that set standards for membership and practice, he established himself as one of the profession's leaders. Allowing and even encouraging his half-brother to take time away from the office to establish and head the program at Harvard reinforced his belief that until there was a group of practitioners who had been trained in the same way, it would be difficult for the public to see the profession as a single entity rather than a random group. This sacrifice for the firm was a boon to the professions of landscape architecture and planning.

While the value of John Charles Olmsted's efforts to professionalize landscape architecture and planning is incalculable; his greatest contributions were in the actual practice of landscape architecture and planning and the creation of the modern design office.

During the time that John Charles Olmsted practiced, other landscape architects had small offices with two or three partners at most.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the majority of them practiced by themselves with workers hired to do occasional draughting. With as many as 250 jobs in process at one time, the Olmsted firm needed an office system that could manage this scale of work. Smaller offices did not need such a system. As the Olmsted office grew under John Charles Olmsted's leadership, it developed a range of methods and practices to deal with all aspects of running a large office, from the way a job went through the office and its departments, to handling the mail, and to the storage of plans, among others.

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<sup>66</sup> Birnbaum, Charles and Karson, Robin. Pioneers of American Landscape Design. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. In this book of biographies, no other landscape architect practicing at the time of John Charles Olmsted's career, had as large an office in terms of both the number of workers or the number of jobs.



A.S.L.A. Laying Out Boston. This office cartoon spoofs the power of the A.S. L. A. Undated. Unpublished. *Office Scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



Cover of program for A.S.L.A. summer meeting in Boston, July 1905. This was the first summer meeting and was an Olmsted-dominated event with a tour of the office and a walk of the Emerald Necklace and other Olmsted-designed landscapes as part of the activities. Both brothers gave lectures; John Charles Olmsted gave a talk on the Boston Park System and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. lectured on Boston's Metropolitan Park System. *Office Scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



The A.S.L.A. at their 1916 summer meeting in Dayton, OH. John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. sit in the front row center. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design. II an annotated bibliography* / edited by Charles A. Birnbaum and Julie K. Fix. Washington, DC : U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Heritage Preservation Services, Historic Landscape Initiative, 1995.

## **Chapter III: In the Olmsted Office**

Hired as an office boy in 1901 for \$3.00 per week, Harry D. Perkins was promoted by John Charles Olmsted to the job of plans clerk in February 1904 and remained in that job until January 1951<sup>1</sup>. As plans clerk, his duties involved the organization and distribution of plans for jobs in the Olmsted office in Brookline, MA<sup>2</sup>. Starting in 1897, jobs were given numbers, and engineering, design, and planting plans were rolled together under one job number. Originally, jobs had been organized by clients' names, but the problem of multiple family members hiring the firm plus the dilemma of having to organize the plans and written documentation of new, additional jobs, necessitated a more formal style of organization.

Trying to keep plans for jobs together was an enormous task even for someone as experienced as Mr. Perkins, and, in this respect, the firm was always on the edge of chaos. While finished plans contained title blocks that listed the job number, name of client, date and type of plan, preliminary sketches did not contain any of this information. Although the men joked about the procedures for retrieving plans, even creating a series of cartoons about the problems involved in retrieving plans, the complicated methods the firm used proved essential to the task of keeping the hundreds of thousands of plans straight, with their own particular jobs. As with the management of the firm and the jobs, Perkins' duties and job as plans clerk continually evolved. By 1911, he had an assistant and three levels of the vault in which to store drawings.

### **Organization of the firm**

The need for strict rules governing the distribution of plans reflected continuing efforts to deal with the ever-increasing scale of work. By 1920, the firm logged over 3,500 jobs, with as many as 250 jobs in active stages at one time. As the number of jobs grew, so did the firm's hierarchy. While it may be said that Frederick Law Olmsted presided over a small family firm, John Charles Olmsted headed a totally different business.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Olmsted, a distant relative was the original plans clerk, but his erratic work habits led to his dismissal. Alex, William. Inventory of the Frederick Law Olmsted Office-Estate and Contents . National Endowment for the Arts, 1972. P. 24.

When John Charles Olmsted joined his stepfather (1875), it was the two of them in Frederick Law Olmsted's office in the dining room of the house on 46<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City, plus a couple of men hired to do occasional draughting. By the time they moved the office to Brookline, Massachusetts in 1883, Mary, Frederick Law Olmsted's wife, was no longer typing the reports. She ran the home and looked after Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., aged thirteen. His sister, Marion, aged 21, and John Charles Olmsted, aged 31, also lived at home.<sup>3</sup> Settled in Brookline, John Charles Olmsted did all the draughting and kept the business records too. His duties were in the long tradition of young men starting off doing all aspects of the work for the family business.

The checkbook for the firm's expenditures was the same one that Frederick Law Olmsted used personally and it was not until 1892 that a separate account was set up for office use. Frederick Law Olmsted was not interested in the business aspects of the firm, only in the design work.<sup>4</sup> As the number of jobs increased, it was not possible for Frederick Law Olmsted and John Charles Olmsted to manage all aspects of the work. In 1892, Miss Helen F. Bullard was hired as a secretary and eventually became the office manager/bookkeeper/secretary/receptionist.

During the time that John Charles Olmsted was senior partner, the Olmsted firm employed as many as 57 employees in the Brookline office, many others worked for the firm implementing jobs around the country. For the largest jobs, such as expositions, fairs, and large suburban developments, the firm opened temporary offices in those places. Bank accounts were opened in these other office locations and while John Charles Olmsted referred to these accounts in his letters to his wife, no records remain today. Because these workers did not show up on the check registers or the employee files of the firm, it is impossible to calculate how many men and women were working for the firm at one time.

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<sup>2</sup> Perkins' duties extended to being in charge of prints and to plans being sent to and coming from clients. He also developed film, and printed photographs and blueprints.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte had married Dr. John Bryant in 1878 and lived nearby in Cohasset. Owen died in 1881 of tuberculosis. He had moved out West to try cattle ranching.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Laura Wood Roper. June 7, 1952. Laura Wood Roper Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.



These numbers are in direct contrast to other practitioners who generally worked in offices with one or two partners and possibly, a draughtsman or two.<sup>5</sup> No other office matched the Olmsted firm in number of employees, size of office and scale of organization during the time that John Charles Olmsted was senior partner.

### **Organization of employees**

After three years of work with his stepfather, John Olmsted had been given a share of the business in 1878 and was made partner in 1884, the year after the move to Brookline.

As more jobs came into the office, they (now doing business as F.L. and J.C. Olmsted), hired engineers and surveyors, as well as men to help with draughting and planting design.

Apprentices were taken on and trained in the office. By 1892, Frederick Law Olmsted had ordered cards that stated that John Charles Olmsted and Philip Codman, who had come into the office as an apprentice and worked himself up to associate member, were Frederick Law Olmsted's representatives and should be treated as equals to Frederick Law Olmsted. Although new clients were initially surprised to see these two young men, instead of the famous designer of Central Park, they gradually accepted the pair. In turn, the pair developed their own reputations.

Codman died suddenly in 1893. Charles Eliot, who had worked in the office as an apprentice (1883-1885) and went on to create his own firm, was enticed to rejoin the Olmsteds, this time with a promise of a partnership and inclusion in the firm name (Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot). John Charles Olmsted and Charles Eliot were Frederick Law Olmsted's partners at the time of the latter's retirement. At that time, they presided over a firm of eleven employees -- three women who did secretarial/business work and eight men involved in design.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. joined the office in 1894 as an apprentice, and became a partner after Eliot's death from meningitis in 1897. During his college years at Harvard, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. spent his summers learning the business. For instance, in the summer of 1890, he

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<sup>5</sup> Birnbaum, Charles and Karson, Robin. Pioneers of American Landscape Design. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. In this book of 160 biographies of the most well-known early landscape architects and planners, not one of the

worked on the firm's plans for the World's Columbian Exposition. Another summer he worked on the Triangulation project in Colorado, and after graduation from college went to Asheville, NC, to work on the implementation of the landscaping plan for G.W. Vanderbilt's Biltmore estate.

John Charles Olmsted was the senior partner from 1897-1920 and oversaw the growth of the firm and the business.<sup>6</sup> As the business rapidly expanded, he divided the office according to a hierarchy of partners/members and associates into the following categories: Engineering Department, Draughting Department, Architecture Department, Planting Department, Printing Department, Photography Department, and Model Department. The staff consisted of an office manager, typewriters, secretaries (file clerks and stenographers), bookkeepers, telephone operators, office boys, lunchroom workers, and janitors. It cannot be overemphasized that the organization of the firm allowed John Charles Olmsted to travel in pursuit of work while having the office run smoothly.

Bolstered by years of instruction by his father and half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. made partner only four years after he graduated from Harvard.<sup>7</sup> Other employees did not rise so quickly, but rise they did; more than one of them came into the firm as office boy and was promoted to draughtsman and, after a number of years and progression through the ranks of the business, became partners. Others who had the same training left the firm to open their own businesses or work for other firms. Of all the employees during this time period, only one of them, a janitor, did not progress in pay or job status.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. does not appear on the payroll until December 1895 (John Charles Olmsted and Charles Eliot agreed to promote him to a salary of \$1200 a year). He disappeared from the payroll list in February 1898 when he made partner. Partners (or members) were paid a percentage two to four times a year. Only their travel expenses appear in the payroll records and these only sporadically. While records of employment and payroll are available for those employees based in the Brookline office, no such records exist for employees hired to do local

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practitioners, except the Olmsteds, had an office of more than then employees.

<sup>6</sup> The Olmsted firm used the terms, "partner" and "member" interchangeably.

work in other places. Therefore, while an accurate account of the workers employed by the firm exists, accounts of outside workers show up infrequently for jobs done in other places.

## Employee records

### *Employee lists*

Employee records for the Brookline office are available from 1892 through 1920.<sup>8</sup> From 1897-1920, more than 300 men and women were employed by the Firm for varying lengths of time.<sup>9</sup> Information relating to employment was kept in three different ways during this time, starting with a hardbound book from “Wm. Franklin Hall, Accountant from Boston and Designer of Special Forms of Books of Account.” This book covered the period from September 1892 to January 1904 and was touted as the “new and improved system for co-operative banks and building and loan associations, secured by copyright.” It consisted of lined pages with a few columns so rates and hours worked and amount paid could be entered. Each employee was listed with his/her salary and after the first month of this record keeping book, the total sum for the payroll was included too.

Initially, the list of employees was grouped by those who were paid by the month and those who were paid by the hour. By 1905, an office memo gave permission to employees, after a year of employment, to ask to be paid by the hour or week or month, but all new employees were assigned a particular wage. New employees were placed at the top of the list so that the division between hourly and monthly paid workers was no longer separated after the first month they worked for the firm. No notation was entered for those who left during the month; their names just did not appear in the next month’s list. Not until 1900 was the list alphabetized.

Workers’ normal hours ranged from 29 to 50 hours a week with monthly working times of 133 to 182.5 hours. The work day lasted from 8:00AM-5:00PM until 1913 and then was changed to 8:30AM-4:30pm and then back again, with one hour for lunch and cigarette breaks during the

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<sup>7</sup> When Charles Eliot died in 1897, John Charles Olmsted was the only partner. If Eliot had not died, it is not clear that Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. would have made partner so soon.

<sup>8</sup> Employee records are available from 1892 through the 1950s but for purposes of this work, discussion will be limited to the time period 1892-1920. Billing records are available from 1874, although some years are missing in the records and others are spotty.

day.<sup>10</sup> The office operated from Monday to Saturday with half a day on Saturday, when the office closed at 1pm. Employees were expected to work seven and one-half hours a day except Saturday when the hours worked were four and one-half. The Saturday closing time was a point of contention. In the June 1913 monthly business report, Miss Bullard reported that several of the larger stores were going to close all day Saturday during July and August, and that most, if not all, of the others closed at noon. She wondered if the office could close at noon, too.<sup>11</sup> When in Brookline, John Charles Olmsted frequently worked on Sundays, savoring the quiet of an empty office when no one interrupted his work.

At the beginning of the employee records (1892), pay ranged from \$225 a month for E.D. Bolton, who oversaw the Biltmore construction, to William D. Cook, who was paid \$.25 per hour. Early checkbook records reveal that the check notations for the men were only listed as "salary." It was not until the end of 1895 that the workers' salaries were charged to a particular job name. By 1920, Associates (position between draughtsman and member) received over \$400 a month, with a specific amount dedicated to be charged to clients (as much as \$1.80 per hour).

Clients were billed on margin, term used to denote the amount billed to the clients above the salaries paid. Most of the middle level employees' work billed on 100% margin and the work of lower level employees billed on 15% or 20% margin. A draughtman's work billed at 100% meant that 100% of a man's pay was billed to the customer and so forth. This margin percentage billing does not appear on the books until the monthly reports, starting in 1911. Although it was a family firm, after Frederick Law Olmsted's death, his estate owned the house and office and firm had to pay \$400 in rent every year to the estate. The margin system may have been put in place to offset the expense of rent and utilities and to create more profit.

### *Tracking Employees: Moore's Modern Methods*

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<sup>9</sup> A general list of employees was first made at the time that jobs were listed by numbers rather than in alphabetical order (1897).

<sup>10</sup> With all the paper of the plans and the wooden structure of the building, fear of fire was great so the men were not allowed to smoke in the building.

<sup>11</sup> Olmsted Brothers. Business Report January 1, 1913. Olmsted Associates Collection. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

From 1904-1907, the firm used a new method of keeping track of employees — Moore's Modern Methods. In this book, the payroll was not organized by time periods. Instead, each employee was given an individual page and employment history. The names were listed in alphabetical order. Although this book covers only a few years, along with the checkbooks registers, it offers the best clues to the salaries that particular jobs were given. In most cases the employee's particular job was listed in the book along with the salary. In a few cases, the dates of employment and not the jobs are listed.

Because the pages were fixed, additions and subtractions to the list were not possible. Two alphabetical lists are included in the book. It is unclear why the two lists were made. Some of the employees in the second list came to the firm before some of those in the first list. Were the lists only a record of the employees, and thus not used on a regular basis, but just as a history? All of the names are recorded in the same handwriting and that points toward the idea that the book was a record of employment history too.

There are twenty names in the first list and thirty names in the second list. What the lists have in common is that they reflect the names of the people who worked for the firm between 1904-1907, some coming before that time and most staying afterwards. Women were hired as clerical staff and men did the rest of the work until 1928.

One exception is Elizabeth Bullard, who worked with her father Oliver Bullard in Bridgeport, Connecticut.<sup>12</sup> Previous to his work in Bridgeport, Oliver Bullard worked with Frederick Law Olmsted and oversaw the implementation of the plan for Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York. After Oliver's death in 1890, Elizabeth Bullard was recommended by Frederick Law Olmsted to take over her father's job as superintendent of parks in Bridgeport, Connecticut, but declined because of the explosive political ramifications of a woman in such an important job. She is generally considered to be the first woman landscape architect and supported herself for the rest of her life by doing residential landscape design. Although she does not show up in the employee records of the firm, as many employees do not who worked off-site implementing Olmsted jobs (perhaps they were on the books of clients, not the firm), she worked with John Charles Olmsted

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Bullard was no relation to Miss Helen Bullard, the office manager.

on a number of occasions, and guided the implementation of the firm's plan for the landscape at Smith College (1901).<sup>13</sup>

The workers in the Brookline office listed in Moore's Modern Methods are: Clerical Department: clerical/stenographer, bookkeeper, file clerk, office boy, Draughtsmen, Printing Department, Planting Department, Forestry Department, Model Department, and Plans Clerk. Besides the family, the first regular non-Olmsted family employees were hired in 1891—three women worked for \$4-\$5 a week and two draughtsmen worked on an hourly basis.<sup>14</sup>

Before this time, the jobs listed were: clerical, stenographer, office boy, Planting Department, and Draughting Department. The first bookkeeper was hired in July 1905; the first stenographer came in January 1895. The Printing Department hired its first man in March 1904, suggesting that the department had been created before that time but did not need new employees until that date. The designation of Forestry Department appears just once in May 1905.

### Employment Trends

A few employment trends emerge from this time period. Men who came in as office boys and those who were employed in the Draughting Department and planting department had opportunities for advancement within the firm. Of the twenty men working in the drafting department during this time period, three of them started off as office boys. They did not start at the same time, nor did they advance with the same speed, although each of them made the transition to the drafting department within two years of their coming to the firm. One of the men who came in as an office boy, was let go in 1903 because of inefficiency.<sup>15</sup>

Six of these men in the Draughting Department came and went during this time period, let go because of lack of work. They were not laid off at one time nor hired back as a group. When they

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, Amy S. "Elizabeth Bullard." in Birnbaum, Charles and Karson, Robin. Pioneers of American Landscape Design. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. P. 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> While these are the main headings of employees, other names crop up in the monthly business reports, such as Architecture Department and Design Department. These department names only appear once and the men seem to be just part of the draughtsmen. Perhaps these new department names were tried on a trial basis.

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Reed was hired in 1892 and let go in 1903. Moore's Modern Methods. Records of Olmsted employees 1892-1905. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

were hired back, it was usually at a higher rate. Those men who remained in the same job rose in the firm with pay increases, but the way that they were paid often changed, going from hourly to weekly to monthly. Occasionally, one of the men was loaned for a public job. For example, M.A. Carpenter was loaned for years to the Cambridge Water Board and the checkbook notations for his pay read, "Charge to Cambridge Water Board."<sup>16</sup> Eventually all the draughtsmen's salaries were charged to specific jobs but this is the first time this sort of notation appears in the check book register.

The women who worked as stenographers, secretaries and clerks did not have the same pattern as the men. Women who left the firm did not return.

### Draughtsmen

Each new draughtsman was given a set of four triangles and the kind of curves he desired, as well as an engineering scale. The tools were marked with the name of the room and the man's bell number.<sup>17</sup> These tools were considered the draughtsmen's private property. Memo #5 of the Office Memoranda reminded the men that tools were not to be borrowed from one another or used except by permission.<sup>18</sup> Locks were available for the draughtsmen's drawers. The draughtsmen were expected to keep the tools as long as they stayed and had to turn them in when leaving.<sup>19</sup> Every aspect of a draughtsman's work life was controlled by rules. As a way to alleviate some of the tension brought on by these rules and always working under a deadline, the draughtsmen created several books of cartoons, which satirized the rules and their bosses. John Charles Olmsted, as well as the other employees, appears in these cartoons, and he always was depicted as a very short, bearded man, and also as a kindly person.

Every draughtsman was also given a large box in the vault into which, at night before leaving, he was expected to put all plans he had either taken out or generated in a particular day except those

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<sup>16</sup> Check Stub Books and Register. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA

<sup>17</sup> The bell system was an office communication system whereby each man could be contacted by the telephone operator by the activation of a bell on his desk.

<sup>18</sup> The memoranda were a series of rules for the firm. These memos were posted on a bulletin board near the office entrance. While there was a call to put these memoranda into a book, Rule Book, it never happened or has been lost.

<sup>19</sup> Memo #5 Scrapbook/Memoranda Vol. I Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline Massachusetts.

tacked to table. Sometimes, as time permitted, the plans clerk gathered up the plans left out and put them in vault. If not claimed within a day or two the plans were filed. The Clerical Card Box, a listing of the jobs and the types of plans for each job was put in the vault by an office boy every night before closing.

### Miss Bullard

Miss Helen Bullard, the unofficial office manager and secretary for John Charles Olmsted, from 1892-1929, managed the office which allowed the partners to travel without worrying about the management of the office.<sup>20</sup> While she was always deferential in her requests to the members of the firm, her frustrations with the members not responding to her suggestions in the Monthly Business Reports were palpable. She concerned herself with all aspects of the running of the firm, from trying to make paperwork for jobs more efficient to asking for raises for women in the Clerical Department. She was a short woman, who was often depicted in the office cartoons as a formidable taskmistress.

### **Monthly Business Reports**

Along with giving a picture of what sorts of jobs the firm handled, Moore's Modern Methods show how the employees were paid for their work. By 1911, the records of the month, printed in the Monthly Business Report, divided the employees into eight different groups. The monthly business reports were assembled from November 1911- February 1921. At that time, they became quarterly reports until they were discontinued in 1927. The reports were seen by the members of the firm alone and not by the workers. For those members who were working away from Brookline, the monthly reports must have served as business newsletters.

The monthly business reports were divided into eight sections:

- New client names, location of work, member put in charge of the job, assistant (high level draughtsman) assigned to member in charge of the job, nature of the work.

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<sup>20</sup> Miss Bullard started off as a secretary and her duties expanded during the years she worked for the firm. She remained John Charles Olmsted's personal secretary throughout.



- Financial statement-salaries, money paid out (office expenses), dividends (paid out irregularly), bills sent (name of client, member in charge, professional fees, margin on assistants, debits and credits on the job, division of earnings per member).
- Amount of money in bank accounts (Brookline National Trust and various West Coast banks).
- Bills over six months old unpaid bills, collection.
- Notes from Miss Bullard on a variety of subjects, ranging from salary raises, arrangement of office, office equipment, billing, mail, library, and clerical.
- Record of overtime.
- Statement of phone records.
- Occasional topics-statement as to cost of various works, accounts getting too high, report on conditions in Planting Department, library report, reports on visits by members and certain assistants, new employees, employees who have left and where they went.

For example, in the monthly business reports of September 1914, the ten women in the clerical department were paid by the month with salaries ranging from \$20 to \$150.<sup>21</sup> The rest of the firm was male. Two office boys were also paid by the month: \$21.67 each. One printer was paid \$45 per month. The plans clerk was paid hourly, \$.60, and worked 203 3/4 hours. Twenty-two draughtmen were paid by the hour, with hourly wages ranging from \$.40 to \$1.10 an hour. They worked from 128 1/4 hours to 202 1/2 hours with one man working only 53 hours, with a total salary for the draughtmen of \$3132.84. Three draughtsmen were paid on a monthly basis and worked from 128.25 to 174.12 hours. Two field engineers were paid by the hour, \$.40 and \$.65, and worked an average of 252 hours during the month for a combined salary of 263.10. The carpenter was paid hourly, \$.60 per hour, and worked for 186 hours for \$111.60. Two janitors and “the women” were paid monthly for \$112. The total payroll for September 1914 was \$5012.56, excluding the pay for the partners and associates. The firm received \$22,124.45 on account of bills for 44 different accounts. These amounts show that the salaries paid to workers in the firm were not standardized. Men were paid by the hour, the week and the month. The hours worked in every month differed depending on the number of workers and the amount of

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<sup>21</sup> Like most of the office procedures, the monthly business reports changed, depending on the usefulness to the firm. This monthly business report reflects the “average” report.

overtime worked. The amount of money that the firm received on account of bills differed every month too. While most aspects of the firm could be regulated, the amount paid out for salaries and brought in from accounts paid could not.

The draughtsmen were individually assigned to particular jobs with the partners and associates having the responsibility for these jobs. In August and September 1914, for example, eighteen new jobs came to the firm: twelve landscapes for individual estates, two plans for colleges, two park plans, one golf club plan and one large development plan for 2500 acres, with 2000 acres of fruit trees, and 500 acres for hotel, country club and houses. One hundred and fifty existing jobs consisted of: city plans, parks, individual estates, cemeteries, colleges and universities, golf clubs and course, etc.

In September 1914, John Charles Olmsted was responsible for 29 jobs. Because he traveled for as many as nine months out of the year, his new jobs do not show up on the “new jobs” monthly list but he had responsibility for as many as 54 jobs at one time. Trying to balance his very heavy workload on the road, and the running of the firm was a considerable challenge.

### **The Physical Office**

From 1870-1880 Frederick Law Olmsted’s job responsibilities in the Boston area increased. By 1878, he and his family were spending summers in the area and the winters in their New York City house. Their first rental house was located on Kirkland Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was there in an upstairs room that plans for the Back Bay Fens were drafted by John Charles Olmsted under Frederick Law Olmsted’s direction. The room also served as Frederick Law Olmsted’s office for other Boston park plans.<sup>22</sup>

As Frederick Law Olmsted was considering a move to Boston he and his family rented two homes in the Green Hill section of Brookline, Massachusetts (1881-1883), one on nearby Walnut

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<sup>22</sup> Olmsted, Frederick Law Jr. “Random Notes about Frederick Law Olmsted’s Brookline Office, 1883 and seq. and about previous temporary offices in the Boston Region 1878-1883.” Unpublished. Laura Wood Roper Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, June 1952.

Street and the other on Dudley Street along the Brookline Reservoir.<sup>23</sup> Olmsted was attracted to the picturesque qualities of the Clark Farm, down the street from his friends the architect, H.H. Richardson, and Charles Sprague Sargent. The property sloped up to a hillside at the western side and flattened out to the north across the front. Surrounded by fruit trees, the house and barn were set back from the road. At the northeastern corner of the property was a rock dell filled with a large outcropping of Roxbury puddingstone.

At first the Clark sisters were unwilling to part with their family home but they eventually agreed when they were promised a cottage on the property. The cottage was designed by John Charles Olmsted.<sup>24</sup> In one of his letters to his wife John Charles Olmsted despaired about the price of land in the neighborhood and remembered his father's purchase. "That lot of nearly two acres and barn cost \$13,220 or \$.13 a foot, including improvements on the land. He then spent about \$4,000 on the house and \$4,000 on the land and barn, making the cost \$21,200 in all."<sup>25</sup>

While the property was configured to be a home for the Olmsted changes were made to accommodate an office too. The barn was moved to a position northwest of the house when the cottage for the Clark sisters was built. Fences were put up which surrounded the service yards around the barn, screening them from the view of the rest of the grounds. Frederick Law Olmsted added a carriage turn on the east side of the house. A stone wall was built on the northern side of the dell. A circular drive with a low mound in the center was constructed in front of the house. Two entrances led in from Warren Street. At the north entrance, an archway was erected of the same material, rustic spruce pole, as the fence built around the perimeter of the property. The south entrance was a pedestrian pathway, accessible through a gate in the fence.

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<sup>23</sup> The office was located at 99 Warren Street, at the corner of Dudley Street and Warren Street, in the old Joshua Clark homestead. The area was originally settled in 1722 by Dudley Boylston, who cleared the land and developed it as a small farm. After his death in 1748, the land passed to his son, Joshua Boylston. Joshua's daughter, Rebecca Clark, inherited the farm in 1804. She and her husband, Joshua Clark took down the farmhouse and built a new one, only to have it burn down when almost complete. A new house was built that passed down to their daughters, Sarah D. and Susannah B.R. Clark. The sisters changed the land use from a farm to a small orchard and it was during this time that Frederick Law Olmsted became familiar with the property.

<sup>24</sup> While John Charles Olmsted frequently sketched buildings on his landscape designs for massing purposes, the house for the Clark sisters is the only building that was built.

## A Home and an Office

The wood-shingled farmhouse, originally built in 1810, sat on one and three-quarters acres of land. Frederick Law Olmsted chose the north parlor for his office and even with additions, he persisted in keeping his office in this room.<sup>26</sup> While work and home were often located in the same building in the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth century, by the time the Olmsteds moved to Brookline, Boston had a downtown with buildings devoted solely to office work. Frederick Law Olmsted's New York City office was located in his home, and he may have continued this arrangement for that reason. Frederick Law Olmsted preferred to work in the landscape and while he accommodated it, he did not much care for his office nor its arrangement.<sup>27</sup> Also, his friend, H.H. Richardson, a near neighbor in Brookline, had built a studio as an attachment to his house and may have encouraged his friend to do the same.

The first major alteration to the house was done in 1887 when the parlor's north wall was removed and extended northwards twelve feet, ending in a large bay window. This new section accommodated a long drafting table and provided support for a latticed sleeping porch opening from the bedroom above this office. The three short extension walls coming out of the house on either side of the bay window also had windows so the room had good north light.

The room, now almost doubled in size, was also the place where clients were received. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. described the room as always looking like it was part of his father's residence casually adapted to office use.<sup>28</sup> During Frederick Law Olmsted's tenure as head of the firm, his office accommodated the desks of the other members too and also Miss Bullard's desk. She moved when the first extension was built. Throughout the history of the firm, this room remained the partners' office.

The next addition came only two years later when a two-story wing for offices and drafting rooms was added at the north/bay window wall. John Charles Olmsted was responsible for

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<sup>25</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 4, 1899.

<sup>26</sup> The front parlor remained as the office for members throughout the history of the Firm in Brookline, MA.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Laura Wood Roper. June 7, 1952. Laura Wood Roper Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. Frederick Law Olmsted left the house the same color as it was during the time the Clarks owned the house. In 1896, Marion Olmsted decided that the exterior gray color was too somber and she chose a reddish plum color to paint the house.

carrying out this change and subsequent alterations and additions to the building. The eastern third of the bay window became an interior wall and a door built in next to it gave direct access from the parlor into the office wing. An exterior office door was built too. By 1899, more space was required and an additional large drafting room was extended out from the first office wing.

Two years later in 1901, a large two-story wing was constructed extending out towards the rear, westerly from the juncture of the original small office wing and the large drafting room wing. This construction added a Planting Department, Print Department and Architectural and Engineering Departments.<sup>29</sup> A lunchroom for the men was built in the basement, along with a darkroom for photography.

At this time, a two-story brick masonry vault for storing drawings was also built at the end of the large drafting room. The number of jobs had increased so rapidly over the years that drawings not in use had to be stored elsewhere, in Brookline Village, about three-quarters of a mile away. One chamber of the vault was below grade; the other, directly above it was on a level with and directly accessible from the main drafting room. Perkins' cubicle was located just outside this entrance. A rear entrance to the office was located around the corner from the cubicle.

In the barn loft were two rooms. In one was kept the old correspondence and old framed plans and photos, most of which were made for exhibitions. In the other were the duplicate copies of reports and writings. A catalogue was kept of each room. If a report was sent away a record of name of report, date, sent and to whom sent was kept. In the other barn loft room were kept the storm windows in summer and screens in winter. Everything in the barn which was not of service was done away with, either sold or carted away. By saving old boxes and odds and ends of lumber, enough wood was saved to fuel the office stove all winter.

### *Office Arrangement*

This office arrangement was different from other landscape architecture and planning offices in scale and organization. It was also different from architects' offices in that plans for architects'

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Alex, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Alex, p. 19

offices were based more on a centralized system having all the draughtsmen grouped together.<sup>30</sup> The Olmsted firm did not base its physical plan on an existing model but did it on a trial and error basis.

The original draughting room was divided into offices along a corridor going down to another draughting room. The Clerical Department with the ladies lunchroom was on one side and a couple of offices for draughting were located on the other side.

The last major enlargement to the office was completed in 1911. A second story was added to the main drafting room and to the vault, accomplished by raising the roofs over both these rooms. This addition produced rooms with high ceilings so that the new upper vault was able to incorporate a mezzanine for the storage of filing cabinets, besides three thousand additional boxes for drawing storage. The upper drafting room with its high peaked ceiling, rafter beams, dark wood finish and window walls became a well-lit work space.<sup>31</sup>

Miss Bullard often mentioned the arrangement of the office in her comments in the monthly business reports. She asked for the re-arrangement of desks a number of times and mentioned that her old desk was being made over to accommodate drawers.<sup>32</sup> As the office grew in physical size, she wondered about the storage of various papers. Were they to be moved? Should she store them in her new office? She complained about the cold temperatures as a deterrent to the efficiency of the office. Sometimes it was less than 60F all morning when the janitor did not get the furnace going early enough in the day.<sup>33</sup> She complained about the darkness of the offices and the noise from the office boys. In all cases, she suggested improvements to correct the situations, although a few times she despaired that she did not know what to do and asked for guidance from the members. This may have been a ploy to involve the members because so often they did not respond to her comments in the office reports.

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<sup>30</sup> Waid, D. Everett. "How Architects Work: offices of noted architects I," The Brickbuilder. Vol. 20. p. 249-252

<sup>31</sup> Alex, p. 32

<sup>32</sup> April 1912 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>33</sup> February 1914 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

The office memoranda or regulations, posted on a bulletin board outside of the Clerical Department, also addressed issues relating to the physical space of the office. Memo #32 reminded the workers of the boundaries of the office and asked them not to go into the house. Memo #28 reminded the men not to use the public desk in the front office. Many of the memoranda related to eating and smoking. Men were reminded that they could eat only in the lunchroom. Water bugs and mice appeared when the men ate upstairs (#18). Games were allowed only in the lunchroom during the noon hour. Gambling was forbidden on office premises (#58).

In view of repeated fires, smoking in the office was prohibited, except in the lunchroom between 1:00 P.M.-2:00 P.M. This regulation was amended six months later when smoking was permitted in the lunchroom during all office hours but on the men's own time (#80). Three burnt matches on the floor of the vestibule prompted another memo (#74) asking the men to carry their burnt matches out onto the driveway before throwing them down.<sup>34</sup> A week later, another memorandum about smoking appeared. "The attitude of the firm in regard to the enforcement of office regulations has always been to trust to the honor and good sense of the employees." The memorandum went on to state that the firm was especially disappointed when men smoked in the lunchroom surreptitiously. "In case a man has got his nerves so dependent on smoking that he cannot regularly do good work four hours at a stretch without a smoke, we would far rather have him openly go out of the office and take his smoke, although we need hardly point out that such a practice, other things being equal, is not a mark of efficiency."<sup>35</sup>

### Office Equipment

The drive for efficiency pervaded all aspects of office life. The office equipment was updated continuously and the Olmsteds bought the latest office machinery for their work. For the most part, these machines and office furniture were equipment not developed specifically for them but were part of the advancement in design of office equipment developed for general business purposes.

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<sup>34</sup> The numerical sequence of the memoranda were often out of order in time and often the numbers were reused. Sometimes the memoranda did not have numbers attached to them.

<sup>35</sup> Unnumbered memorandum, July 27, 1915. Scrapbook/Memoranda Vol. 2, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

### *Office Furniture*

Adjustable light fixtures for the Draughting Department were installed in November 1896. Shades and awnings kept out the heat and the cold (installed or changed in 1900). Filing systems were changed from the Shannon Filing system to a vertical filing system (August 1914). In between, a tengwall file was purchased March 29, 1903. New filing cabinets accommodated this new style of filing papers. Locks for drawers came as early as January 1897. A pencil pointer or sharpener was also purchased at this time. An electric fan came into the office in the summer of 1897 and with it, very strict rules for its operation.

New plan filing cases made to hold plans flat, up to and including 36"x48" drawings, created the need for the standardization of drawing sizes. Drawings were made on cloth and paper and had to conform to the following sizes: 8"x10 1/2", 10 1/2"x15", 20"x24", 20"x30", 29"x36", 29"x42", and 36"x42".<sup>36</sup> Seasoned tracing cloth cut to these sizes, stamped ready for filling in title for working drawings and also plain for drawings needing a special title, were stored in the top drawer under the shipping table.

### *Typewriters and other Office Machinery*

Typewriters, the machines, as distinct from the people who used them, also called "typewriters," were always being fixed and new ones were purchased regularly. A variety of office machinery was purchased over the years, from a plummeter (no clue as to what it was) to a hectograph (1913) machine used to print multiple copies, to an electro copier from the Electro Blue Printing Machine Company (May 3, 1902). An electric receiving stamp was not appreciated because of its "sprawly appearance."<sup>37</sup> In December 1912, Miss Bullard asked to purchase a new Fisher machine. This machine was a bookkeeping machine that allowed the bookkeepers to do their work on large pages. By November 1915, she requested another Fisher machine. Miss Bullard (March 1913) reported that the bookkeepers had made use of the adding machine. She suggested

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<sup>36</sup> Memo #76 Memoranda/Scrapbook Vol. 2, Frederick Law Olmsted Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA. Undated.

<sup>37</sup> April 1914 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.



that they receive instruction in using it. Some equipment came to the office on trial. A machine with tabulators was said to cut the time spent on bookkeeping by 25-50%.

In January 1913, she wrote in the monthly business report that the adding machine had proven to be a great help and a valuable addition to the equipment of the Clerical Department. "We have, with its help, been able to get together much information of value which would have otherwise been lost on account of expense of getting such information by other means."<sup>38</sup> Two months later she reported again on it, adding that the firm had saved \$27.50 or 8.46% of the cost of the machine on bill-checking the previous fall. She also noted that the adding machine was being used by the draughtsmen "to a great extent in their work on grading estimates where it has saved considerable time and labor."<sup>39</sup>

### *Communication*

Early improvements included the installation of electric bells (December 3, 1895) and telephones (June 13, 1896). Each man had an electric bell at his desk and those bells served to alert the men that a telephone call was waiting for them or that someone in the office needed to see them. Later three different telephone lines were installed in the office and each Department had its own telephone. The telephones were rented from the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company. Something called a micro-telephone was purchased in September 1897. Installation of a wall telephone (April 29, 1903) was followed by the installation of a telephone booth.

The installation of telephones in the office greatly improved communication with clients and business contacts. At first, anyone who expected to receive a telephone call, whether by toll line or local call, had to inform the receiving station, later called the switchboard, of his name and that of the party who was expected to call. Later when the men had access to the telephones themselves, in the absence of the switchboard operator, they had to record their calls on forms designed for the purpose. By January 1915, the Firm had three telephone lines with 16 stations or telephones in the office. A yearly plan with the New England Telephone and Telegraph

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<sup>38</sup> January 1913 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>39</sup> March 1913 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Company allowed 4000 calls for \$340.50. Despite recording the number of telephone calls made each month in the monthly business reports, listing the separate number of both personal and business calls each person made, the allowed number of calls was always exceeded by the summertime and another 4000 calls were made by year's end.<sup>40</sup>

*Transportation: From Office Horse and Carriage to Automobile*

While checks written for horse feed, horseshoeing and a new harness show up in the check register for 1891, an office automobile was not purchased until 1917. Previous to the office car, men were allowed to drive their own cars to make site visits and they were reimbursed for mileage. A parking lot sat next to the barn in the back of the office.

While the advance from horses to autos was great, no such advances were made in office furniture, except in the Draughting Department. The system of drafting standing up with a low bench on which to rest the feet was replaced with stools for the men in 1901. Flexible hanging lighting for each man was installed in 1896.

In 1905, at the American Society of Landscape Architects meeting in Boston, in a brochure detailing the various field trips, a description of the Olmsted office was included because a tour of the office was part of the program. This description was written by one of the firm members.

The Olmsted office is heated by direct and indirect hot water apparatus and has electric lights and fans. The office contains ten rooms having an aggregate floor space of approximately half an acre. Each room is connected with the main office by a private telephone line. There are four long distance telephones in the office. There are seven draughting tables having an aggregate area of 570 square feet.

The Clerical Department included book-keeping and looking after the filing of all letters, reports, etc according to the vertical file system.

The Planting Department has a draughting room and a desk room. The latter contains nursery catalogues, a card catalogue of all nursery stock obtainable, American and foreign, with folders

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<sup>40</sup> January 1915 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.0

containing all plating papers relating to active planting work, about three hundred volumes of reference books and fifteen more or less technical weekly and monthly periodicals.

The print Room contains a cylindrical electric arc-light printing frame, a large outdoor frame and vacuum attachment for securing good contact, and an ordinary blue printing frame. It has a room for developing and washing and drying prints.

The fireproof plans vault now contains about 21,000 plans. It has 2000 boxes each box capable of holding forty rolled tracing paper and tracing cloth and other plans, and there is space left for about 500 more plans boxes.

There is a lunch room in the basement with a seating capacity for 25 men. Lunches are furnished at a maximum cost for food of 20 cents per meal. It is run by a member of the office force.

There is also in the basement a dark room for photographic work. A photographic collection consisting of approximately 40,000 prints arranged topically according to clients and cross-referenced under details. The collection contain prints received from many parts of Europe and America as well as photographs showing different stages of our own work.<sup>41</sup>

## **Office Procedures**

The office arrangements and the procedures for doing business were more detailed and more complex than any of the assembled group for the ASLA meeting in 1905 was accustomed to. Thomas Mawson, an English landscape architect traveling to Boston five years later, was also amazed at the thoroughness and complexity of the Olmsted office. Mawson noted that the methods of doing business in the Olmsted office were unlike any other.

After my introduction to the several members of the family, I was shown round the office, which, notwithstanding their straggling arrangement, proved to be most orderly and convenient. Indeed I soon realised that in the matter of office organisation we in England have much to learn. Also their survey and contour work, which formed the basis of every plan, was done with a thoroughness seldom attempted at home. The method of preparing the plans by regular stages, ending with the work of the men who

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<sup>41</sup> quoted in Alex. p. 28

take out the quantities of the trees and shrubs required, all carefully noted on the plans, was a revelation to me.

The filing of records of executed works and “progress photographs” was reduced to an up-to-date card system. The records of expenditure upon all the work passing through the office were tabulated with a thoroughness which I was quick to praise. But I think that Mr. Olmstead’s [sic] rejoinder was right when he explained that whilst they in America paid more attention to the business side of their practice than we did in England, we in this country paid greater heed to design.<sup>42</sup>

Mawson noted the methods of doing business in the Olmsted office as peculiar to the office. The Olmsted way of doing business was not only innovative to the Englishman but to American methods of design business as well. William Alex, in his Inventory of the Frederick Law Olmsted Office-Estate and Contents, completed in 1972, wrote of the firm’s work that it “demonstrated a rare continuity of work by a single American professional organization. It can be said that this core group of drawings comprises the history in the United States of environmental design.”<sup>43</sup> In the report, Alex related that he was able to interview Harry Perkins, the plans clerk. He refers to and quotes a 1910 Olmsted office manual, also called a notice book.<sup>44</sup> While this manual no longer exists, we are lucky in that his report liberally quotes from the manual. In it we can see the way a job moved through the office and the amount of specialization required.

### Hiring the Olmsteds

While many of the jobs that came through the office grew out of jobs on the road, many more were of local origin and grew out of other local jobs. A potential customer would write to the firm (later as technology advanced, he might telephone) laying out a landscape or planning problem he wanted the firm to address. The scale of jobs varied as much as their content. The jobs may be categorized in the following way: parks, estates, civic improvements, schools/colleges and universities, planned communities (suburban developments, cemeteries, expositions).

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<sup>42</sup> Mawson, Thomas H. The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect, quoted in Alex, p. 35

<sup>43</sup> Alex, p. 32

<sup>44</sup> Reference to this office manual is made in the monthly reports of 1912 and suggestions for updating the manual are made by Helen F. Bullard.

### *Design jobs*

In the early days of the firm, when a customer wrote and asked the Olmsteds to do a job, they wrote back to make an appointment for a site visit and described the financial arrangements. An initial fee for a visit was charged and, depending on the job, the customer was charged by the acre or by the degree of complexity of the job. The firm also requested a topographical map. While many aspects of this process changed over the years, the need for a topographical map remained a constant. Many times the firm had to make alterations to these maps because of mistakes, but the initial request remained a necessary part of the process.

Inquiries for new work came into the office at a steady pace. The Firm never advertised its work and they never lacked for new jobs. In 1915, 175 inquiries came in for new work and most of them resulted in jobs.

In answer to an inquiry for work, the firm would send a variation of the following letter:

... It seems to me that perhaps the best way for you to proceed would be to have me make a preliminary visit with you and then write up a report stating at some length, but in general terms, the nature of the improvements which we would advise and stating rather definitely what surveys are needed as a basis for a comprehensive general plan, and giving a rough estimate of the cost of such surveys and of our own services in preparing the plans. You could then send out this report with a letter of your own to a limited number of the alumni of the school who are most likely to be interested. If the responses are favorable, the plans could then be prepared and you would be in a position to go before the general body of the alumni with a tolerably definite proposition, accompanied by actual plans and specifications, with recommendations for taking up the execution of the plan piece by piece.

As you asked nothing about our charges, I did not mention the subject yesterday, but to avoid a possible misunderstanding, I may mention that the charge for a preliminary visit with a written report such as I have mentioned above would be \$100. The charge for a

general plan it is impossible to estimate without a better knowledge of the problems than I have at present.<sup>45</sup>

If the client was amenable to these provisions, he replied in writing. A client folder was started. Larger jobs required signed contracts. This letter illustrates a top down method of planning where the client did not necessarily consult with the people for whom a plan was being prepared. This lack of accountability was the way that business was done generally.

Public jobs operated on a different system. John Charles Olmsted often had to appear before park commission boards with varying personal and political agendas. As jobs progressed and the composition of boards and commissions changed, he had to accommodate to changes/whims of his clients. The client base mainly comprised wealthy businessmen or a group of wealthy individuals who made up the park commissions.

When Frederick Law Olmsted was head of the office, he made site visits, bringing along John Charles Olmsted. After the visit, John Charles Olmsted returned to the office, wrote up a report of the site visit and drafted the plans. When Frederick Law Olmsted retired and the volume of the work grew too large for this process, the partners took notes on site and brought them back to the office, instructing the draughtsmen as to the plans. Photographs of the site were often taken at this time and then again after the job was completed.

When they returned to the office, the men filled out cards detailing travel expenses and estimates for the job for Miss Bullard.

As the volume continued to increase, the partners traveled with assistants who made notes on the site. On the road, jobs begot jobs and to save travel expenses, the partners after 1906 visited more than one job at a time and used the visits to new clients to also look at jobs in progress and completed jobs. Requesting an Olmsted to be the partner assigned to a job cost more than a non-Olmsted partner. Occasionally, the number of the jobs in the office was so large that the members had to turn down jobs. This happened infrequently but if bringing in more jobs meant

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<sup>45</sup>to General Francis H. Appleton on the methods of the Olmsted firm. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. June 8, 1898. Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

having to hire extra men to do draughting and more women to do secretarial and bookkeeping work, sometimes it was more economically efficient to restrict the number of jobs in the office. No formula existed to figure this out because jobs were in process at different stages with different deadlines.

Jobs sometimes dragged on because of lack of client resources or reversal of fortunes. Inquiries from customers for work were dropped and not taken up for years. Occasionally, completed plans were not implemented or only partially implemented and taken up later, in extreme cases, twenty years later.

The Olmsteds were involved in every aspect of a job except for the supplying of plants and building materials at a profit. While supplying plants for a job could have been financially rewarding, it was not considered honorable business practice. In addition, some of the men in the office had family connections to various nurseries. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, the firm also did not buy plants from these nurseries.

Staying away from the nursery business meant that there would be no confusion about the best plant material for a job versus the most expensive plant material. The firm believed that not being involved in the selling of plants assured the customer of the best plants for the site. For some of the bigger jobs, nurseries were established on the job site and the office also recommended nurseries from which clients could purchase planting and building materials, but profiting from these two aspects was considered bad form. As part of the typical job, the client hired an Olmsted employee to oversee implementation and could also pay for regular visits from an Olmsted employee to check on the progress of plant growth and the maintenance of the hardscape. This approach meant that the firm did not sell plans alone; it sold a package. In supervising the implementation of their plans, the Olmsteds retained a measure of control over the quality of the work. This did not guarantee that changes would not be made when an Olmsted firm employee was not on the site. Even so, the better the work (and its implementation), the more jobs came. With more jobs came growing public recognition of the professionalization of landscape architecture and planning.

While some of their clients had financial reverses, and the economy of the United States during the time that the Olmsteds practiced certainly fluctuated, except for the time the United States was involved in World War I, the firm never lacked jobs. While it may be said that park planning and design dominated the firm's work until 1900, a variety of types and scales of jobs was the norm in the office through most of its history.

### Draughting Department

When the number of active jobs in process grew to over 150 and there were over fifteen draughtsmen in the office, the initial acceptance by a partner of a new job was accompanied by the assignment of one of the senior draughtsmen or assistants to a particular job. The firm promoted the idea of an office of cooperation and when plans were due, often others who were not initially involved with the draughting of particular plans, were assigned to help, stopping work on what they were doing to pitch in to get a job out on time. In general, while one partner was assigned the responsibility for a job, the hands of many of the men in the office contributed to the work, except for John Charles Olmsted who traveled alone for most of the year and who often had to complete jobs while on the road.

After the preliminary plan had been approved by the client, it was draughted and then approved by one of the members. If plans were needed for details, such as fences, gates or paving, the plan was sent up to the Architectural Department. Then it was sent to the Planting Department where a planting plan was created. A great deal of work and revision went into the jobs and the path from general concept to final plans was complicated by changes made by the clients and the many who worked on the plans.

Attribution for a particular job was always muddy, even when Frederick Law Olmsted was still head of the office. Frederick Law Olmsted did not draft final plans and only sketched general concepts. By 1913, an Olmsted job might not have an Olmsted working on it.

In many cases, the Olmsteds were hired after the architect and the engineer, requiring them to work with or around these people. Difficult conditions and people became a frequent problem. In



most cases, the partners did a variety of work. With John Charles Olmsted away for most of the autumns and winters, he took all sorts of jobs as they came to him on the road. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. also handled a variety of jobs, which included almost all of the high profile jobs. At the beginning of his career, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was often hired for his name alone, such as his work for the McMillan Commission. He also took jobs that John Charles Olmsted could not do because of his large volume of work. The power of the first Frederick Law Olmsted's name was so great that years after he retired and died, work was still being attributed to him by people outside the firm and even clients.

After revised topographical maps were prepared, a preliminary plan was draughted and approved by the client, often with revisions. Suggestions for changes in the production of a job rarely appeared in the monthly business reports but the few that did reveal an effort to further standardize their work. In writing the scale of a drawing on the plan, there seemed to be some controversy over how it should be done. While the members of the firm wanted a feet first scale, as in 40'=1," sometimes the reverse appeared on a drawing. Memorandum #9 made the feet-first scale ruling an office regulation.<sup>46</sup>

Dawson tried to draw on his experience with architectural plans by asking the members to consider the architectural convention of putting the plan number in a large circle in the right hand corner of the plan. His idea was never implemented.<sup>47</sup> A series of memoranda addressed this issue though. Memoranda #15 mandated that in the right hand lower corner of every tracing were to appear the initials of the draughtsman who made the tracing and those of the draughtsman who made the study from which it was traced. If the man who made the study was not available to look over the tracing, the man who did the tracing had to write the initials of the man who made the study with the addition "per" his own initials. The plans clerk was instructed to enforce this order strictly and to accept no plans for printing or mailing which did not conform to the rule.

Trac. G.C.W.                      or Trac. G.F.W.

Stud. A.B.C.                      Stud. A.B.C.

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<sup>46</sup> Memo #9. Office Scrapbook/Memoranda. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service Brookline. MA

<sup>47</sup> November 1914 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Per F.G.

With so many jobs in active process, the firm needed to build in protections so that plans never went out without proper authorization. With John Charles Olmsted on the road and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. teaching at Harvard, a system needed to be in place that had as many protections as possible. It is likely that plans went out previous to this memorandum that were not checked properly. While the Draughting Department needed fewer rules than the Clerical Department to maintain order, the rules were equally enforced in all Departments. Six years later, this memorandum was superseded by another memorandum, #40.

No plan is to leave the office unless it has the following

Drawn by	Approved for issue
Traced by	
Checked by	By

In the lower right hand corner filled out. On finished plans it is to be put on in ink but on studies and sketch drawings it can be stamped on with a stamp.<sup>48</sup>

The idea of checking everything twice by two different men extended to all design work, specifications and contracts. Revising the memoranda reinforced the idea that work could always be done in a better and more efficient way. Many of the memoranda were revised over the years. Also, with the head of the firm, John Charles Olmsted, traveling as much as he did, it was a way to maintain the design standards of the firm.

### Planting Department

The Olmsteds were involved in every aspect of a job except for the supplying of plants and building materials at a profit. While supplying plants for a job could have been financially rewarding, it was not considered honorable business practice. In addition, some of the men in the office had family connections to various nurseries. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, the firm also did not buy plants from these nurseries.

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<sup>48</sup> #40 Office Scrapbook/Memoranda. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service Brookline, MA

Staying away from the nursery business meant that there would be no confusion about the best plant material for a job versus the most expensive plant material. The firm believed that not being involved in the selling of plants assured the customer of the best plants for the site. For some of the bigger jobs, nurseries were established on the job site and the office also recommended nurseries from which clients could purchase planting and building materials, but profiting from these two aspects was considered bad form. As part of the typical job, the client hired an Olmsted employee to oversee implementation and could also pay for regular visits from an Olmsted employee to check on the progress of plant growth and the maintenance of the hardscape. This approach meant that the firm did not sell plans alone; it sold a package. In supervising the implementation of their plans, the Olmsteds retained a measure of control over the quality of the work. This did not guarantee that changes would not be made when an Olmsted firm employee was not on the site. Even so, the better the work (and its implementation), the more jobs came. With more jobs came growing public recognition of the professionalization of landscape architecture and planning.

After a design was approved it then moved to the Planting Department where the planting plans were prepared. Men in the Planting Department made trips to East Coast nurseries in the early spring and made notes on the character and condition of plants and the running of the nurseries. The firm had a rule that all orders for plants had to be backed up in writing. Things went awry when men who made orders away from the office on the phone or telegraph, forgot to have the order confirmed in the regular way, by creating a written order.

The complete advantages of the system cannot be made fully available unless it is completely followed. By observance of the rule, checking lists and other information automatically reaches the man who will unpack goods, or receives them, and relieves the assistant in charge of the work, of the clerical work connected with placing such an order; and yet, at the same time, it places on that assistant the responsibility for the placing of the order.<sup>49</sup>

Information about the Planting Department contained in the monthly business reports was mostly concerned with the efficiency of the operations. In 1912, they sent out carbon copies of the plant orders to the man in charge of planting instead of creating new lists and that worked well. Clients

hired Olmsted employees to oversee the planting and they checked the received plants against orders. In 1913, the firm made it easier for the man on the ground by alphabetizing the list of plants, sending again a carbon copy of the order.<sup>50</sup>

Even the checking list blanks for plant orders came under the scrutiny of the firm. When it was reported that new order blanks would soon be needed, Hubert Canning, the head of the Planting Department, asked for a new form because “the present blank is a bit crude and unbusinesslike.”<sup>51</sup> This note in the November 1913 monthly business report reveals the importance to the firm of every aspect of the business. It also shows how the departmentalization of the Firm’s organization worked. No one person had responsibility for all areas. Instead, the head of each Department was in charge of only his segment of the firm. While a coordinated effort was necessary to see a job through to completion, each Department could concentrate on its own section.

All the design work would have been meaningless without the ability to count on good plant stock. When trouble over poor stock and bad relations occurred between the firm and the nursery, Ellwanger and Barry, one of the oldest nurseries in the country, Canning, an assistant in the Planting Department, suggested that one of the members of the firm write to the head of the nursery to try and establish a better relationship. He also suggested that when one of the men was in the vicinity of the nursery that they visit.<sup>52</sup> Canning also reported that the Planting Department had experienced for the first time the effect of plant importation laws in their purchase of rhododendrons from Scotland and that all had gone smoothly. They experienced a trying spring season in July 1915 when nurserymen were unable to provide them with ordered plants. It led to a season where the number of orders were the same but the dollar amounts were less than usual.

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<sup>49</sup> Memo #76 Office Scrapbook/Memoranda. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service Brookline, MA

<sup>50</sup> February 1913 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>51</sup> November 1913 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>52</sup> November 1913 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

## Library

The main Library of the firm was located in the Planting Department and it caused much anxiety. The volume of materials was daunting; the firm subscribed to 39 monthly magazines. In addition, they collected park reports and received government pamphlets. Within two years, they could accumulate over 1000 magazines, pamphlets and reports. According to subject, the materials were divided between the Planting Department and the Architectural Department (upstairs Draughting Room). All of the books were classified under two headings: Landscape Architecture and Planning, but what to do with the magazines, etc.? The magazines, reports and pamphlets were stored in the Planting Department.

The dilemma of classification was initially solved when Miss Theodora Kimball from the Harvard Library Department came to the firm to look over their subject classification. Library cards were printed and put to use for the library in the Architecture Department. Members of the firm were not pleased with the Harvard system as they thought that it was too general a system. "It does not draw a sharp distinction between topics, thus making them mutually exclusive."<sup>53</sup> Thus it was agreed to alter the Harvard system. "It must be taken into account that the material here, for the most part, is a very miscellaneous collection of magazine articles and pamphlets and also that the books are few, while the Harvard Outline is based on books."<sup>54</sup>

Miss Bullard added her opinion about the library, praising the system of reviewing books used at Harvard's Landscape Architecture school, headed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. Percival Gallagher, a firm associate, wrote that he did not see the value of the Harvard classification system to the actual arrangement of materials. What the library needed, he said, was a card catalogue. He suggested that books and pamphlets take their places on the shelves partly by custom and partly by the physical characteristics of the books. Large-sized books would have to lie flat and would not be able to be accommodated under any system. Gallagher backed down on his condemnation of the Harvard system when he next suggested that maybe the park reports would be best referenced using the system.

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<sup>53</sup> September 1912 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Gallagher gave an example of how the reports could be classified, using the South Park System in Chicago:

Maintenance—parks

South Park system, Chicago

Parks-maintenance for year 1908-cost per acre for each park-p. 95

Boulevards-maintenance for year 1908-cost per mile-p. 95

Ten months later Canning complained that some of the book borrowers had failed to fill out the cards for borrowing a book. The new set of rules was slow to take in the office. For the next two years, new plans for the library were presented in the monthly business reports.

The first suggestion divided the 39 monthly magazines into three groups: magazines that do not need to be reviewed and shall be filed immediately, magazines that will be reviewed in office time, and magazines to be reviewed by men who have had special training in certain lines, such as architecture or engineering.<sup>55</sup> It then assigned all the monthly magazines to some of the draughtsmen and the men in the Planting Department, and also, to Miss Bullard.<sup>56</sup>

Another suggestion started with a complaint that it was impossible to organize the library based on the Harvard Classification system<sup>57</sup>. Instead, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. suggested a system where each man would turn in a list of magazines in which he was most interested. As each magazine arrived, it would be given to a man for three days. Each man would then note by checkmark or initials whether or not he wanted a particular article catalogued and filed. Because a man requested a particular magazine, it was reasoned that he would be more disposed to read it as opposed to being assigned to the magazine without choice. Large manufacturing office and works used this system. Why would it not work at the firm? This is another example of the firm's borrowing, albeit in a small way, from manufacturing and business. This system would have proved difficult because it required the services of a library assistant.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> October 1914 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> November 1914 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Two months later in the January 1915 monthly report, Miss Bullard wrote three short paragraphs. The first one stated the importance of reviewing new books, specifically the proceedings of the city planning conferences and books on landscape architecture. The second one asks the question, who decides whether a new book is filed in the Architecture Department, the Planting Department or with Perkins? The third paragraph also asks a question, who is to clip magazine articles?

By April 1916, library classification was underway and the system was in place.<sup>58</sup> City Reports were filed geographically in the Front office. Books were arranged by subject using Library of Congress classification and books were stored all over the office. Pamphlets were filed according to subject in the pamphlet case. This system of classification proved to be overly ambitious and in the Summary for 1916 of the monthly business reports, Canning reported that no one was in charge of materials so it was a mess.<sup>59</sup>

The system of reviewing magazines was in trouble. They chose Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s idea and while the articles were being reviewed and indexed, the method of sending the designated magazines around the office was not working. Magazines got lost as did posted articles on an already crowded bulletin board. Canning suggested that a wall rack could be put up outside the bookkeeping department. Interesting articles could be flagged and the men could read them at their leisure.

By January 1918, monthly business report, Miss Bullard wrote that certain details of the library work had been dropped; the reviewing done only sporadically and the clipping of articles was way behind. The library system never worked; it became one too many system of rules to follow. More importantly, there was little incentive to follow the rules.

The firm had more success with the Photography Department. At the beginning of 1914, the task began of assembling and arranging photographs belonging to Frederick Law Olmsted's two

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<sup>58</sup> April 1916 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>59</sup> Summary Report 1916 Monthly Business Reports Business Records Series E Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

children and stepson according to the Harvard classification system. The next mention of the project is a confession that the work is frightfully behind. More success was the photo mounting project; 1094 prints had been mounted in four months. The prints were filed, along with the culled magazine articles (eventually this work was done too) into subject files. They were used as reference material by the men in the office.

### Print Department: Lithographs

In the case of subdivision development, a client might request the production of a lithograph of the plan to sell plots to customers. The lithograph files listed the lithograph print drawer number, file number and number of prints remaining for a series of particular jobs. The final design or presentation drawings of approximately 250 jobs were lithographed in quantity. Clearly printed runs of up to a few hundred were made for distribution to clients, architects, engineers, municipal officials and other interested recipients. The earliest lithographic prints date from the 1870s and go through the 1950s. Each set of prints was kept in its own custom made kraft paper envelope. The envelopes in turn were kept in wide drawers numbered from I-12 (roman numerals) which were located in the main drafting room. The individual prints ranged in size from about 6"x8" sheets of Prospect Park to 4'x5 1/2' topographical sections of Biltmore estate. Whenever a print was removed the subtraction was noted on its envelope.

### Model Department

Models were produced for large jobs and sometimes for large individual estates if large enough or if requested by the client. The plans clerk with the advice of Baston, the head of the Modeling Department, did the buying of supplies. He also kept a record of the cost of every model made, so that the cost could be used in estimating on new jobs. When Baston's work got backed up, he hired local help.

### *Correspondence*

Every aspect of the Olmsted office needed to operate as efficiently as possible in order for jobs to move through the various departments in a timely manner. With the large number of jobs in process at one time, the possibilities for chaos were great. Because each job started with a written



request and was followed up with more correspondence from the client, and letters back to the client, the system for dealing with the mail was an important aspect of the firm's workings.

Mail deliveries came three times a day. According to the January 1913 monthly business report, the office boy collected the mail from the Brookline Post Office and arrived at the office by 8:45 A.M. While doing the mid-day errands in Brookline; the office boy brought the second delivery at noon; and the postman delivered the afternoon mail sometime between 3:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M. By 1920, the firm had no office boy in the morning and one of the men in the office collected the first delivery.

In 1913, all mail was opened, stamped, and numbered by one of the secretaries/filing clerks, Miss Daymond. She then passed it along to Miss Bullard who read it, entered it into a ledger and got it ready for distribution. She marked on each piece of mail the name of the member of the firm and those employees who should see it. She did this by checking the Order drawer and considered the Orders to be her most valuable guide in figuring out the distribution. If more than one man was to see a letter, she marked it thusly on the letter and indicated the order of viewing. If a letter indicated that a plan was being sent, the letter went first to Mr. Perkins who noted on it whether or not the plan had arrived.

In the case of letters that had to be answered by a member of the firm, Miss Bullard first sent the letter to one of the draughtsmen who was working on the job to see if he should supply any data for the proper answering of the letter. The draughtsman either added data and sent the letter up for a reply, or he might have kept the letter and sent word to the Member of the firm that he wished to confer with him in the matter. Such letters were given to the draughtsman with a special request for prompt attention and return or report. This process of opening, stamping, numbering and entering, sometimes helped by other members of the Clerical Department if they were free, took 30-45 minutes.

All return letters were typed with carbons so that the office could keep a copy. They were given then to Miss Bullard for checking and distribution. She read them, and if they contained any promises for visits or for work completed, she noted those dates in her "Date Ahead" file. She

marked them with the names of the persons to read them and was guided by the same rules as letters coming into the firm. If the letter stated that the firm was sending a print of a plan, she sent the carbon first to Mr. Perkins, whose job included being responsible for printing. Perkins either noted, "print sent" or if not, he looked into the matter to make sure that the print was eventually sent. The members of the firm never signed business letters with their own names; instead they signed, "Olmsted Brothers." This practice reinforced the idea that the work of the firm was collaborative, not individual.

The office boy collected and distributed the letters from baskets on each draughtsman's desk at least once an hour. The distribution of letters from Miss Bullard's desk was not a designated hourly task but they were sent around as soon as they were ready. The office boys were also instructed to go around to all the men's desks, except members of the firm, at the end of the day and collect any office letters which they saw left there.

Despite these regulations, the possibilities for losing or misfiling letters was great enough for Miss Bullard to report on them in the January 1913 business report. She reported that most losses of letters were due to one of two problems, the first being an indefinite or incorrect description of the requested letter. She cited the case of a letter that seemed lost but was found to be sent to a different person than was requested. The person requesting the letter thought that it was addressed to one person and it turned out to be another client entirely. The other reason for a letter's misplacement was that it was being held on one of the Members' desk. She also cited the problem of a letter being taken from the folder of a draughtsman who was absent and retained by some assistant. "Such instances must occasionally occur and rules won't help. On the whole I do not think we can do much better although we will gladly adopt any other plan. I do not believe any plan depending upon the attention of Members of the firm will avail much in such an irregular office."<sup>60</sup> The irregularity was due in part, to the variety and scale of jobs the office handled and to the travel schedules of the members. As often as Miss Bullard tried to impose her version of order on the office, complications seemed to occur that made her suggestions impossible to follow.

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<sup>60</sup> January 1913 Monthly Business Report, Business Records. Series E, Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

By the December 1915 monthly business reports, problems had arisen with the reading of mail by assistants. Miss Bullard reported that much of the time, all the partners were out of town and she was unclear about who should see what mail. A number of the assistants had asked to see letters from the client folders and she did not like that situation. The system of sending letters around the office from man to man had been stopped. Could the assistant see the whole folder? She thought not because some client folders contained sensitive materials such as a client objecting to the size of the bill. Generally, the client folders contained: reports of visits, letters giving terms, letters describing plans or giving suggestions as to the development of the work, letters to surveyors, superintendents, etc., letters from employees of the office to the firm, letters making appointments, estimates for payment to contractors, and specifications (given to Perkins when complete).<sup>61</sup>

When the members of the firm were absent or did not take time to look over their mail, it backed up the work in the Clerical Department. Not much dictation was being taken in the morning and Miss Bullard noted that late in the day, the Clerical Department was busy doing other things. Trying to get all the letters out that late meant that the typing was hastily done and that the stenographers were kept after closing time. She suggested a regular time for attending to mail, from 10:30 A.M. to noon.<sup>62</sup> She lamented that the Clerical Department was not in good enough order to account for every letter every day. "That would save much time," she wrote "Everybody's time."<sup>63</sup>

Still frustrated four months later, in an attempt to make suggestions for improvement, Miss Bullard, in the April 1917 Monthly Business Report, gave a detailed description of how a letter was circulated through the office. She divided the mail into four categories: office mail-first class, house mail-first class, office mail-second class and house mail-second class. With priority given to the first class office mail, with second class mail and mail for the Planting Department

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<sup>61</sup> June 1912 Monthly Business Report, Business Records. Series E, Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., p. 5

<sup>62</sup> Summary for 1916, Monthly Business Reports, Business Records. Series E, Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>63</sup> April 1917, Monthly Business Reports, Business Records. Series E, Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

dealt with after the first class mail had been given to Miss Bullard, the mail was time-stamped, numbered after reading, and arranged chronologically for her to enter in her book.

Afterwards she assigned the mail to various people with extras, such as trade catalogues, calendars and advertisements going to Mr. Perkins, time slips from out-of-town men going to one of the filing clerks, plans going to Mr. Perkins, and book advertisements going to Miss Bullard. The carbons and letters answered the day before were arranged chronologically and given to Miss Bullard to enter in her book. All others were arranged for filing or redistributed to those to whom they were assigned or who had not seen them before.

Her three suggestions for improvements came out of her own experience. First, she suggested that the mail be kept in one place. All mail that could not be delivered because of absences could be kept in folders. When any letter was taken from a folder, it could be replaced with a blue index card. This method was already employed in the filing department when a letter was taken from a client's folder. The card marked an absence of a letter in the folder and on it was written the time that the letter was taken, who took it and the subject of the letter. Miss Bullard's second suggestion was to require that filing be up to date every day. In her third suggestion, she asked that all letters be destroyed after their usefulness. She argued that these suggestions would increase the efficiency of the department because they would lessen the amount of work. She could not imagine anything that would hasten the distribution of the mail unless she stopped keeping track of all the letters in her book. She wrote that she did it originally to help in the tracing of lost letters and the process continued to be useful and a timesaver. It also afforded her the opportunity to keep a record of new works, see that the Order cards were completed and that no letter was left too long unanswered<sup>64</sup>

Miss Bullard's suggestions were incorporated into the rules for dealing with the mail and became part of Memo #19. Other rules were added. Any letter needing a reply was to be attended to and returned to the Clerical Department the same half-day in which it was given out. The problem of

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<sup>64</sup> January 1920 Monthly Business Report. Business Records, Series E. Series E. Olmsted Associates. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

men needing information from letters in client folders was solved by a rule that did not allow them to take letters from client folders but to read them in the Clerical Department and if notes were needed, they could dictate them to a stenographer.

### Filing System

After 1897, a job coming into the office would first be assigned an accession number by Miss Bullard. Each new job or subject or study was listed in numerical order in the accession book when it came into the office. This number was variously known as the client number, the job number, or file number and, except for drawings, all materials relating to it, whether correspondence, photographs, planting lists, accounts or anything else was given that number.

The accession books may be considered a chronological job file index as well as a listing of employees. Why the employees and the job numbers were mixed is unknown but it was the first time that the firm made attempts to organize the work in more than an alphabetical listing. Perhaps it was a try at general organization and if the jobs could be numbered, then why not the employees too? The first book was started in 1897 and the first 20 numbers were assigned to the firm's business records, correspondence and other matters. Before that time there was no central indexing system. Clients are listed beginning with number 21. Thereafter blanks of two or three space occur frequently apparently to reserve numbers for additional work expected from the client listed just above.

A listing of employees begins at number 351 and goes to 409. It was taken up again at 740 and ended in the high 800s. In between employee listings are spaces 550-600, unused and reserved for the Art Commission, City of New York. The numbers 900 to 1000 were set aside for the Boston Park system and most of these were used, the last job entry being 970. The numbers 1500 to 1600 were reserved for the Metropolitan Park Commission and reached 1557. Blocks of numbers, large and small, remained unassigned through the four accession books. Pre-1897 are the jobs completed during Frederick Law Olmsted's tenure as head of the office; jobs are retroactively numbered in the 500s, 2000s and 3000s are also scattered about in earlier spaces as well.

When the accessioned item turned into a job for which drawings were made or received, the item was then entered into the vault plans book and was given a box number. This book, located on a table just inside the middle vault, was no doubt the most important document in the entire Olmsted office, at least according to Perkins. The book contained the complete list of jobs in alphabetical order. Each job was bracketed by two numbers, the job number or file number, on the right and the box number on the left where it was stored in the vault.

The filing system for drawings was a remarkably efficient one. Within the vault were storage boxes lining both sides. The boxes are 5 75 inches wide and 5.75 inches high and 4.5 feet long. Each box was initially intended to hold a total of 40 drawings. This ideal could not really be maintained because as the years passed specific jobs grew or were taken up again in later years after contiguous boxes had already been assigned to other jobs. On the other hand, in the upper vault, there were groups of intermediate empty boxes because of jobs that did not materialize or fulfill their expectations. Noting the box number one may have gone to its location in one of the three vaults. Boxes numbered 1-1287 were located in the lower vault, numbers 1266-2273 in the middle vault and 2274-5200 in the upper vault.

Having gone to the proper vault, the plans clerk could find general guide numbers on the ceiling and finally find the box number written in ink or pencil on the right edge of the box. Boxes could contain plans for several jobs and their contents had to be carefully examined. Large jobs would extend over a series of boxes, their inclusive numbers given in the vault plans book. The actual drawing rolls were identified by the job title written lengthwise along the exposed surface which was either the edge of the outermost drawing, the outer wrapping, or outside of the long envelope containing the drawings. The envelope method was used in the case of fragile tracing paper sketches which were first rolled around a wooden dowel before being inserted.

Also kept in the vault was the card catalog system—each drawing in the vault had its corresponding 3x5 index card—which was separated into two parts: one set of card drawers containing the record plans drawn by, received by, and kept in the firm and the other set of drawers containing the record of individual plans sent out to the firm's clients. The following table shows the various designations.

## PLANS FILE CATALOG CARDS

### Tab Designations

Arch. & Eng.	Cards are used to record all construction details, and other architectural and engineering studies and plans.
Gen. Pl.	Cards are used to record master plans and definitive drawing for portions of Master or General plans.
Grading	Cards are used for recording studies and plans concerned with the establishment of proposed ground forms—and for such plans used as the basis for grading estimates.
Layout	Cards are used to record proposed site location studies and plans which are not grading plans or master plans; also for recording <u>measured and computed layout drawings</u> .
Photo/Pers	Cards are used to record 1) aerial photographs too large to be mounted in photo albums; and 2) perspective or isometric sketches made for illustrative purposes (not as constructive drawings).
PL'T'G	Cards are used for recording planting studies and planting plans, plant lists, and related details.
Prel.pl	Cards are used for recording preliminary plans of a general nature—usually as studies for presentation to a client to serve as a basis for a master plan. These are NOT specialized plan dealing primarily with grading, planting, or utilities.
Prof. & Sec.	Cards are used for recording profiles and sections.
Topo	Cards are used for recording all existing conditions of survey maps, including topographic maps, hydrographic charts, property line surveys, and field notes covering existing conditions—except planting tallies and site clearing plans.
Utilities	Cards are used for recording information pertaining to electrical power lines, plumbing, sewage lines, storm drains, fuel pipes, and other special service lines.
Study	(incorporated into prel. pl.)

Current usage of card file colors and designations with regard to plans drawings are described in the following listings:	
<b>PLANS FILE CATAOG CARDS</b>	
<b>COLOR INDICATIONS</b>	
Salmon	Cards signify plans developed by others outside of the Olmsted Brothers office
Yellow	Cards signify rough studies on tracing paper mainly developed by OlmstedBrothers. These are not normally issued to clients or to collaborating professionals.
White	Cards signify plans, other than rough studies or contract drawings, developed by Olmsted Brothers.
Blue	Cards signify contract drawings developed by Olmsted Brothers and issued for bidding or construction. Approved master plans for institutional or recreational development are also recorded on BLUE cards.

Because a variety of plans came through the office, some from other sources, a system of colored cards was developed to keep the type of drawings in order.

The methods for controlling the chaos, and much of the responsibility for the organization of the office was carried out by the plans clerk who was in charge of all the plans. He started his day by opening the vault and wheeling out the plans catalogue. The last thing at night he did was return the catalogue to vault, making sure that vault lights were out, and afterwards, he locked the vault. During the day, as soon as plans or letters were received from Miss Bullard , he checked or numbered them and gave them to the proper persons immediately. He was also in charge of keeping the corner in the front office at the left of the main door, the reception area, clear of plans.



All plans were required to have two numbers: the job number and the plan number. This job number never changed. The first plan on the job was number 1 and so on consecutively and indefinitely. Plans received from outside the office were stamped thus:

**OLMSTED BROTHERS**

RECEIVED : date

Client

Plan no.

by the plans clerk, the blank spaces being filled out by him. He also recorded the receipt on a red card which he filed with the record cards of plans made by draftsmen. When a draftsman started a plan, he filled out a slip of paper stating the client's name, plan title, scale, date, kind of material of plan, his name, and if the plan was a copy of or revision of some other plan he stated so and recorded the plan number if it was a copy of or revision. This slip was given to the Harry Perkins, who in turn told him what number the next plan was to have. The job number was found on the draughtman's order card. These numbers were put on the draughtsman's plans by the draughtsman. Once or twice daily these slips were copied by the plans clerk onto cards and filed in the card catalogue. All plans were filed under one of these headings:

Schedule for listing plans:

All plans received were to be recorded on red cards.

	Card heading	card color
<b>Topo-</b> made or traced at the office.	Topo	White
<b>Block plans</b> -made or traced by office-existing	Topo	White
<b>Surveys</b> -made or traced by office--existing	Topo	White
<b>Grades about buildings</b> -received	Topo	Red
<b>Plans of cities or towns</b> Plans showing location of buildings, fences, etc. -existing, if received		Red
<b>Study</b> —notes and studies for preliminary plans	Study	white
Or notes and studies made not by an employee of Olmsted Brothers *Study is incorporated into preliminary in the later system which also adds Layout, Photo/perspective and Utilities.	Study	Red
<b>Preliminary Plan-</b>	Prelim. Plan	white
Plans showing proposed location of buldings,	Prelim. Plan	white

fences, etc.		
Plans for a terrace (not a detailed drawing)	Prelim. Plan	white
Arrangement of forecourt and approach drive	Prelim. Plan	white
Perspective of thing non-architectural	Prelim. Plan	white
<b>Grading-</b>	Grading	Blue
Grading plan	Grading	White
Grading studies	Grading	White
Notes on grading	Grading	White
Grading plan card to say number of profile and cross sections which accompany them	Grading	blue
Location of catch basins	Grading	Blue
<b>Profile and/or Cross Section Studies-</b>	Pr'f & Sec.	White
Profile and/or cross section to say number of plan which they accompany them	Pr'f & Sec.	White
Cross section of wall (no details) also of terraces, etc.	Pr'f & Sec.	White
Profile of cross section (final plans	Pr'f & Sec.	Blue
<b>Planting-</b>		
Forestry or planting plans	planting	blue
Forestry or planting notes	planting	White
Forestry or planting studies	planting	white
<b>Architectural Details</b> for Bridge, shelters, Sheds. Steps, sundials, lamposts, etc. (made by Olmsted Brothers )	Arc. And Eng.	Red if received, white if study. Blue if final
Taking plans (if received)	Arc. And Eng	Red
Taking plans made in the office	Arc. And Eng	White or Blue
Building (received)	Arc. And Eng	Red
Studies for building plans (made by Olmsted Brothers)	Arc. And Eng	White
Schedule of buildings,	Arc. And Eng	White
Cross section of walls with details, drainage plans	Arc. And Eng	White or Blue
<b>General Plan</b>		
General plan studies	Gen. Pl.	White
General plan studies	Gen. Pl.	Blue
Litho of place not laid out by Olmsted Brothers	Gen. Pl.	Red
Riders to listed on same kind of card as the plan which they accompany		

A preliminary plan showed the firm's idea of the solution to a given problem, to be presented to the client for general criticism. Such plans usually showed only the proposed appearance of the area to be treated, giving in minimal detail the roads and walks, foliage masses and some architectural and engineering details. Some elevations were included, but without contours, drain pipe locations, planting areas, etc. Depending on the job, more than one preliminary plan was conceived. Creating more than one preliminary plan was also a method of educating apprentices to a range of design solutions.

When a plan was to be sent to a customer, it was first approved by the man in charge of the job, then stamped with date of issue stamp by the plans clerk. The plans clerk then filled out a "sent" slip giving client's name, number of plan, kind of print, or, if it was an original, address to whom sent, date sent and how sent. Once in two or three days these slips were copied onto a card, tabulated the same as "plans made" cards and filed in case in vault according to date. If plans were sent by express the express receipt was kept for at least two years. Prints were sent rolled on 7/8" dowels at the rate of two ounces for \$.01 because they were sealed. These rolls had to weigh four pounds or less and be 48" long or less. Plans containing original hand notes went out to clients as written matter at a mailing cost of three cents per ounce.

For a draughtsman, requesting a print came with its own set of rules. Draughtsmen desiring prints had to fill out a printed form stating client, number of plan, name of person ordering printing, date slip was made out, kind of print wanted and whether mounted or not. If colored, by whom, when wanted, to whom it is going, name of client to whom it was charged, job number and letter. This slip, with the plan, was given to plans clerk. He looked plans over to see that they conformed to Notice Book rules and then gave plans and slips to the printer who carries out the instructions regarding the printing. On this slip the printer put down size of original and charges.

Once a week these slips were turned over to the bookkeeper who posted them in her books in order to charge clients. The printer kept a record of all work done and all expenses so that at the year's end, a statement was created regarding the print room expenses. The charges were usually sufficient to pay for running the Department. No change in charges for printing were to be made without consulting the firm. In 1910 the charges for blueprints in Brookline were the same as in

Boston, but black prints were cheaper. Perkins was also responsible for prints and the printer was responsible to him. Coloring of prints was left to the draftsman but the printer also helped out.

Mr. Perkins also managed the purchase and storage of office supplies. It was important to keep sufficient brush and W. & N. watercolors on hand. The watercolors, brushes, black and blue print paper were bought from Ledder and Probst, Mounting cloth from Farley, Harvey Company and paste from the the Boston Paste Company were staples. Once in every few months the exhaust pump has to be taken down and sent into Goodman Shurtloff and cleaned.

A carbon copy was kept of all purchase orders. The office used a numbered duplicate order book. Telephoned orders were confirmed by mail. Most drafting supplies were purchased from Ledder and Probst. Stationery was purchased from Wards, and wrapping paper and scratch paper from Whitney Brothers. The plans clerk ordered all the supplies used in connection with the Photograph Department.

In 1910, Mrs. Murray was in charge of the photo files and she issued orders for all photo work to be done, such as developing, printing, mounting and filing and entered the charges. When any developing or printing was to be done she issued an order slip and gave this slip and films or photos to the plans clerk who filled out the order slip and returned the slip and work to Mrs. Murray. She also oversaw the charging up of the work. Any copying of plans, photo, or models was done by Perkins. The office owned one 7x5 and two 3 1/4 x 5 1/2 film cameras and an 8x10 plate camera for copying. The photo work was mostly done in the office and the time spent by Perkins on it was charged to Photography Department. Office cameras were at the disposal of the draughtsmen.

### Finances

When a bill was received, it was stamped by the office mail opener and then sent to Perkins who checked off to whom items were to be charged and added his initials as a sign of approval. Practically no bill was paid until the goods were received or the work done. As far as possible, express bills were charged to the client. In buying letter paper 10,000 sheets were bought at a time in order to get a discount. Employees were allowed to buy stamped envelopes for personal

use. They filled out a blank about three weeks before expecting to receive them. When the envelopes were received the employee paid two cents apiece.

Most supplies were purchased in large quantities. Ink was not bought in freezing weather. The fire hose was kept about four or five years; when a new piece of hose was bought, the old one was used in garden. Coal was ordered when the price was low in early summer. All gas and electric bills were checked against the preceding bill before they were approved. Miss Bullard looked after all repairs to typewriters and ordered the carbon paper and ribbons. When there was a leak in water, gas steam pipes or electric wires it was attended to immediately. Clark and Mills had a yearly contract with the office to maintain the fire alarm system and bell.

### Perkins: Did He Sleep?

Because Perkins' work was so important, a system had to be worked out to cover his job when he was absent. When Perkins was absent his work was done by Keeling and Pree. When Pree was absent, Perkins and Keeling did his work. Even the janitor had a system of substitution. When Dunmore was absent, Kitt, the houseman, did the work.

In addition, Perkins as plans clerk, looked after the books, papers and catalogues kept in the case in the main Draughting Room and in the Planting Department. At the beginning of the year he had these books bound. He also looked after the US Geological Sheets, keeping one of every issue on hand.

He kept up the Standard Details office scrapbook.<sup>65</sup> He kept track of the lithographs and made sure that the number of lithos on each envelope was marked on the outside. He made sure that splines, ducks, railroad curves, planimeters, proportionals, cross hatching machine, steel straight edges, tape measures, level glasses, magnifying and reducing glasses, and T squares were kept in order and in their proper places when not in use.

In the case opposite the shipping table, he kept some Imperial tracing cloth along with "perfect" transparent profile and cross section paper. All over the office, accessible to all the draughtsmen

was kept some of each of the following kinds of tracing paper: Lotus, Electric, and Economy. Near the shipping table were kept rolls of Detail paper, a 45" roll of light paper used for table covers, and a roll of 36" heavy manila paper in which to wrap plans. A supply of 7/8 inch dowels for rolling plans for storage was kept here too. The dowels came from RT Stearns Lumber company, Neponset, Massachusetts. The electric lights and fans were Perkins' responsibility. His duties included making sure that every new book that was bought by the office was embossed with the firm name on the first and middle pages. On the inside of front cover was written in ink, the date of purchase and cost. Perkins also looked after the sample cabinet located in the east end of the Planting Department draughting room. Finally he also looked after the filing of reports of site visits and notes to be saved in a cabinet beside the shipping table. No doubt he evolved some sort of system to manage all of these duties.

In men's toilet the office boy looked after the blacking box and the Plans Clerk the soap. In the men's lunch room there was a sufficient supply of food on hand in the kitchen such as crackers, soups, ham, chicken and sardines. These were sold to the men at cost. The same held true for the women's lunchroom.

### Storage of Plans

Plans recorded before 1897 were kept in two large books up high in rear of "Sent" catalogue. When Perkins was asked about how a set of drawing made in 1870 would be recorded in the card index which did not start until 1897, he replied that this happened when the old job came up again in his time, after 1901, whereupon he simply numbered all the old drawings first and then continued the number as per 'duties of the plans clerk.'

### Billing Clients

After moving to Brookline, bills went out twice a year and over the years, went out more frequently. The firm carried large amounts of unpaid bills from year to year. In January 1912, the firm listed 61 active clients and \$41,067 in unpaid bills.<sup>65</sup> In 1912, statements were not sent out until a bill was six months old. By March 1913, with a growing firm and an increasingly large

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<sup>65</sup> The Standard Details scrapbook was later expanded and classified and renamed, the NAB/NAC files.

<sup>66</sup> \$68,4450 in 1999 dollars.

amount of unpaid bills, Miss Bullard suggested sending monthly bills to those accounts who were six months old and unpaid. The custom had been that after sending the bill, if it was still unpaid, quarterly statements would be sent to the clients. If she felt that a bill was a problem, she took it up with the member of the firm who had worked on the job and that member wrote to the client. This procedure was done on a case by case basis.

That suggestion was not taken up because in the April 1913 monthly business report, she once again asked for advice from a member of the firm as to how long she should hold an unpaid bill before sending monthly invoices. Would the statements be sent every month or every three months? Some of the members of the firm had agreed to sending a statement each month in all cases except for cities where always some time elapsed before a bill came to payment. The sending of the first statement would begin with the first of the month after the sending of the original bill. She noted that not all of the members had approved this method. When would they charge interest? She wondered if the firm could agree on a policy that would cover all the bills.<sup>67</sup>

Creating a blanket policy and sticking to it were not easy tasks. In February 1914, she reported that in January, the Clerical Department sent out 153 bills. She reminded them that sending out the bills promptly upon completion of each piece of work would lessen the amount of overtime, as well as chance of errors, and "it would also relieve the bookkeepers of a good deal of nervous strain," she wrote.<sup>68</sup>

But figuring out the bills was not a simple task. First, there was the cost of a professional visit, which differed from member to member. When a job started, a Cost Card was started too, along with an Order card. The Cost card was a listing of the hours worked on the job and the Order card detailed the type of plans required for the job.

At the beginning when the members of the firm were doing all the work, figuring out costs was easy. As the firm developed its margin system, there were always questions about how much to

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<sup>67</sup> April 1913 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>68</sup> February 1914 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

charge and what could be charged to a job and what costs would be the burden of the firm. While the margin for draughtsmen and office workers was set, the matter of Inspectors' margin was not settled until May 1914 when it was decided that inspectors should share in 50% of the general overhead expenses and 32% of the direct overhead expenses.<sup>69</sup> Miss Bullard suggested that they should share in the ratio of the number of inspectors to the total number of employees, making the margin between 20-25%.

The Clerical Department always seemed to be waiting for the Cost Cards to be filled out by the member responsible for the job. By April 1913, it was decided to give up having a general cost card on any work. Miss Bullard related that using another method would save the office great difficulty and loss of time.<sup>70</sup> She was loathe to give up this system though and in the next month's business report, she suggested giving general Cost Cards an order which would be letter "A;" thus making it possible to "take care of trifling expense which may be covered by lump sum fee for professional services alone."<sup>71</sup> She wondered about what the fair average amount would be for a man to charge in one month for making up time slip, summaries, traveling expenses. She wrote that the usual time to do these tasks took one hour but in some cases it took two to four hours a month. In the margin of the report was a note from one of the members who wrote that no time is charged to clients for these activities.<sup>72</sup>

By January 1915, the matter of Cost Cards and charges to Professional Services (amounts charged by members of the firm for their time spent on a job) in regards to unpaid bills frustrated her. "It is obvious that we have been unsystematic and illogical in the case of a good many accounts where conditions were abnormal in respect to the amount credited to Professional Services and the amounts written off."<sup>73</sup> She reminded the members to always charge up all the direct expenses to a work order and the regular margin percentage, and to charge up to

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<sup>69</sup> May 1914 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>70</sup> April 1913 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>71</sup> May 1913 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>72</sup> November 1913 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>73</sup> January 1915 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Professional Services the service rendered to be fairly worth on the usual basis of charging. She suggested a new category for the accountants, Uncollectible Accounts.

The issue of unpaid bills was a continual problem. Private clients as well as public jobs were slow to pay and in some cases never did. Economic downturns as well as first time developers contributed to the loss of income. A listing of unpaid bills was a regular part of the monthly business reports. They were categorized in the reports initially as being “probably good” and “of doubtful value.”<sup>74</sup> In the list of the unpaid bills, the member of the Firm in charge of the overdue account was also listed.

Generally, big clients who did not pay their bills weighted the list toward one of the members and that was usually John Charles Olmsted. He spent so much of his time away from the Brookline office and often his clients were not known to the firm, being jobs he picked up on the road. Fred Dawson had a client who defaulted on a \$10,000 job in 1908 so he was at the top for having the largest unpaid accounts for many years. In 1914, the firm started adding six percent interest on the older bills and that interest, when the bill was paid, was added to the totals (professional services + margin + interest) that made up the amounts used to calculate the members’ dividends. In extreme cases, bills were turned over to collectors.

While the Clerical Department took care of calculating the bills after the men entered the amounts of their work on the Cost Cards, the firm received help in closing up their books every year. The accounting and accounting books firm of William Franklin Hall helped the firm until April 1912 when Professor William Morse Cole from the Harvard Business School and his students took on the task. The latter devoted a month to studying the office arrangements and cost accounts with a view to suggesting improvements. Cole came once a year until 1919 when he began a twice a year schedule. In consultation with Miss Bullard, he audited the books and made suggestions on record-keeping that were carried out. Besides addressing many of the

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<sup>74</sup> September 1913 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

problems that frustrated Miss Bullard, the work of Cole and his assistants allowed the bookkeepers to focus on the bills.<sup>75</sup>

When the issue of daily time cards was raised, Cole did not think it practical or advisable because it would require a good deal more help and consequent expense. If daily time cards were used, the controlling accounts would then have to be entered daily, causing extra work and expense, corresponding to that of bookkeeping to audit the books. He did not believe anything which might be omitted from bills would equal the amount of the additional expense for entering daily.<sup>76</sup>

Cole also made observations on the firm's methods and he applauded the form of the business reports. He criticized the methods of Brookline Trust Company, the local bank that the Firm used. On a regular basis, the Bank made numerous errors which increased during World War I, despite the fact that Miss Bullard called each mistake to their attention as it occurred. Cole felt that these errors were perhaps excusable during the war but a year afterwards, he wrote, "They have made many mistakes; they correct errors in a most slovenly manner; they pay money for checks which are not properly endorsed."<sup>77</sup> Miss Bullard added that she and the bookkeepers noted that checks were deposited in the wrong accounts. "Do you wish to change to some other bank?" she asked in her report.<sup>78</sup>

As in other areas relating to the running of the firm, Miss Bullard took it upon herself to try and make improvements, to make the office more efficient and less chaotic. While she was moderately successful in the Brookline office, even her tentacles could not reach John Charles Olmsted, who traveled for many months of the year, working on the ground. He was in daily contact by letter with her for most of his trips and he often suggested to his wife that she consult Miss Bullard as to his schedule.

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<sup>75</sup> December 1916 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>76</sup> July 1915 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>77</sup> August 1919 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>78</sup> August 1919 Monthly Business Reports, Business Records Series E, Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## **Conclusion**

As senior partner in the firm, John Charles Olmsted, aided by Miss Bullard and Perkins, met the challenges of a growing office by coming up with innovations in both the physical design of the space and the business operations. The change from a Frederick Law Olmsted-dominated office to one headed by John Charles Olmsted did not occur all at once. Nor did the transformation of business practices and the move from a small office to a large one, in employee numbers and physical space, occur in one swoop. Trial-by-error served as important a role as the adaptation of business practices from other professions. With his exposure to some of the largest business operations in the country as his clients, John Charles Olmsted was able to borrow and adapt their practices as fit the Firm. On the road, he wrote about the business methods of large companies, often admiring their practices. Not having any inter-office correspondence means that there is no direct evidence of the adoption of practices, but the division of the firm into departments as well as ideas for more efficiency in the Olmsted office could be imagined as coming from John Charles Olmsted's direct experiences on the road.

The work of the firm expanded on a steady geographic basis. During Frederick Law Olmsted's career, he worked on a couple of jobs in California and Washington. During John Charles Olmsted's tenure as head of the firm, he had clients up and down the west coast of the United States and into Canada. While Frederick Law Olmsted had a number of jobs across the country, John Charles Olmsted's business expanded so greatly that he was required to be away from the office for as long as nine months in a given year.

Traveling for long periods during most of the years that he headed the firm, John Charles Olmsted needed to know that the business ran efficiently. Rules for all the procedures involved in design jobs and the business had to work well and the people who worked for him had to be willing to follow them. Miss Bullard, as office manager, took care of the daily operations. John Charles Olmsted was in weekly contact with her. He created an office structure that with the help of Miss Bullard and Mr. Perkins ran itself, to some extent. The levels of hierarchy in the office resulted in a system of checks and balances so that the quality of the work was maintained. Also,

the men who came in at the lowest positions and rose to the level of partner, had many years to learn the business.

Unfortunately the inter-office correspondence between the workers has been destroyed but in John Charles Olmsted's correspondence with his wife, his attention to the details of office practice is discerned. Under his leadership, the firm created a model for practice that is still in use today.

*I take this method of giving those to whom this card may be sent some information about my partners Mr. J. C. Olmsted and Mr. H. S. Codman.*

*Having been previously led by marked aptitudes to pursue special preparatory courses under excellent guidance, both of these gentlemen were for some years working pupils and assistants in my practice. They made several tours of study with me, some extending to the Southern and some to the Pacific States, and took active and responsible parts in the laying out and superintendence of a variety of works, large and small. They have, under my advice and that of professional friends abroad, examined with unusual advantages, the best examples of Landscape Architecture of modern times, both in the north and south of Europe, and have reviewed the methods and present results of older practice there. Mr. Codman, during the past two years, has been studying under the general direction of one of the foremost European Landscape Architects, and has had a thorough knowledge of his work. Mr. Olmsted entered my office fourteen years ago, and has been already five years associated with me as partner. Mr. Codman was admitted to our partnership August 1st, 1889.*

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED.

Brookline, Mass.

Frederick Law Olmsted's endorsement of his partners. 1892. Henry Codman and John Charles Olmsted carried this card with them when they first began to travel by themselves on jobs for the firm. *Office Scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

*By the death of Mr. Charles Eliot, on March 25th, the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot became dissolved.*

*Their business will be carried on by the surviving members of the firm, under the name of F. L. & J. C. Olmsted.*

*Frederick Law Olmsted,*

*John C. Olmsted.*

*Brookline, Mass.,*

*April 1st, 1897.*

Notice sent out by the firm after Charles Eliot's death announcing that the firm was taking back its earlier name, F.L. and J.C. Olmsted. Despite the fact that Frederick Law Olmsted had retired two years before the firm reverted to the ambiguous name.. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was not made a partner until 1899-8. A year later, the name changed again, this time to Olmsted Brothers. John Charles Olmsted remained the senior partner until his death in 1920. *Office Scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

In order to avoid any possible grounds for imputation of improper motives or unprofessional conduct, because of the family connections between members of the firm or employees of this office and the concerns listed below, no orders are to be placed on account of clients with any of these concerns, and no materials supplied exclusively by any of them are to be required in any specifications, except as hereinafter provided. The concerns in question are:

The Eastern Nurseries Company. (Dawson and Elgarin)  
 The Barrett Manufacturing Company. (F. L. Olmsted)  
 The Flomestead & Reading Nurseries. (Manning)  
 Edw. J. Canning & Company. (Canning)

If in any case it shall appear that the interests of a client would materially suffer by the failure to place an order with one of the above concerns the case should be called to the attention of a member of the firm for decision.

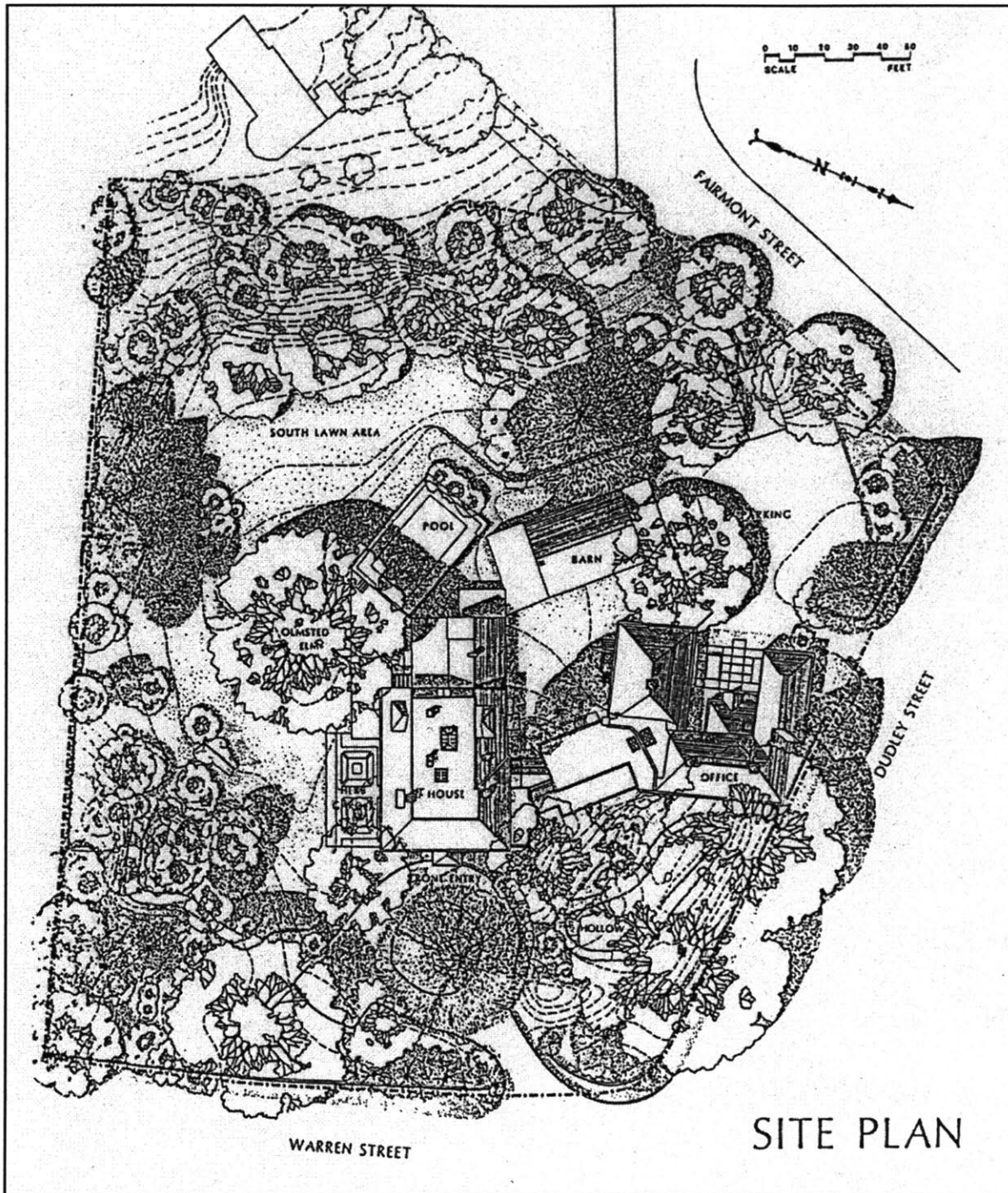
In such a case the ordinary procedure would be to notify the client in question that 'it is our rule not to place orders with the concern in question because the proprietors of the concern are related to Mr. So and So of our office, but that in this case the best alternative we can find to placing the order with the concern in question seems

Notice to the firm that they would not be trading with various nurseries because of a conflict of interest with current Olmsted employees. Although a number of employees grew up surrounded by family nursery businesses, the firm had a policy of not doing business with them. They did not want to appear to show favoritism; the right plant for the right place from the best nursery was the office policy. *Office Scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

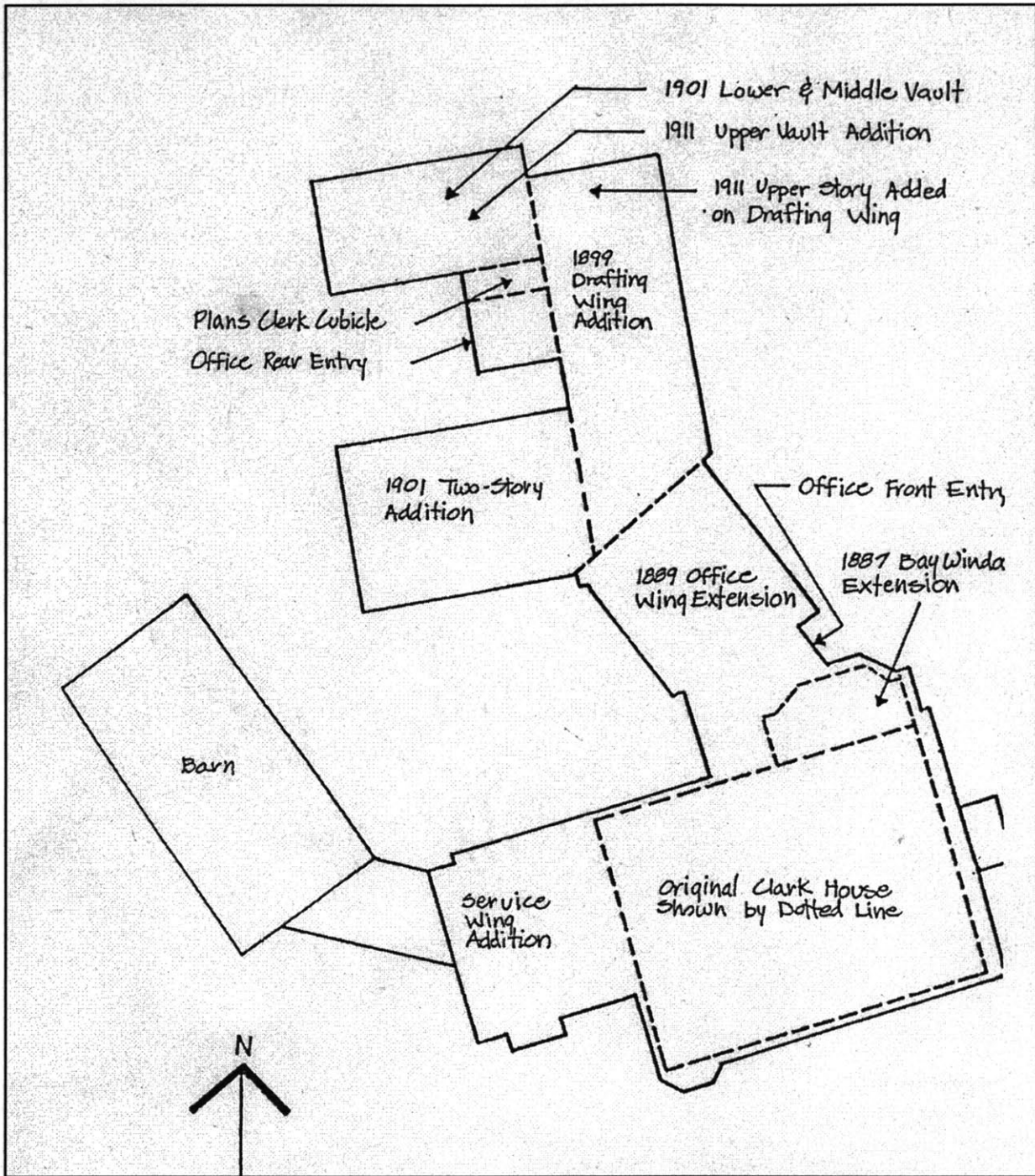
Bullard, Miss Elizabeth,	
472 Park Place, Bridgeport, Conn.	
2922 =	A. P. O. <sup>new York</sup> <sup>association</sup> A. A. Louisville
2835 =	U. S. Geological Survey. <sup>Washington</sup>
2901-3 =	A. S. L. A.
2919 =	F. L. O. letters
3706 =	City Planning Conference
2901-6 =	B. S. L. A.
5929 =	Stockbridge, Mass. <sup>Lowell Hill</sup> ASSOC STOCKBRIDGE

Elizabeth Bullard's card from the Olmsted Client Card File. For each employee, a card was created showing the major jobs on which they worked. Miss Bullard, the first woman landscape architect, did not work in the Brookline office but was based in Bridgeport, CT. Some of the job numbers shown on the card indicate files of written materials, such as the A.S.L.A. and B.S.L.A. files rather than the jobs she was hired to implement for the firm. Interestingly enough, Smith College, one of the bigger jobs on which she worked, is not included. The Client Card File was incomplete for workers who did not work in the Brookline office. *Client Card File*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.





Site plan, Olmsted House and Office. Plan shows how the house and office fit into the landscape. The pool, added after the Olmsteds had moved out, was sited in a place originally planned for a tennis court. National Park Service, North Atlantic Region, Planning and Design. *General Management Plan*, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. 1983.

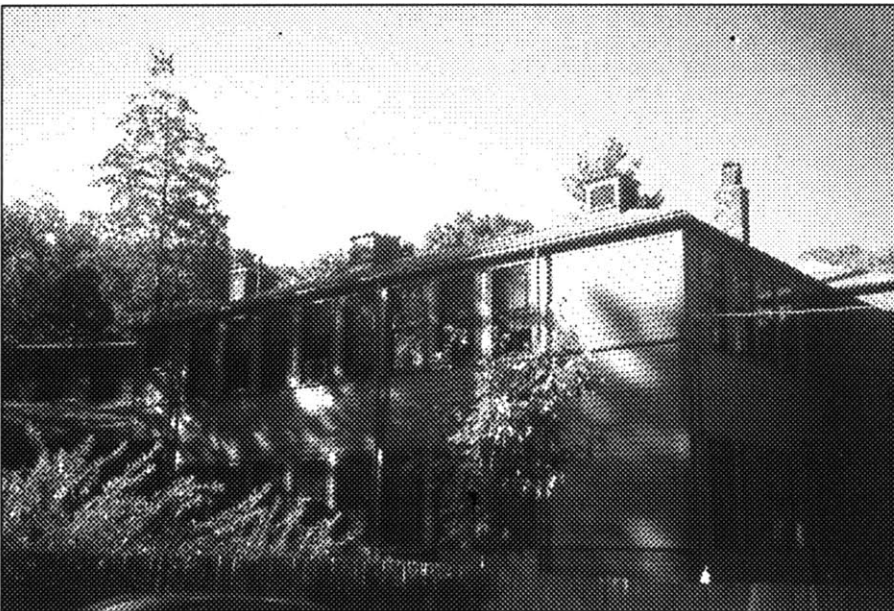


Growth of Olmsted house and office. Alex, William. *Inventory of the Frederick Law Olmsted Office-Estate and Contents*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1976.

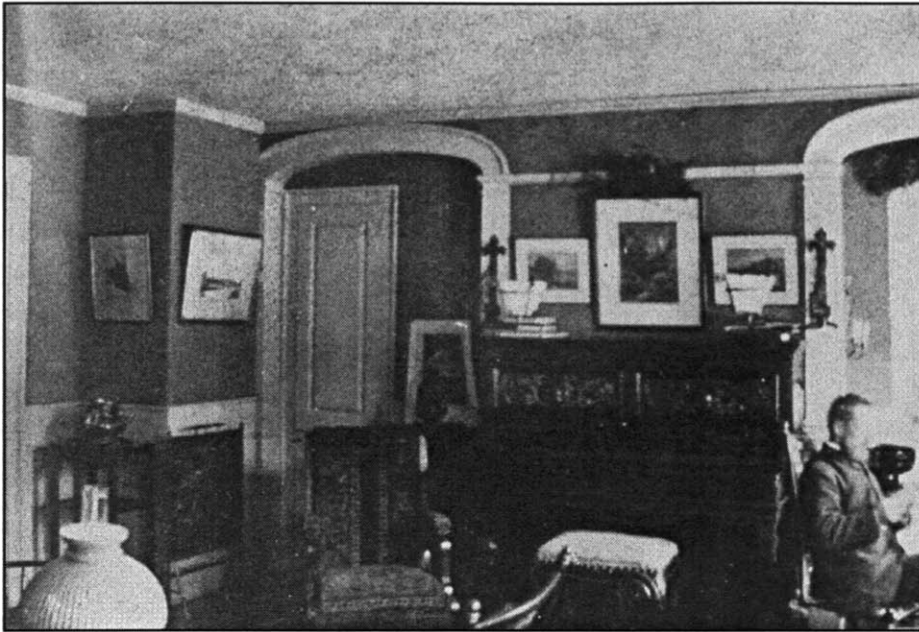




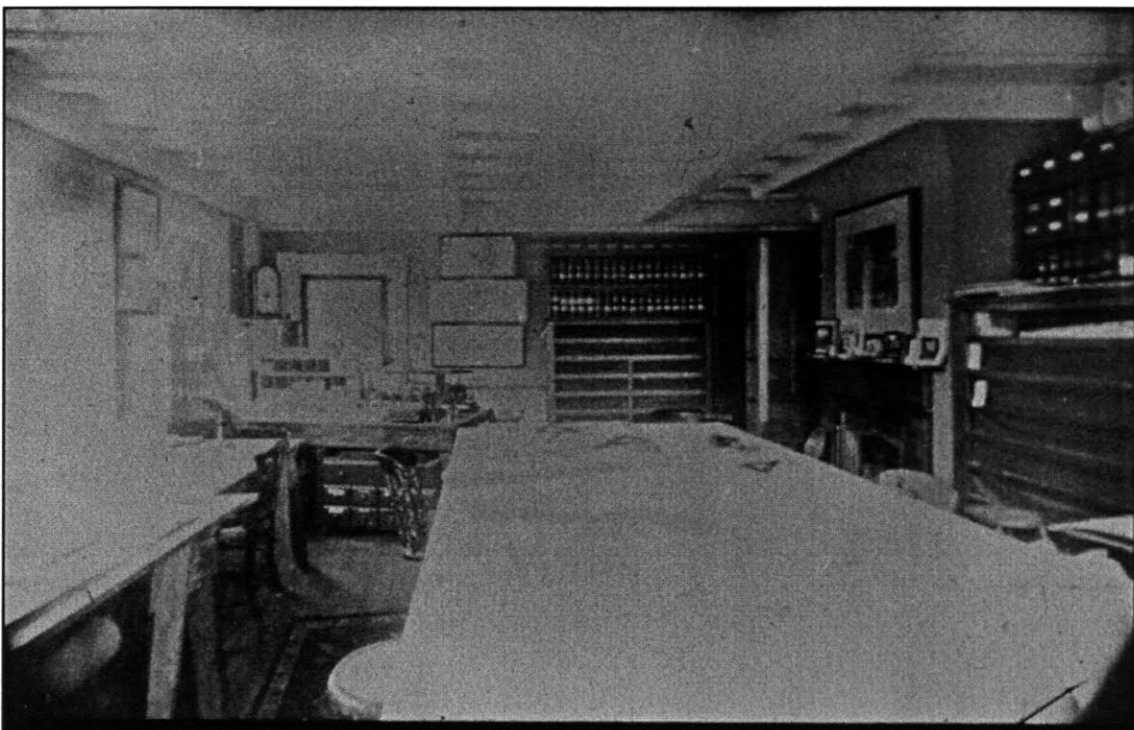
The front entrance at Fairsted. Photograph by author, 2002.



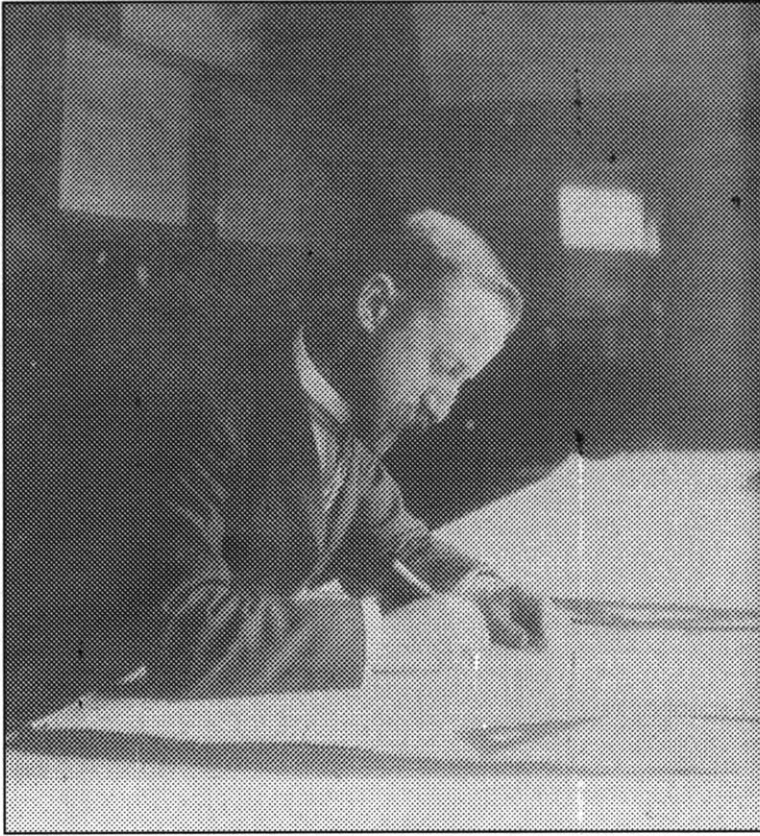
Fairsted, showing 1899 drafting wing addition, and the 1911 addition of a second story to it. Photograph by author, 2002.



Fairsted sitting room. February 1885. John Charles Olmsted. The house's domestic side was a comfortable and typical upper-middle class home. Note John Charles Olmsted sitting and reading in the corner. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Volume L2.



Partners' office, Fairsted. Historic (1885-1888), John Charles Olmsted. When Frederick Law Olmsted moved to Brookline, he chose this room off the Fairsted home entrance hallway for his office and it remained the partners' office throughout most of the firm's history. The office contained desks, a large table for looking at plans and reference books. The partners' secretaries shared the office with them. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Volume L3.

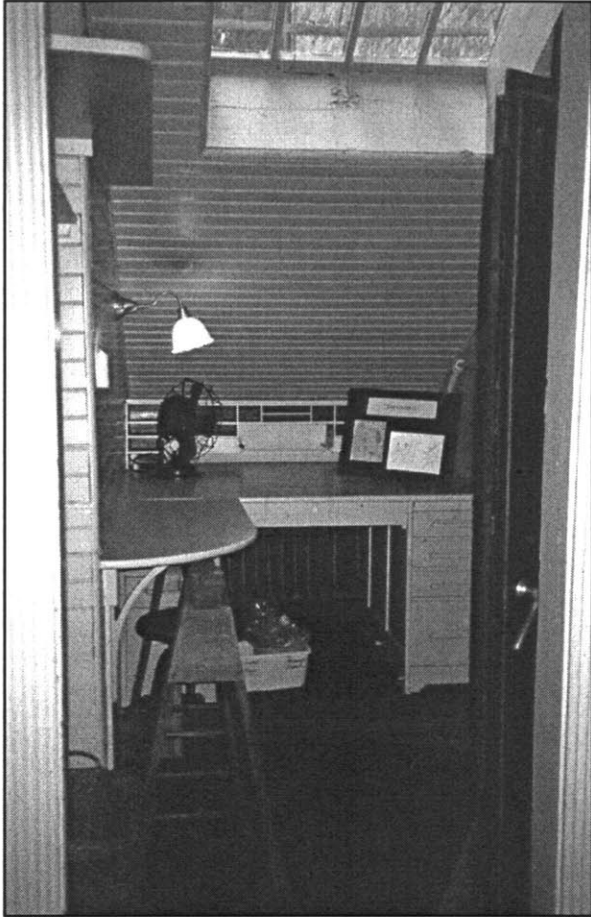


John Charles Olmsted in his office making notes. He liked the quiet of Sunday afternoons when the office was closed and he could work uninterrupted. Photographer unknown. Date unknown. *Family photographs*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA



1889 office extension. Area to the left was used by the Clerical Department, both as an office and the second room, as the women's lunchroom. The space to the right of the hallway was a drafting room. Photograph by author, 2001.

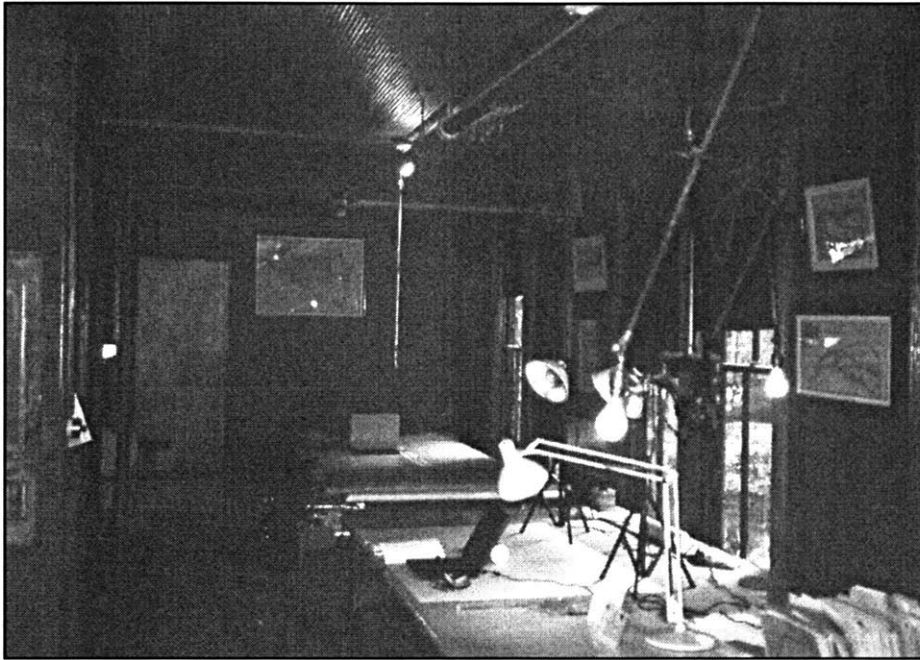




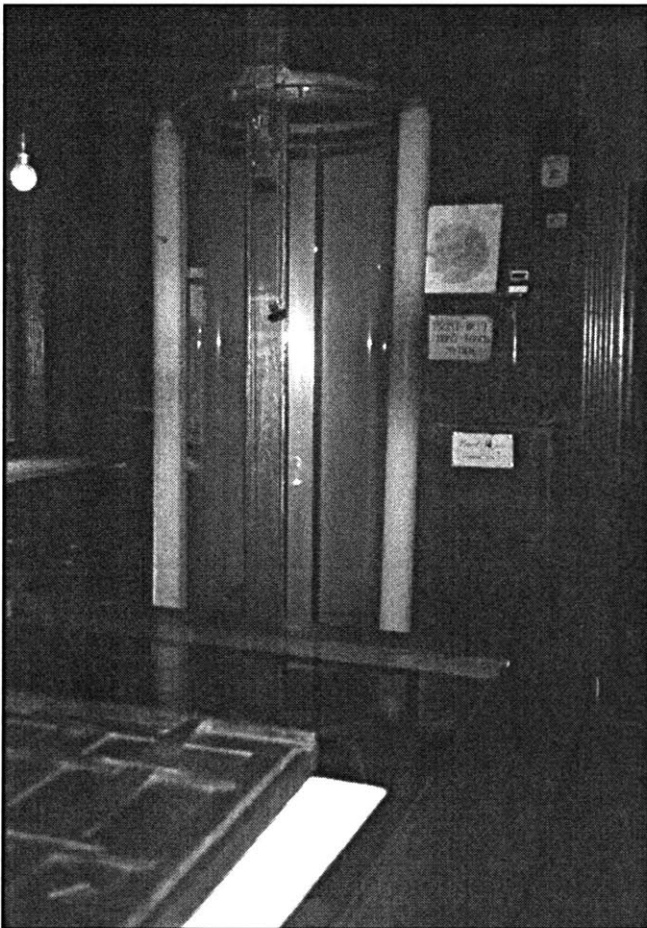
Mr. Perkins' office, the plans clerk cubicle—part of the 1901 addition that included the lower and middle vault. Photograph by author, 2001.



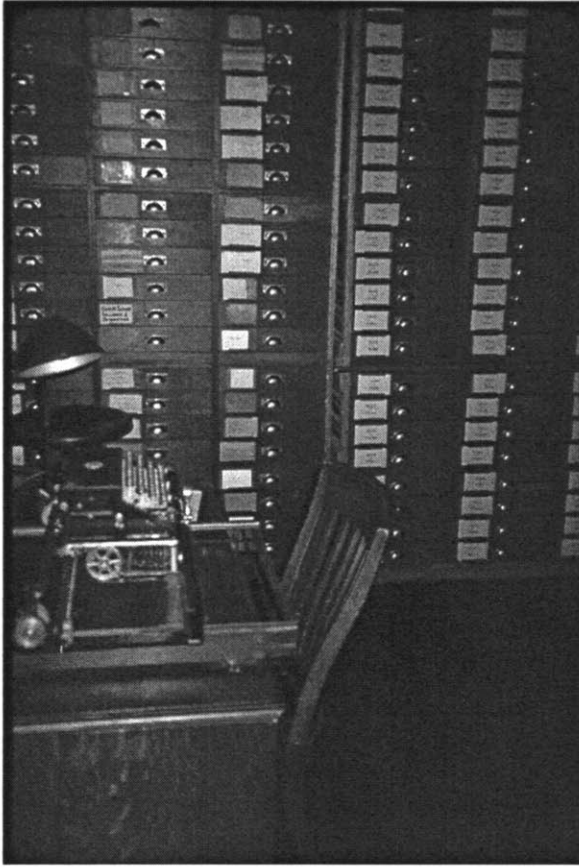
The middle vault showing plans storage. Each box of plans was identified in the lower right hand corner and on the ceiling was a plan of the room and plans' location. Photograph by author, 2001.



The Planting Department-part of the 1901 addition. This space also included the library. Photograph by author, 2001.



The Printing Department-part of the 1889 addition. Besides a blueprint machine this room contained movable windows and frames to make sunprints. Photograph by author, 2001.



This room was used for a variety of purposes over the years-part of the 1889 addition. Wooden filing cabinets contain the firm's photography collection. A Fisher machine, shown in foreground, was used for bookkeeping purposes. Photograph by author, 2001.

DRAFT OF NOTICE

The FIRM have noticed a considerable amount of slackness on the part of various members of the office force in arriving at the office on time both in the morning and in the afternoon when returning from lunch.

We wish all the members of the office force would endeavor to be at their work at nine in the morning and at two in the afternoon.

7th July, 1914.

Hours of operation. Part of making the office more efficient was making sure that the employees showed up on time. 1914. *Office Memoranda*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

17th August, 1904.

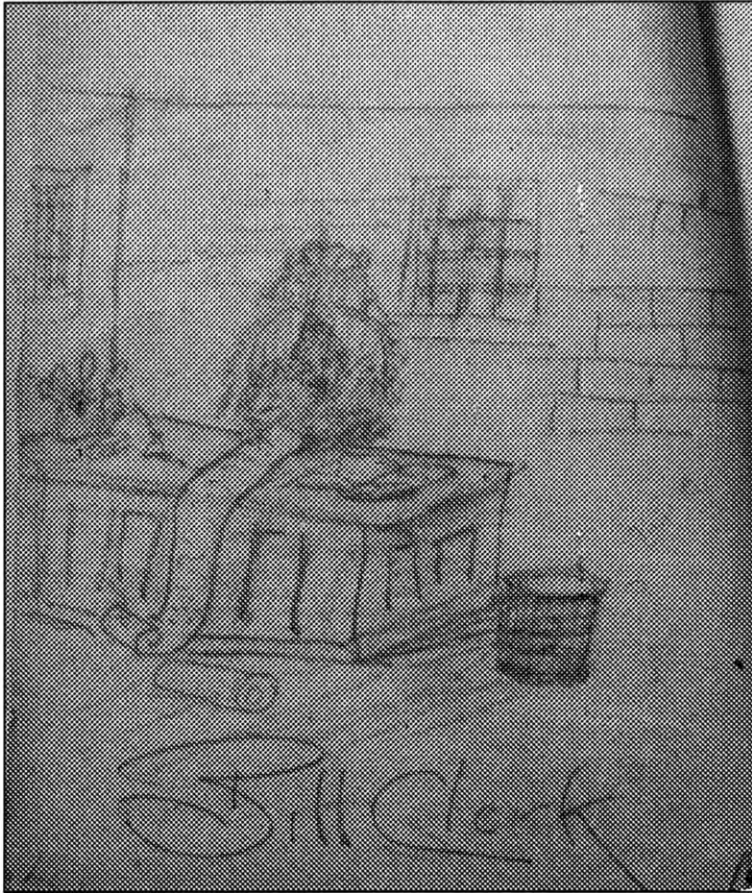
On account of the increasing number of (water bugs) and mice caused by the men eating their lunches up stairs and leaving their crumbs in the baskets and on the floor, all the men are requested hereafter to eat their lunches in the lunch room.

*Olmsted Brothers*

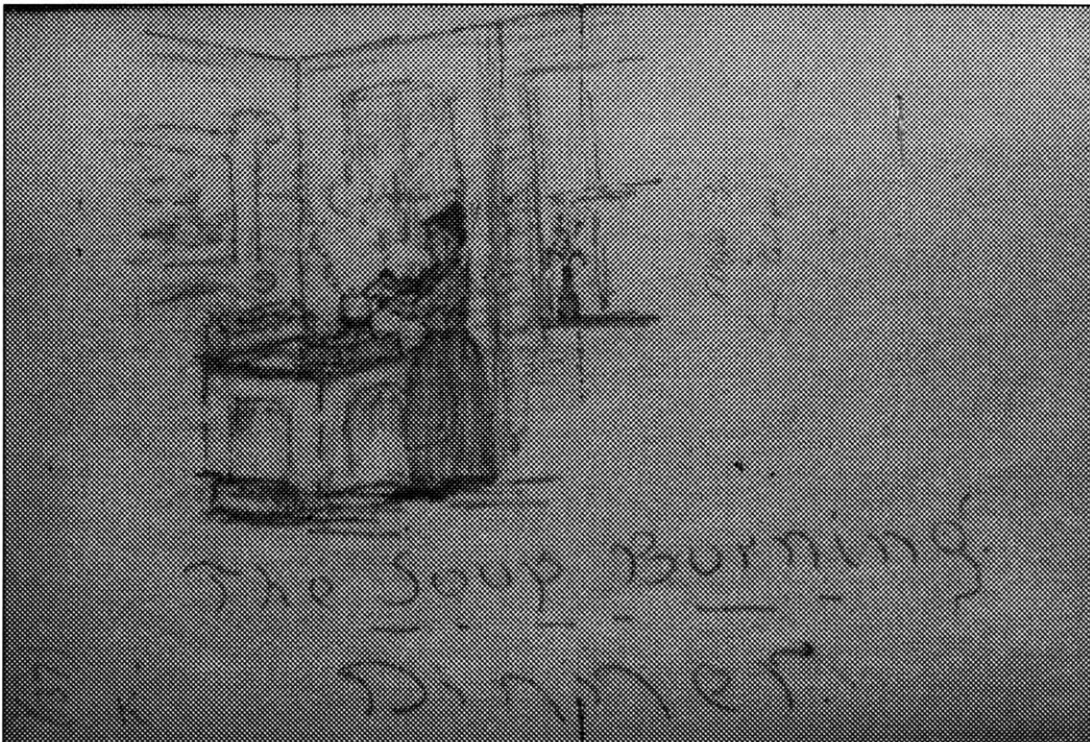
18

Lunchroom rules. The men's lunchroom, located in the basement of Fairsted, was the subject of many memos. 1904. *Office Memoranda*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.





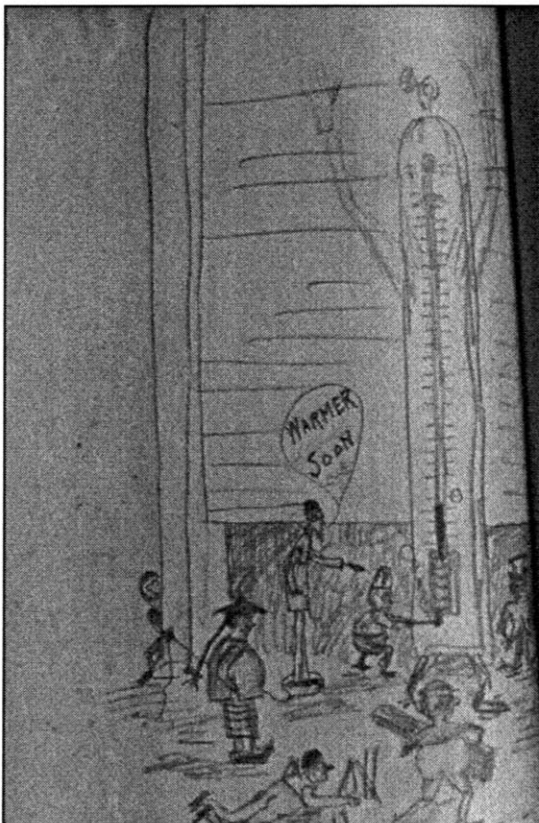
Both of these cartoons spoof Miss Bullard's role in the office. The top cartoon depicts her as the royal accountant sitting in an ornate chair while the bottom cartoon questions her abilities as a cook. *Scenes from the Office of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. 1895.







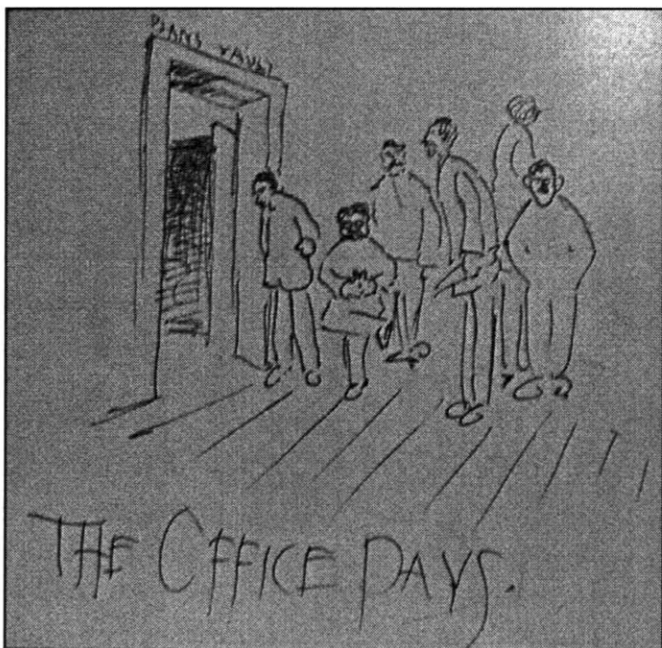
The Printing Department. The cartoons frequently depicted the various departments. In this one, one of the men has succumbed in one of the machines. *Scenes from the Office of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot.* Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. 1895.



At Fairsted, even the subject of the temperature of the office was detailed in a memoranda. The furnace was not turned on unless the temperature was below 60F. In this cartoon, the office workers wait for heat. *Scenes from the Office of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot.* Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. 1895.



This cartoon is a caricature of the whole office in a Brueghel-like scene. *Scenes from the Office of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot.* Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. 1895.



Plans retrieval was always a subject of the cartoons. Here some of the men wait for plans. *Employee scrapbook.* Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. Undated.

# O.B.G. PEACE NUMBER

Vol 2 No 1

## LIFE'S MOVIES

### "ORDERING AN O.B.O. PRINT BY TELEGRAM"

Reel of Speed and Pathos scenario - by Irra Sponserbilly  
Photographed - by Chalkit Downe.

NEXT WEEK - "PASSING THE BUCK"



O.B.G. Peace Number. The intricacies and bureaucracy of the office operations are the subject of this cartoon. It shows what happens when a print of a plan is requested and the ensuing chaos that results. *Employee scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. Undated.



John Charles Olmsted and Percy Jones. John Charles Olmsted was a short man and this cartoon shows just how short he was as compared to one of the draughtsmen, Percy Jones. *Employee scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA. Undated.



2<sup>d</sup> Park Street, Boston, January 1, 1905

**M**R. James Sturgis Pray takes pleasure in announcing with the opening of the New Year, that he has associated with him, in the Professional Practice of Landscape Architecture, Mr. Percival Gallagher, with whom he has entered into Partnership under the Firm Name of PRAY & GALLAGHER.

Mr. Gallagher has been Ten Years in the service of the Olmsted Firm, during which term he has been engaged in responsible ways upon their most Important Designs both of Public Grounds and Private Places, and for some years has been at the Head of their Planting Department.

**JOHN CHARLES OLMSTED AND FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED, JR., COMPOSING THE FIRM OF OLMSTED BROTHERS, ANNOUNCE THAT THEY HAVE ASSOCIATED WITH THEMSELVES IN THE PRACTICE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, PERCIVAL GALLAGHER AND JAMES FREDERICK DAWSON.**

MR. GALLAGHER, AFTER STUDIES AT THE BUSSEY INSTITUTION AND HARVARD COLLEGE, ENTERED THE OFFICE OF OLMSTED, OLMSTED AND ELIOT, IN JULY, 1894, REMAINING WITH THAT FIRM AND ITS SUCCESSORS, UNTIL BECOMING A MEMBER IN JULY, 1904, OF PRAY AND GALLAGHER, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, FROM WHICH FIRM HE NOW WITHDRAWS. HE IS A JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS.

MR. DAWSON, AFTER PROFESSIONAL STUDIES AT THE BUSSEY INSTITUTION, ENTERED THE OFFICE OF OLMSTED, OLMSTED AND ELIOT, IN JULY, 1895, AND HAS REMAINED WITH THAT FIRM AND ITS SUCCESSORS IN A POSITION OF GROWING RESPONSIBILITY, UNTIL THE PRESENT TIME. HE IS A JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS.

BROOKLINE, MASS.  
2ND JULY 1906.

A core group of men and women stayed with the firm for many years. A number of them left and returned. Percival Gallagher worked for the firm for ten years before leaving and joining another ex-employee, James Sturgis Pray, in partnership. One year later he came back to Olmsted Brothers, was made an associate partner in 1909 and made partner in 1922. *Office scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

Smith College  
Northampton,  
Mass.

Frederick Law Olmstead, *ing*

Dear Sir;-

Can you or your son come to  
Northampton this week to consult with me  
concerning a plan for arranging the grounds  
of Smith College ?

I should like to see you as soon as ~~soon~~  
as possible, as some immediate changes are  
imperative.

Yours truly,

L. C. Seelye,

Per *A. C. S.*

September 16, 1891.

*L. C. Seelye*

*Answered you*  
*W. L. O.*  
*ML*

An example of a  
letter from a  
potential client.  
1901. *Office*  
*scrapbook*. Frederick  
Law Olmsted  
National Historic  
Site. National Park  
Service, Brookline,  
MA.

1905

**OLMSTED BROTHERS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS,  
BROOKLINE, MASS.**

**OFFICE HOURS.** Employees are expected to reach the office not later than nine and to work until five, or on Saturday until one, except when absent on office business or by special permission. It is customary to stop work for an hour at one. A regular week's work consists of 42 hours.

**RULES FOR CHARGING TIME.**

Use the daily slips as memorandum sheets, checking off time spent on each piece of work as it is done. Enter against any piece of work only the time actually spent on it. At the end of each day enter on the weekly slip the total time spent that day upon each piece of work, detach the slip for the day and drop it in the box provided for that purpose. When away from the office, mail the daily slip each day. The daily slip must be placed in the box, or in case of absence from the office mailed, before nine o'clock on the day following its date.

At the end of the week, hand in the weekly time slip properly filled out. A duplicate of the weekly slip is provided so that a fair copy can be made for submission and the original record retained by the draughtsman if he so desires.

In stating the nature of the work against which time is charged, enter:

1. Number and letter of order and name of work. The name may be abbreviated.
2. Nature of work and of plan abbreviated.

E. G. Stud. Prel. Pl. Appr. Road. Est. Grad. Lawn & Drive. Tr. Csta. Pl. Shore Lobster Cove. Comptg. Topo. Main to North Sta. Ord. Pits. North Sec. Enl. Genl. Pl. vicinity of shelter to 40' sc.

**RULES FOR CHARGING WHEN TRAVELING.**

Time spent in traveling (not counting time spent in hotels or other temporary domicile) is to be charged at full rates, except when the total number of hours occupied in one day, for both work and traveling, amounts to more than eight.

In that case, if the actual working time is less than eight hours, eight hours of the time occupied is to be entered in full and the remainder is to be entered at half time.


If the actual working time is eight hours or more the traveling time is all to be entered at half time.

Less than half an hour at one time spent in traveling is to be entered in full in any case.

During all night traveling no entry is to be made of eight hours supposed to be spent in sleep.

62

While John Charles Olmsted traveled across the country, other men in the office made shorter trips. This card, printed for the men, detailed how to charge their time for work on the road and in the office. 1905. *Office scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



*F. L. Olmsted Co  
Brookline  
Mass*

*Specimens*

*What Style of  
date do you wish pie or  
long primer, 12 hours a  
found line dates for  
100 in long primer size  
Stamps is readily  
as to dates*

F. L. OLNSTED & CO.

Rec'd \_\_\_\_\_

Ac'd \_\_\_\_\_

Ans'd \_\_\_\_\_

2001 \_\_\_\_\_

*Yours Sincerely  
Globe Stamp Works  
Emerson Co  
Per E*

REPRODUCED FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE MANUSCRIPT DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Auxiliary businesses grew to meet the demands of American business. Having a stamp meant that the box did not need to be drawn for every plan. *Office scrapbook*. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



Acknowledged \_\_\_\_\_  
Shipped \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Bill \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Cut on all orders and  
information filled as  
as received*

DUPLICATE

*General use*

TEMPORARY

OLMSTED BROTHERS.

*Used for signing circular letters  
to nurserymen occasionally*

CODE-5TH EDITION A.D.C.

*on copies of code catalogues*

JOB PRINT

*for Architectural Dept. Prints*

Drawn by _____	Approved for issue _____
Traced by _____	By _____
Checked by _____	

*for studies*

OLMSTED BROTHERS RECEIVED JUL 8, 1913 Client _____ Plan No. _____
----------------------------------------------------------------------------

*for Plans received*



*for Plans sent*

Time spent in traveling from one base of operations to another is not ordinarily to be charged. But if it breaks into the hours between nine and five a charge is to be made for the working hours so occupied; and if it breaks to the use of an evening (or night) during the hours which have before eleven o'clock and suitable hours of time (not over three hours) it is to be made for the whole evening. All use and other exceptional charges for use on account of traveling (for a per hour of 0.25) should be entered and listed on separate lines in the summary.

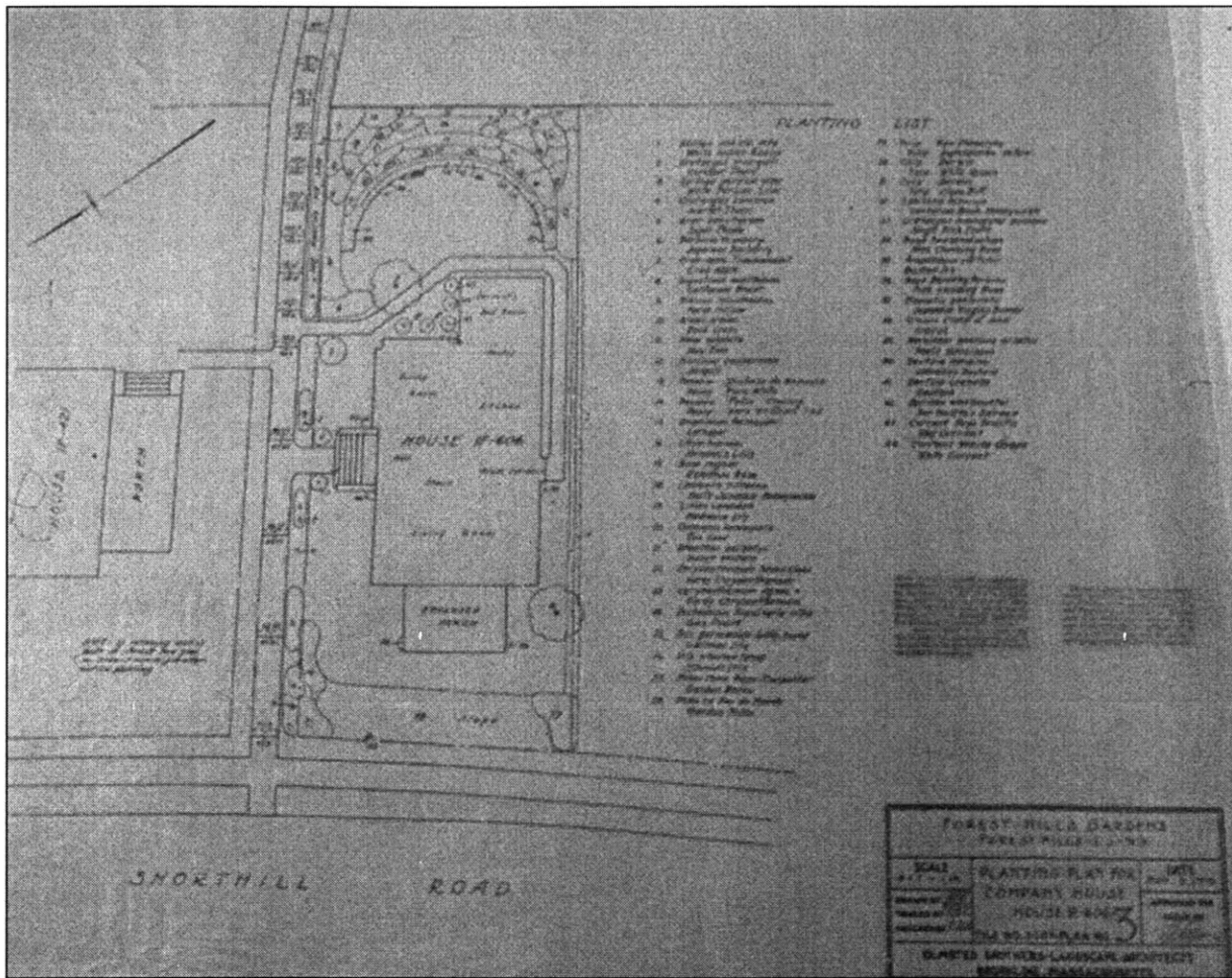
*for bottom of time books  
Aug 1913*

The variety of stamps used by the office. *Office scrapbook.* Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

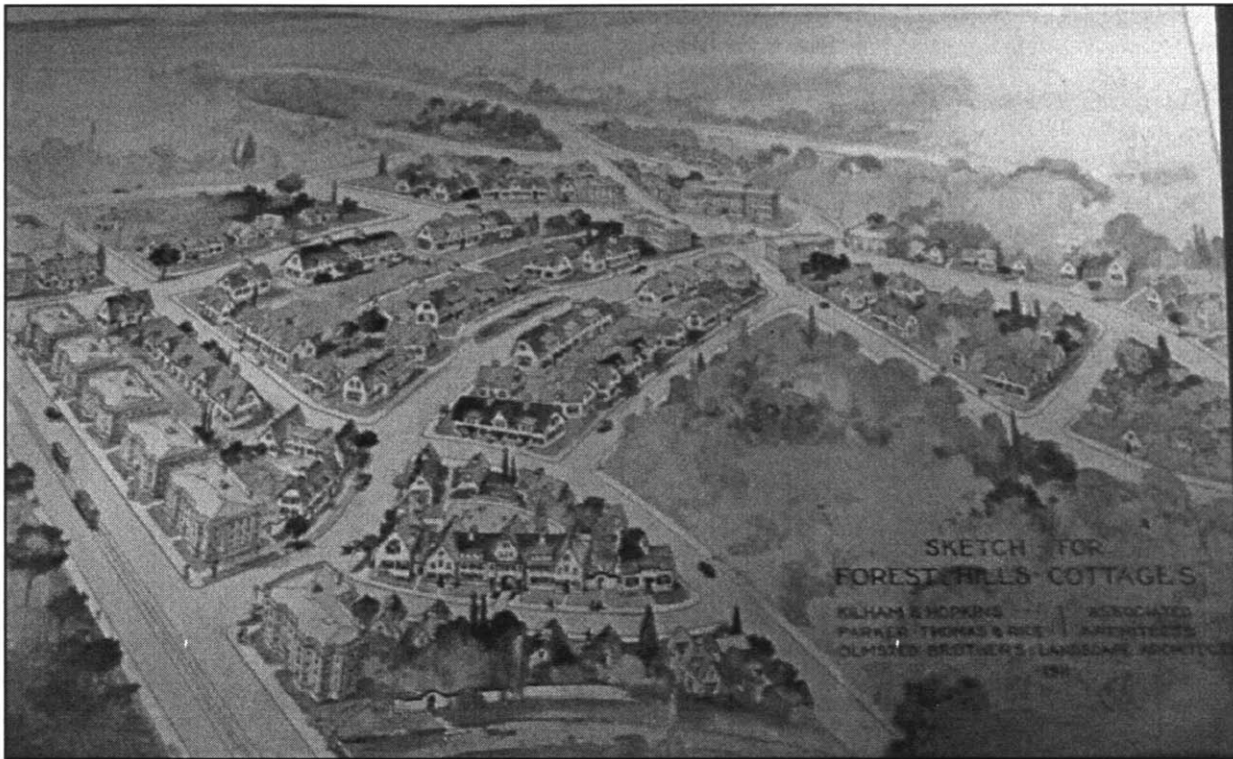




Two scenarios for Baggs Square, Utica, NY. These two watercolors showed the client what would happen if the plan were carried out and what would happen if it was not done. Job #3181. 1906-1907. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



Site layout and planting plan. This plan shows the relationship of the house to the site and to the road. Although it is a small house and lot, the planting plan is extensive. Forest Hills Gardens, 1913. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



Watercolor aerial view of Forest Hills, MA. 1911. Sometimes to sell a project, a watercolor was produced. It would be hung in the developer's office to entice buyers. On this job, the developers tried to get around the Olmsted office requirement that they oversee the implementation of the job. The developers advertised for another firm to do the implementation and when the firm learned of the advertisement, they quit the job. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

## Chapter IV: On the Road with John Charles Olmsted

I can go on with these matters satisfactorily although with the great disadvantage of being so much away from home, but I am obliged to do less than the best with many other works we have on hand. The solution of the trouble would be to have more partners in the business. That would inevitably reduce any chance of the profits but that is a purely selfish objection. The real objection is that I don't know a man I can cordially accept as a partner. The pupils in our office hardly seem to have business capacity enough or the quality of gaining the confidence of clients. Besides that they are not thoroughly enough equipped in technical knowledge. However, there is no need to excite your sympathy to the point of 'annoying' for I do not allow the work to so absorb me as to injure my health. The one thing I really ought to do is to get more exercise.<sup>1</sup>

From the time that John Charles Olmsted joined the firm until he came down with a life threatening illness in 1912 (he resumed traveling at a somewhat reduced schedule in 1913), he traveled extensively for the firm.<sup>2</sup> As an apprentice, he had crisscrossed the country with his stepfather, Frederick Law Olmsted. As an associate and then as a full partner in 1884, he established his own client base, and traveled until the year before his death in 1920. It was not until he was 55 years old that he had a sense of his standing in the fields of landscape architecture and planning. "It seems extremely queer to take precedence over so many I am now thrown with because of seniority. So many years I tagged behind Father and all his friends and employers and coworkers!"<sup>3</sup>

### Letters Home

John Charles Olmsted chronicled his life on the road in daily letters to his wife, Sophia White Olmsted, known as Fidie. These letters provide the most comprehensive account of John Charles Olmsted's work. They paint a picture of the life of a traveling businessman in American cities in

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<sup>1</sup> John Charles Olmsted to Sophia White Olmsted. May 14, 1899. John Charles Olmsted Collection. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, hereafter listed as, John Charles Olmsted.

<sup>2</sup> John Charles Olmsted suffered from digestive problems for most of his adult life. In February 1912, while in Dayton, Ohio, an intestinal obstruction was removed in emergency surgery. His death certificate lists, "bronchial pneumonia" as the cause of death eight years later.

the first twenty years of the twentieth century, as well as providing a social history of attitudes about the natural environment and daily life, from the viewpoint of both John Charles Olmsted and that of his clients. Because the firm did not retain any of the notes and memos written within the office, and despite John Charles Olmsted's inability to see the importance of what he wrote, the letters serve as the best record of the firm's work across the United States and Canada between 1898 and 1918. In some cases, the letters served as a reference source for his time on the road. "I'd be glad if [you] would look up my letters for certain days and write me what I said I did am and pm as the case may be. 5th pm, 6th pm, 7th am & pm, 8thpm, 15tham & pm, 17thpm, 18thpm with JH Patterson but no record of what we did or said." <sup>4</sup> Some days he had time to write out full notes in his diary; others, only a few.

The letters describe in remarkable detail his work as well as his personal comings and goings. The letters, mostly written on hotel stationery, were frequently interlined, a process whereby the writer continued to use the page after it was filled by writing between the already written lines. "I only expected to interline two or three lines and here I am filling a page all up and making it about as hard as one of your dissected picture puzzles." <sup>5</sup>

Despite John Charles Olmsted's dislike of writing work reports, his letters home, sometimes twice a day, flowed easily. Impressed and somewhat cowed by his fluidity, John Charles Olmsted's wife worried that her letters back to him might not be good enough. He reassured her, "I do not object in the least to your remarks about weather or anything else for our letters are not 'for publication,' and we can't confine ourselves to witty and interesting anecdotes and experiences. I like your letters very much and hope you will not feel discouraged ever!" <sup>6</sup>

While he sometimes used his letters in figuring out how to bill his time, he generally discounted them. "What I write is just as unimportant to the world at large as what you write but I like to hear all the time what you and the children are doing just as I should be cognizant of them if I

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<sup>3</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 5, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 24, 1916.

<sup>5</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 14, 1909.

<sup>6</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 3, 1901.

were at home.”<sup>7</sup> The letters from his wife were a daily remembrance of her and his daughters, Carolyn and Margaret. “Don’t trouble your mind about the quality of letter writing,” he wrote her. “You write just what I want to know. I am interested in all the little daily doings of yourself and the children and your friends.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Challenges on the Road**

Working on the road presented a whole new set of challenges for John Charles Olmsted. While he headed an office in Brookline that utilized the latest office equipment and modern business practice, work on the road continued to operate for a longer period of time in the same manner as during Frederick Law Olmsted’s tenure as head of the firm. Most often, a hotel room served as his office. He worked there under the most primitive conditions, sometimes using a window for tracing purposes. Eventually, he traveled with his own lights because even in better hotels, the lighting usually was inadequate for looking over or drafting plans.

On the road, he did not have access to a Miss Bullard, the office manager, the stenographers, filing clerks, and Perkins. Neither did he have the draughtsmen to draw out his plans in the manner that the office dictated, nor did he have the luxury of collaboration with the men in the office. Finally, in 1906/07, he began to travel with draftsmen and by 1913, associate members of the firm went with him and eventually had their own jobs when the volume of work outside of Brookline was too great for John Charles Olmsted to handle alone. But even when associate members were doing their own jobs, John Charles Olmsted found himself alone frequently at holidays. “... This hasn’t been a particularly Merry Christmas for me being away from home and all alone,” he wrote on Christmas day in 1908. Traveling so much of the year was always lonely. “... It is a lonesome life for me too living so much of the year in hotels and sleeping cars. Once in a while someone joins me at a meal or I join them but almost always I eat alone.”<sup>9</sup>

During the course of his working life on the road, John Charles Olmsted made contradictory statements about the advantages and disadvantages of working on the road, depending mainly on

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<sup>7</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 30, 1909.

<sup>8</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 13, 1916.

<sup>9</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 26, 1909.

the status of his work. He believed that the one consolation of being alone on the road was that it gave him time to give each job the study it needed until he finished it. Back at the office in Brookline, he was interrupted so frequently that he could not devote the time to each job that was deserved.

On the road, he found it slow and laborious to write out instructions, explanations, and criticisms but these conditions forced him to be “more thorough and the draughtsmen had them to refer to instead of having to receive them orally and trust to memory for them.” Another advantage of being on the road was that he had to “often draw out the changes and improvements with his own hand and so get them pretty much as he wanted them” as opposed to being at the office where his ideas were “interpreted” and not always just as he would have liked, and sometimes not as good.<sup>10</sup>

While he realized advantages to being on the road, particularly in gaining business and dealing with the clients and sites firsthand, he could not always do his work in the way he wanted. Two years before, he wrote, “It is annoying to be constantly called to one new thing after another so I have no time to finish up old ones.”<sup>11</sup> This aspect of John Charles Olmsted’s career never changed; he was always behind in his work. “Will spend Monday in Montgomery, Alabama at Hotel Gay-Teague, then the Seelbach Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky. I guess three days will do there and about two at Dayton, Ohio maybe another at Oxford, Ohio. It puts me out of sorts to be off on all these jobs when I should be finishing Anchorage, Kentucky report and doing Niagara report. I fear I’ll lose a lot of pay owing to the delay. Just now I’m losing sleep however.”<sup>12</sup>

### Who Else Could do the Traveling?

After John Charles Olmsted was married (January 1899), he did not like to travel for the long periods of time that his job required, but he felt that he had no other choice. When the firm consisted of John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, John Charles Olmsted traveled with his stepfather to learn the business. When the Codmans, Henry and Phillip, joined the firm,

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<sup>10</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 4, 1909

<sup>11</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 4, 1907.

<sup>12</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 26, 1915.



they traveled with Frederick Law Olmsted too. John Charles Olmsted reminded his wife, Sophia White Olmsted, that when Frederick Law Olmsted was head of the firm and Charles Eliot was a partner (1893-1897), that Eliot did not like to travel because he was married. As a bachelor, John Charles Olmsted traveled the country and built up a reputation of his own. Clients began to know him as the representative of the Olmsted firm and by the time he was married he was the member of the firm that clients expected to see.<sup>13</sup>

Although he took the traveling as his responsibility, it did not mean that he liked being away from his family and the office. He even recognized that it might seem strange that he was away so long. “I guess I ‘show up’ at home often enough to prevent any tales of desertion arising, I am away a good deal--too much to suit me--but what can I do about it? If people out here want advice I can’t refuse to give it, even if you were any place out here I should be just about as much away because I go to various cities and to no one for any length of time, I certainly am at home more than at any other one place.”<sup>14</sup> That meant that he did not stay in any one place longer than three months, that when he was on the road, he was constantly moving between cities and jobs. But he was away much more than he was at home in Brookline.

As head of the firm, he usually left Brookline, Massachusetts in September and returned infrequently, if ever, before June. From mid-June to September, he spent his weekdays in Brookline and on day trips, and on the weekend, traveled to Maine to be with his family at the Binnacle, one of two houses the Olmsteds owned on Deer Isle, Maine. His thoughts on working away from the office changed when he was away from it. He wrote that he felt like a schoolboy who out of school, forgets or ignores his schoolwork. In Brookline, “the office seemed everything” and he could not imagine being away for more than a day.<sup>15</sup>

When away, his attitude changed; all his work in Brookline could wait until his return or until his half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. could do it.<sup>16</sup> His ability to focus on the job at hand or the one with the most pressing deadline, be it a specific landscape plan or doing six reports of

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<sup>13</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 23, 1906.

<sup>14</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 29, 1908.

<sup>15</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 18, 1900.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



visits or writing fifteen letters in a day and two reports, served him well. There was no reason to worry about the work in the office when the jobs he had out on the road were enough to challenge him nine to ten hours a day, six to seven days a week. Also, the work of the office followed him wherever he went. Letters from clients and papers relating to office matters, as well as work uncompleted before his trips, found their way to his hotels across the country.

### Additional Partners?

Five years after John Charles Olmsted became the head of the firm, he considered his options regarding the surplus of work and the lack of men to do it. He contemplated having more partners. While John Charles Olmsted worried that more partners meant less profit for him his real objection was that the “pupils in the office did not have business acumen or qualities of gaining clients’ confidence nor did they have the technical knowledge to do the work.”<sup>17</sup> Two years later he wrote that “Our young men are gradually getting a working knowledge of the business and I may have more leisure, hereafter than I have had in the last few years.”<sup>18</sup>

It was not for another five years that other men in the office traveled the long distances from Brookline. By 1910, he thought that he might ease up on his traveling. “The only thing I can do about it is to refuse work west of the Mississippi. I may begin to do that after 1915, as I suppose I ought to ease up by that time and let the younger fellows have the business.”<sup>19</sup> Although he never did cut back on the volume of his work, he began to imagine an easier time. “I wish I need do only one thing at a time and have a week or two at home between each thing,” he wrote.<sup>20</sup> Slowing his pace was not attractive either. “The idea of ‘retiring’ has little or no charm for me.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 14, 1899. In general, in business, more partners mean that a firm can take on more work and reap more profits. John Charles Olmsted’s comments reflect a general feeling among practitioners that until there was more recognition of the profession, there would not be more work for them.

<sup>18</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 22, 1901.

<sup>19</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 13, 1910.

<sup>20</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 27, 1911.

<sup>21</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 17, 1916.

## Professional Reputation

John Charles Olmsted knew that getting and keeping a highly regarded professional reputation had its downside. “I too was grieved by the call but she especially asked for me and no one now in our office was familiar with the work or known to her so I could not excuse myself and send someone else.” So did the fact that Seattle was almost 2500 miles away from Brookline. “Seattle is so far away and they are in such a hurry that it will not do to take the problem home and work it out there as I usually do. I must get a small-scale solution of the problem done here, and approved in its main features. Then I can leave a copy for the engineer so he can get out drawings for a partial grading contract.”<sup>22</sup>

And there was also vanity. On most jobs, he, as landscape architect, was the last professional hired so he always appreciated when he was the first hired. “And as they did me the honor to employ me before they employed their architect and as I felt they ought to see and discuss the plan with me here, and not merely have a plan sent them from Brookline which might not suit them, I concluded it was my duty to stay and try to satisfy them.”<sup>23</sup> Three months later, he wondered whether the same board, created for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, Washington, would hire an architect who would work harmoniously with him, or is “so conceited and grasping as to want to ignore my ideas and run everything himself.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Design Philosophy**

John Charles Olmsted worried about many things, including architects taking over his jobs, but the one thing that never concerned him was his ability as a designer. From an early age, he had been taught by his stepfather and he supplemented that training with study trips to Europe and direct observation of the landscape. Frederick Law Olmsted passed along to young John Charles Olmsted his belief that it was not about the landscape architect, it was the distinct landscape each new job presented to him that was important. “Each new problem he took up was to him a fresh

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<sup>22</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 20, 1906.

<sup>23</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 27, 1906.

<sup>24</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 15, 1907.

and unique adventure in observation, analysis, and creative adaptation of mean to ends.”<sup>25</sup> While John Charles Olmsted’s design methods owed a great debt to Frederick Law Olmsted, changing times called for new methods.

John Charles Olmsted’s design philosophy may be divided into three parts: role of nature, methods, and choosing a design style. He thought it an “awful shame our cities are not planned right in the first place.”<sup>26</sup> Economy was all right in its place but he regretted a city’s cessation of acquiring land for parks when the city was bound to have parks eventually and land only rose in value. Boston would have saved millions by buying land for parks when it was a small city.<sup>27</sup> “It’s hard to persuade economical practical voters and taxpayers to spend that much in improving the plan of the city.” When the majority of the citizens owned their own homes, they would not stand for increased taxation.<sup>28</sup>

This perceived lack of foresight on the part of cities was ongoing during his career and not restricted to the United States. In Manitoba, to plan out an industrial village in 1911, his client told him that he had purchased land for \$235 an acre on the outskirts of the city and four years later, was selling it for \$2,000 an acre. “The city meanwhile has grown so much that some speculator is doubtless buying it to cut up into lots. It’s a shame all cities don’t own all the land and merely lease it, revaluing it say every five years and making a new lease when the time is right for it,” he suggested.<sup>29</sup>

John Charles Olmsted had to contend with his clients’ perception of styles. When he read John Ruskin’s treatise on architecture, The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1873), he was “persuaded that it was abominable to use any sham in architecture.”<sup>30</sup> Confronted with his clients, the Stinsons’ (of Seattle) desire for a New England farmhouse bungalow, he looked at the design for their house and told the clients that a New England farmhouse never had verandas and never a second story sleeping-porch. Further, a bungalow was strictly a one-storied building with

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<sup>25</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to Laura Wood Roper, The Laura Wood Roper Collection. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. February 28, 1949.

<sup>26</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 2, 1909.

<sup>27</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 28, 1910.

<sup>28</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 2, 1909.

<sup>29</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 28, 1911.

verandas. They could have whatever they wanted but he told them not to call it by the wrong names.<sup>31</sup>

### Ambivalent Feelings for the Job

Sometime he felt it was wrong to do anything to a certain piece of land. “The woods are fine and it is regrettable that they have to be marred by any drives,” he wrote in regards to creating a plan for a new park in Seattle.<sup>32</sup> He respected plant material. “My work is very puzzling because there are so many good trees in the way of proposed roads and walks,” he complained.<sup>33</sup> “I like the wild open landscape very much and I only regret to be planning to spoil it with roads and houses and stables. It would be fine if one man would buy the whole of it and just keep it as it is, he wrote a few years later.<sup>34</sup> His ambivalence carried through his career. In referring to a suburban development in Seattle, he wrote to Fidie, “I wish some rich person had the whole point for a country place. They are crazy to cut every piece of land up into lots.”<sup>35</sup>

He did not always feel like preserving land. He appreciated an easy subdivision job and in writing about a job that the client decided against, he wrote, “I am sorry for it as it would have been fairly easy and very good pay for the time it would have taken.”<sup>36</sup> He realized that some subdivision lots were easier to sell than others. Writing about a job in Saskatchewan, he noted that the lots with views would be easier to sell than the ones in the densely wooded areas. “I will try to get that part to lay out as it will be the part that will sell in lots quickest.”<sup>37</sup> It was important to lay out lots that would sell so that John Charles Olmsted would get paid.

When the clients were disposed towards his ideas and he liked the site, John Charles Olmsted was inspired to plan a comparable landscape. “This afternoon I went with the Belknaps to their place and made some progress toward perfecting the plan. It will be, I think, a beautiful place.

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<sup>30</sup> John Charles Olmsted July 25, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 28, 1908.

<sup>32</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 14, 1910.

<sup>33</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 28, 1904.

<sup>34</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 5, 1906.

<sup>35</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 19, 1907.

<sup>36</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 4, 1907.

<sup>37</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 5, 1913.

They treat me respectfully which makes me feel disposed to do everything I can.<sup>38</sup> Ten years later he was still working on the Belknaps' plan but by 1915 it had to be entirely changed. "The work I did before is entirely thrown away except the lines for the drive in the street. ... It gives me pleasure like doing a puzzle only there is more thought and invention."<sup>39</sup>

### Design Principles

In the continuation of John Charles Olmsted's work on Branch Brook Park in Essex County, NJ, his design principles shine through. He had spent the day walking over the park. "It cost me only the trouble of walking over the ground and telling my thoughts--or some of them--as to planting as part of a general conception of the design and as details considering the existing conditions as they presented themselves to me."<sup>40</sup> Like with many of Frederick Law Olmsted's plans, the borders of the park were to be planted and supplemented in some places by border mounds.<sup>41</sup> He suggested more undergrowth planting to add winter variety. The west side of the park was densely planted by adding pines, hollies and hemlocks while the east side was to be more diaphanously underplanted with trees and shrubs, noted for "handsome flowers and foliage such as rhododendrons and magnolias."<sup>42</sup>

He envisioned that the open meadow would be surrounded by symmetrically branching trees. "The aim will be to accomplish the tree-dotted grassy pasture fitted for large numbers to enjoy by strolling or by playing field and lawns."<sup>43</sup> While he surmised that the meadow section was going to be easy to plan, not so the wooded areas, "for it is a type of natural scenery that is hard for man to imitate successfully. In fact, exact imitation would scarcely be appropriate or sensible in a public park to be surrounded by dense population and to be enjoyed by visitors little practiced in the enjoyment of wild natural woodland."<sup>44</sup> His aim then was to take the woodland as a type but to make it more "strikingly handsome and humanized." It was to be recognized as the work of man, no more a realistic creation than an oil painting of a waterfall or sunset scene.

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<sup>38</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 19, 1905.

<sup>39</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 15, 1915.

<sup>40</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 5, 1899.

<sup>41</sup> Now called, berms.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

He compared the task of creating this landscape to an actor conveying the stronger passions of human life. Certain conventions and allowances should be allowed both the actor and the designer, he wrote. "The basis of criticism much be not absolute nature but the suggestion of somewhat the same pleasurable thought and feeling as are experienced in contemplation of certain scenes of nature." Remembering the actor metaphor, he wrote that an actor accompanied certain words with actions. A good actor displaying jealousy in a play does not make one think that he as a man is really jealous but he can make us identify with his actions. The actor puts his ideas into the character and the scene. The designer does not have that luxury. He cannot put in all the plants nor can he make sure that all of his ideas are carried out. The details of planting and execution must be left to subordinates.<sup>45</sup>

John Charles Olmsted's work was interpreted by numerous people, many of whom did not necessarily agree with his ideas or have any inclination to carry them out. He compared himself to a Gothic architect whose designs were executed by French Renaissance draughtsmen. "If I had only one work to carry out at a time and I had plenty of time to do it in, I might succeed in realizing my ideals but employers would pay me for such work little more than they do their gardeners, and I should have to live in a corresponding way. Tis a pity, some trial to one's satisfaction in art, but it seems inevitable as the world is."<sup>46</sup>

### **Implementation of Work**

Despite his worries over implementation of his work, John Charles Olmsted took great pleasure when his designs were executed to his satisfaction. At Iroquois Park in Louisville, KY, he was very pleased with both the engineer and the superintendent. He noted that the roads in the park "afford agreeable and pleasurable access to the scenery on good lines and grades for a fraction of the cost in Boston." He mentioned that the appearance of the woods was greatly improved since he had starting planning the park six years before. He likened the burned over woods used for pasture that he initially saw as being, "like a bald head with about a dozen stiff hairs on each

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<sup>44</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 5, 1899.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

square inch and scars and tumors and sores and scabs in abundance.” Now the trees had more foliage; “the ground is almost everywhere clothed with asters and other weeds and by young trees and bushes. They hold the fallen leaves which cover the bare earth instead of blowing or washing away or being burnt off as formerly. The improvement is wonderful.”<sup>47</sup> Still, he wrote, “... anyhow there are few artificially created park scenes that can compete with wild natural scenes.”<sup>48</sup>

His interest in civic improvements included much more than landscape. In mentioning a pamphlet, “How should we beautify Springfield?,” he lauded the author’s valuable suggestions, not just for local citizens but to “dwellers in all towns for not only improving the appearance of the town and its buildings, but for improving the popular appreciation of art in all its possible relations to life, even including drama and music by educating children as well as by organized effort on the part of grown-ups.”<sup>49</sup> Although he saw himself as a reformer interested in its theoretical aspects, the pamphlet made him realize that he was lucky in his work, that he was not just a theorist but a practitioner who got to see his ideas implemented, albeit sometimes not up to his standards.<sup>50</sup>

John Charles Olmsted had the gift of being able to use a style that fit the site best. He could and did design in four styles: English (picturesque), French (formal), German (Baroque), and Russian (Rustic Baroque). Sometimes he encountered designers who were not so flexible. “I told them I had recommended the Russian style for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. I thought Bebb was pleased with the idea but Somerwell had studied in Paris and I imagine thinks there is no architecture worthy the name that is not pretty pure classic or French Renaissance.”<sup>51</sup>

Five months later he wrote, “I can see that almost all of our architects who went through the Ecole des Beaux Arts have faith only in the Classic styles. They consider that no other style is to be taken seriously.” He wished that Americans could develop a credible modification of it that would be distinctly American instead of French. “The French style has wonderful vocality to get

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<sup>47</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 24, 1899.

<sup>48</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 9, 1900.

<sup>49</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 11, 1902.

<sup>50</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 12, 1903. February 11, 1902.

such a hold on so many good American young men that they cannot shake it off.” Using the French style rather than the Russian style he recommended would make the architecture so “self-assertive, so formal and cold as to be out of harmony with the wild woods and that will result in the beautiful wild growths being swept away from about the buildings and replaced by smooth grass plots, rows of little nursery trees and beds of cannas, geraniums and such like.”<sup>52</sup>

Four years later, in Manitoba, planning an industrial village, he noted that the client wanted “something attractive as a paper plan.” He surmised that the client wanted the French style of planning over the late German or late English style. “Being familiar with and ready to work in all three styles and finding his taste inclining toward the Frenchy, I was able finally to suit him.”<sup>53</sup> It pleased him to suit his clients and he chose to view the change as proof that working out a complicated plan with the aid of constant discussion with the owner was the best way to do things, rather than viewing the incident as a failure of styles.<sup>54</sup>

Although John Charles Olmsted was not an architect, that did not stop him from having opinions on architecture. While his jobs might include the siting of buildings in relation to other buildings and onto a particular site, he also gave general advice about their style. In designing the landscape for the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, he praised the siting of buildings and even wrote that he was glad that the “ugly main building” had burned in a fire. While he praised the new building’s site as being “reasonably good,” he did not like its style—different from the other buildings in style and materials. “I always preach the need of harmony in these two respects,” he wrote.<sup>55</sup>

He did not “really enjoy the job of tinkering up old college grounds.” There were so many difficulties and limitations. “The fundamental difficulty, of course, is inadequate money but another almost equally great [problem] is the aversion of the Trustees to study out a scheme and plan for the future and stick to it.”<sup>56</sup> Another trouble he mentioned was that the fundraisers and

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<sup>51</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 11, 1906.

<sup>52</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 10, 1907.

<sup>53</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 27, 1911.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 15, 1907.

<sup>56</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 31, 1907



donors insisted upon the best site for their building, even if it did not fit the site.<sup>57</sup> When he had a choice of sites, as he did for a power site at Niagara Falls, New York, he “quickly decided on the one which did the least violence to the scenery.”<sup>58</sup>

He did not like flat sites either because they were “uninteresting.” “I can’t take much interest in laying streets in a flat tract of land. Curved streets don’t seem really called for on flat land and especially on such a small area.”<sup>59</sup>

Olmsted jobs did not always progress as quickly as he wanted. Because of economic ups and downs and reverses of developers’ fortunes, some jobs took years to implement and in that time, designs changed. In commenting on Druid Hills in Atlanta, Georgia once thought to be Frederick Law Olmsted’s last design for a suburban development, John Charles Olmsted wrote to his wife that the original client, Mr. Hurt, had sold the land and the design to Mr. Adair and his associates. Twelve years later, the development was finally being built. Sales of lots were not going well; John Charles Olmsted surmised that it was due to the fact that there was a more popular development in Atlanta, Ansley Park, which was closer to town and to a fashionable neighborhood and to the country club. What was built at Druid Hills distressed John Charles Olmsted because of the shabbiness of detail.<sup>60</sup>

Besides city officials, John Charles Olmsted had to work with architects and engineers. Looking over a park in Atlanta, he noticed a plain and ugly concrete shelter that had been built in the woods after he had years ago made the plan. “I think that it must be an engineer’s design. They seldom pay much attention to beauty and wouldn’t know how to secure it if they did.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Architecture versus Landscape Architecture**

Spending money on architecture rather than landscape architecture was a problem John Charles Olmsted frequently encountered in his work on the road (and at home too). Hiring an architect

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> John Charles Olmsted July 15, 1918.

<sup>59</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 8, 1911.

<sup>60</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 18, 1909.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

before bringing in a landscape architect presented another set of problems. “It’s odd how much more satisfaction most people take in spending money for architecture than for grading and topsoil, clay, gravel, manure and all that.”<sup>62</sup> He complained that people putting in lawns prepared the soil only a few inches deep and then had to spend their summers watering the grass. When asked how deep the soil should be for shrubs and trees, he answered that it should be three feet deep but commented that the park commissioners in Spokane would probably not put that much expense underground.<sup>63</sup>

When in Winnipeg at a businessmen’s club with his client, he was introduced to a group of men who were organizing a national exhibition celebrating the discovery of the region (1909). He suggested that there would be a lot of political maneuvering in seeking the appropriations from the Canadian and Manitoban governments and “some politically clever architect may get the job of planning.”<sup>64</sup> Two months later, commenting on the work the firm was doing at Niagara Falls, he wrote to Fidie that he was distressed that the firm had been employed to mitigate some of the damage caused by the architects. “Those Canadian Commissioners of the Reservation on the Canada side are primarily to blame for not insisting on the principle of subordinating the building to the landscape being applied by landscape architects. The engineers and architects were good ones but evidently preferred to make their work prominent.”<sup>65</sup>

## **Park Planning**

John Charles Olmsted believed in the power of the park as a civilizing influence but he decried the “artificializing of a beautiful natural park, like Cherokee Park in Louisville, Kentucky.” People regard such a park as “merely a pretty vacant lot until they get historical, natural history and art museums, zoological gardens, aquariums, statues, monuments, pergolas and sculptured fountains all over it.”<sup>66</sup> Unlike Frederick Law Olmsted, who quit his supervisory job at Central Park because of intended intrusions by such elements as these, John Charles Olmsted’s only known protest in this case was made in a letter to his wife. He wrote that a sculptress who was a

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<sup>62</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 2, 1908.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 24, 1909.

<sup>65</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 30, 1909.

<sup>66</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 29, 1905.

friend of the head of the Park Commission, General Castleman, disagreed with John Charles Olmsted's placement of her sculpture of Daniel Boone. The site she selected was located in the same woods, but isolated from the other artificial features that included her Pan fountain. John Charles Olmsted felt that it was useless to argue the point because of her friendship with Castleman.

In reflecting on the newly planted Essex County park system in New Jersey, he allowed that the park land would look better when the plant materials were grown, but opined, "There are few artificially created park scenes that can compete with wild natural ones."<sup>67</sup>

## **Methods**

### Trouble in the Garden

John Charles Olmsted's perceived lack of knowledge of botany plagued him throughout his career. Calling on a client in Seattle, he admired the flowers but despaired over his ignorance as to their proper names. "There were beautiful roses as well as lots of other flowers but unfortunately, for a landscape architect, I am extraordinarily ignorant as to garden flowers. I am often ashamed to be in a garden with people who assume that I know everything."<sup>68</sup>

### *Incorrect Contours Yield Bad Designs*

Because topographical maps were frequently wrong, incorrect design resulted. John Charles Olmsted blamed it on "maps made with spot elevations by young draughtsmen."<sup>69</sup> Surveying a site with many changes in elevations so that the contours on the map were reliable was a challenge. Surveyors often only made spot elevations and then, when the notes were turned over to draughtsmen who never saw the land, they had to guess the contours. While the firm always required topographical maps from clients, there was nothing consistent about these maps. Frequently they were so bad that John Charles Olmsted ended up redesigning a site. "It seems the contour map on which our plan of walks was based was very poor indeed. In places it did not

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<sup>67</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 9, 1900.

<sup>68</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 12, 1909.

<sup>69</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 1, 1907.

in the least represent the actual shape of the land. "It is extremely annoying to work on such wretched topographical maps," he wrote.<sup>70</sup>

## **The Vagaries of Traveling:**

### **Jumping on Trunks**

Because he was away for such long periods of time and traveled through many seasons and climates, John Charles Olmsted needed to take a year's worth of clothes on his cross-country trips. Besides the clothes, he took with him all the tools of his trade, including: tracing cloth and paper, pencils, pens, surveying equipment, compass, camera, film, paper, and materials to write the reports he was always late in finishing. "I have completed packing my two trunks for the California trip ready for the express. Somehow it seems almost as formidable as going to Europe."<sup>71</sup> Packing his trunks was an ordeal. "I had a struggle to get my trunk shut—had to jump on it a lot. I hope it won't burst."<sup>72</sup> Sometimes the trunk fought back.

Last night I was up late packing and when all through and having locked my trunk I looked at the ends for surplus tags and discovered that one end was badly broken. So after lunch today I bought a new trunk. It was nearly 6:00 P.M. when it got to my room. It took me till nearly 7:00P.M. to repack. The trunk is too full and I had a long job to get it closed and locked, but I didn't have time to sort out things I might send back to the office. Also it is very heavy with pamphlets, paper, folders, and such."<sup>73</sup>

The trunks were heavy. "Before I had left the platform a Negro porter seeing which way I was headed offered his services which I was very glad to have as my suitcase is so heavy. I found it was over half a mile. He asked me on the way if I were a hardware drummer. I suppose the suitcase suggested the question."<sup>74</sup> Sometimes the suitcases and trunks were not cooperative. The trunks took on a human quality of a naughty child who would not do what he wanted. So did his rolls of plans. "My roll of plans must have had a spite against me for depriving it of all by one of those rubber bands for it lost me very promptly and I haven't heard a murmur of disappointment from that roll since. The roll's all right but very disregardful of my feelings."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 24, 1916.

<sup>72</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 17, 1909.

<sup>73</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 1, 1911.

<sup>74</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 2, 1908.

<sup>75</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 21, 1901.

## No Longer Walking to Work

In Brookline, John Charles Olmsted walked less than a quarter mile to work. Getting to work quickly seemed to him to be a necessity and he remarked about a businessman in Ohio who lived 30 miles from his office, that it was a waste of time to have to travel so far.<sup>76</sup> But traveling to his own jobs on the road was not an easy task; he endured the troubles of traveling by train. As a rule, he traveled only by night so that he could use his days for working in the locations for which he had jobs. "It is evidently true that it is better for my health to go to New York by the Fall River line than by the midnight train and perhaps it is even better than the 5 o'clock train although that shortens my nights' rest about an hour, but it also give me an hour less time at the office." He wrote to his wife that he was sorry that taking the earlier train meant that he would miss spending the evening together but he reminded her that he needed more to keep himself in "good trim for work."<sup>77</sup>

Trains were frequently late and so was John Charles Olmsted in meeting them. Sometimes his tardiness was due to a particular job and more often, due to the client.

I am in the train I intended to be in, but without my trunk owing to the haste with which I departed. I was getting on all right and was looking over the third Hills and Dales house [Dayton, Ohio] at which we are doing planting when Mr. Patterson came up to it in his automobile and captured us for the afternoon and took us to his house and gave us some supper. Had only 25 minutes for three course supper so I had to hurry too much to suit me. Then there was 20 minutes to train time and I had to go to the hotel. I got my bag and coat but had no time to get my trunk to the station."<sup>78</sup>

Besides lateness, sometimes there were accidents. Recognizing the trembling motion that meant that the train he was on was running on its ties instead of the track, John Charles Olmsted got off with one of his heavy suitcases and walked to the station.<sup>79</sup> He did not want to waste the time waiting for the problem to be fixed.

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<sup>76</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 1, 1906.

<sup>77</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 4, 1902.

<sup>78</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 12, 1907.

<sup>79</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 14, 1918.

## Page One News

He had trouble sticking to a schedule when he was away from Brookline. He had to be flexible. Jobs begot jobs. More often than not, his arrival in a town made page one news. In the vast majority of cases, the newspaper articles were fabrications of interviews that never took place. Sometimes a fantastic plan was front page news but it had little to do with the scheme that John Charles Olmsted proposed.<sup>80</sup> He did not advertise but sometimes came into a city and found advertisements for developments in local papers that purported to be Olmsted firm jobs. “I enclose an ‘ad’ showing that I am getting ‘notorious.’ That is the second land subdivision I know of called by my name because they want to convey to possible purchasers the implication that it is fine and parklike or beautified...and they got my name spelled right, for a wonder.”<sup>81</sup>

This both irritated and amused him. While he had many clients in Louisville, Kentucky, Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, he had just as many scattered over the country in small towns and medium-sized cities. “It is remarkable how many parts of the country I am getting familiar with. I begin to feel like a commercial traveler in that respect, but fortunately do not have to be always pushing in where I am not invited nor always trying to sell someone something they do not want!”<sup>82</sup> More likely than not, wherever John Charles Olmsted traveled, he was late coming from somewhere and later going somewhere else.

## Less than Perfect Accommodations

These problems with travel did not end at the station. While John Charles Olmsted had a rule that he did not stay with clients because they took up too much of his time, his accommodations in hotels were often less than perfect. Hotel rooms were too hot or too cold or sometimes not even available. “The hotel is crowded and I could get no room but only a bed in a hallway.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 10, 1909.

<sup>81</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 22, 1909.

<sup>82</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 3, 1907.

<sup>83</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 5, 1906.

A few years later, he wrote home that he had trouble getting his laundry done and that someone had taken his valise from his room to the baggage room. "Sounds rather grand to call it my room when there were five of us shared it."<sup>84</sup> By 1916, hotels were full of conventions. Stopping in Kansas City, he wrote that all the hotels in town were full of men from the American Bankers Association. "They directed me to a Turkish Bath and said I could sleep there. I tried to but it was hot and close and very noisy."<sup>85</sup>

Often the hotels were less than modern. Asking for the location of the toilet, John Charles Olmsted was directed to a room, where despite the word, "Toilet" on the door, he could not find it. Finally, he realized that he was expected to use the stove. "It has a wooden seat on it and a wooden step. The stove pipe is all right I don't know whether they have a fire in it daily. It was not offensive at the time. That is a new scheme to me. I suppose it is to save the expense of plumbing."<sup>86</sup>

Despite these seemingly primitive conditions, he tried always to stay in a first class hotel. The cost bothered him. "I can't remember ever doing that on business trips. One reason why I don't is because it is not customary. People will pay more to the professional man who lives in the best hotel than to the same man living in a boarding house so it wouldn't be policy to do it. It's a queer instance of human illogicality."<sup>87</sup>

No matter what the class of hotel, they began to look alike.

That I am in this hotel is a joke on me. Others got out of the bus here and I followed them thinking it was the Radisson. There is a similarity between them as you will see by comparing the cut on the envelope with the above. Both are on the same side of a cross street and only a block apart. Both have lace curtains behind plate glass windows. The lobby did not look quite natural but both are new and lined with marble. Both are new and fireproof. It is not open and right of Radisson. There is a three story building there. I did not notice my mistake until I had reached my room and was taking my bath when I noticed the name on the bath mat! However

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<sup>84</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 10, 1910.

<sup>85</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 27, 1916.

<sup>86</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 6, 1909.

<sup>87</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 17, 1918.

it makes no real difference. I went to the Radisson later to inquire for telegrams so I missed nothing.”<sup>88</sup>

As the fortunes of his clients changed, so did the owners of the hotels in which he stayed. “In the bathroom of my room is a ‘quarter in the slot’ dry store--eight kinds of toilet articles such as toothbrush, tooth paste, shaving soap, safety razor, headache and constipation medicines, etc. I never saw that before. This is no longer the swell hotel. I get a room with bath for the day for \$1.50 while they charged me \$2.00 at The Yates, Syracuse, New York and that isn’t fireproof nor modern. Still it is respectable and just as comfortable as ever.”<sup>89</sup>

The inconveniences of hotels, combined with the loneliness of being on the road by himself, made John Charles Olmsted both bored and sad. He looked for innovation and peculiarities and wrote to Fidie about it. “Here I have a nice cheerful room but it is decidedly small--only 9’2” wide and 13’6” long. It has a bathroom 5’1” by 8’1” long which is just about as small as a bath room should be although if a porcelain tub is built into the walls on two sides, a few inches could be saved. There is no closet nor is there a door into the next room, which is perhaps a good thing or there would be no place for my long trunk.”<sup>90</sup> Out of boredom, he even measured his food. “I mentioned the smallness of the grapefruit. I had the curiosity to measure one. It was two and five-eighths inches across and three and five-eighths outside only! One-half inch skin—and very green inside at that.”<sup>91</sup>

### Office Accommodations in Hotels

By 1900, most hotels had “working rooms” for businessmen to work in and typewriters to help them, but it was not always competent help.<sup>92</sup> These hotel working rooms with typewriters were not equipped to deal with businessmen like John Charles Olmsted, a landscape architect and planner, but rather business travelers who wanted a couple of letters typed, not the hundreds of pages of reports that John Charles Olmsted needed. But the written work was slow, no matter

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<sup>88</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 25, 1911.

<sup>89</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 28, 1916.

<sup>90</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 5, 1907.

<sup>91</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 21, 1910.

<sup>92</sup> Typists were known as, “typewriters.”



how it was done. "It is decidedly slower than dictating to a stenographer. I suppose the trade is for business men who have only short letters and want them done while they wait so to speak."<sup>93</sup>

In a day that John Charles Olmsted wrote fifteen letters, twelve were to be typewritten. While John Charles Olmsted appreciated that there were three operators instead of the usual one or two, it did not make the workers go fast enough for him. While writing out the letters and then having them typewritten was slower than dictating to a stenographer, he thought that it made better reading. "Easy writing,' you know, 'makes hard reading.' I have forgotten who said it. If I could think the matter all out thoroughly and revise and improve it in my mind before dictating it would go fairly well but I am not skilled in that way."<sup>94</sup> Writing out the letters and reports and then having them typed meant that he would have to labor over the work extra days and that meant that he would be delayed in getting home.<sup>95</sup>

He frequently had difficulties in getting his work typed by local typewriters and dictated to in-house stenographers. He complained that local help, both men and women, were not very efficient. "I have not accomplished very much of tangible value here although I have been busy all the time. I dictated my report to Mr. Blattner (twelve pages) and today I corrected it and the carbon which was a slow tedious matter as there were 159 corrections!"<sup>96</sup>

Sometimes even getting help was a problem. Returning to the hotel from mailing a couple of letters in Portland, Oregon, he caught the stenographer with her hat and coat on about to leave the workroom, leaving John Charles Olmsted's work undone. She had only typed one page of his report. He begged her to stay and after some discussion she agreed to. He was dismayed to find that she wanted him to re-dictate the report all over again as she typed it. He replied that he could not remember all the report and was sure he would leave out important ideas. He insisted that she type the report from her stenographic notes.

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<sup>93</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 10, 1904.

<sup>94</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 8, 1904.

<sup>95</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 3, 1905.

<sup>96</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 30, 1910.

To make matters worse, she admitted that she could not read her own notes. She had written out the dictation long hand and had missed most of what he said. She started trying to transcribe these notes and asked him to fill in the material every fourth word! To add to his frustration with her, a man arrived to take her home and she wanted to leave, telling John Charles Olmsted that she would take the material home and read it over so she could do it first thing in the morning. He did not trust her and persisted. "I dare say it was beastly irritating to her to puzzle over her notes and wait for me to think of something that would make sense."<sup>97</sup>

Toward the end of the 90 minutes he got her to stay, he caught her cheating again. She put a book in the way of her notebook so John Charles Olmsted could not see her note pad. Thinking that she could fool him, she started skipping sentences. Since he was watching what she typed and being familiar with his own report, he caught her. He finally dismissed her in frustration. "That is the worst of that kind—they will promise anything and attempt things they know they can't do. Both she and the Hotel stenographer put aside my work to do letters for anyone who came along without the least concern for the promises as to time they had made me," he wrote home.<sup>98</sup>

Problems occurred with other local help too. "It is wasteful of my time to do such jobs away from the office, but they are in such a hurry I could not postpone it longer and the lazy engineer took three months to do two or three days work on the survey," he wrote in relation to a plan for Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>99</sup> Miss Bullard and draughtsman Percy Jones offered to come out to Seattle to help with work but John Charles Olmsted rejected the idea as being too expensive without proper return. "I could accomplish more and earn more but no one wants to pay enough to include them."<sup>100</sup>

### No Schedule

Even in his daily existence on the road, he had no schedule. If the trains were on time, John Charles Olmsted arrived in the station at breakfast time. Sometimes clients met him at the station. On one occasion, he almost missed his client because the man did not want to leave his

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<sup>97</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 7, 1906.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 18, 1906.

wife with the horses so he sent her to find John Charles Olmsted. Although he had female clients, John Charles Olmsted would have never looked for a woman at the station. As he walked away, the husband and wife (now back in the carriage) finally found him. Despite the confusion, he later wrote, "They have bought a choice place and it will be a pleasure to help them to improve it."<sup>101</sup>

After checking into his hotel, he contacted his clients. Since he had no office, John Charles Olmsted had to meet the clients on their terms. This meant meetings in a variety of places, including John Charles Olmsted's hotel, businessmen's offices, businessmen's clubs, at proposed sites, and at their houses. In all cases, he was at the mercy of his clients' schedules. Frequently, he complained about meeting someone to discuss a job and being kept waiting, sometimes for hours. When the clients finally met with him, they took up too much of his time, either on asking him to repeat ideas already discussed or on matters unrelated to the job. Sometimes he got talked into coming to his clients' dinner parties and these events were never a pleasurable experience. John Charles Olmsted did not have confidence in his abilities to make conversation and these evening were never remembered as pleasant ones. Yet, they were important ways in which he made contact with new clients.

#### *No Reliable Schedule for Work Away from the Office*

John Charles Olmsted kept in constant contact with the office so that letters and work-related materials could reach him as soon as possible. Yet, his schedule was rarely set. "Fact is, that losing one day in train and one or two by rains and other by general slowness of events and lack of assistants to execute my ideas my stay here is being prolonged and so far as I can see will continue the rest of this week. Anyway I am rarely able to stick to a schedule made before I leave Brookline."<sup>102</sup>

There was always special pressure to get back to Brookline by late June in order to go up with the family to Maine to open the house for the summer. "This morning I gratified myself by buying my ticket for Minneapolis and this afternoon by telegraphing our office as to my

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<sup>100</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 6, 1907.

<sup>101</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 20, 1901.

movements. I plan at present to get home to breakfast Monday June 26th.” He wrote that he could be delayed further by a day’s work in Louisville, Kentucky. “It bothers me to have to make definite appointments so far ahead. I like to work along till the job is done and then take up the next one. But in this case some sewerage engineers are to meet me at Louisville and they must know the date in time to arrange to meet me there or one of them.”<sup>103</sup> Because of the changes in schedule, hotels forwarded his mail, often from place to place. Letters from his wife arrived out of the order she mailed them because of these changes in schedule, but since she was “not writing a serial story with much of a plot it hasn’t made much difference.”<sup>104</sup> Sometimes packages arrived at hotels and days went by before they were given to John Charles Olmsted.

### Problems of Men Coming out from the Firm to do Work on the Road

Even when John Charles Olmsted started traveling with draughtsmen from the firm, he was not guaranteed that they would always travel with him for the long periods of time he was away from Brookline. The men might be with him for a week or so, but were then needed back at the office on other jobs. If they traveled to the West Coast with him, on their way back to Brookline, they might stop along the way to see how other jobs were proceeding. He opined that it would be better to travel with a draughtsman used to the firm’s way of working to make plans in direct consultation with clients. “If I do I ought to avoid taking a married one as it would be cruel to treat such a one as I do myself! Unless it is Koehler who seems to have gotten tired of his wife or she with him.”<sup>105</sup>

Generally, the draughtsmen from Brookline did not like to be away for long periods. Even the firm’s own men hired to oversee the planting of a particular job did not last long. Either they advanced in the firm and could not be spared to be away so long or took local jobs that grew out of the overseeing of the planting, opened their own firms or went to work for other design firms.

The Olmsteds did not pay their men more than other firms so money did not keep them. While men rose at the firm in terms of pay and rank, becoming a partner or member, was difficult.

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<sup>102</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 17, 1918.

<sup>103</sup> John Charles Olmsted June 12, 1911.

<sup>104</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 8, 1907.

Having worked for the Olmsteds carried a certain status. Men who had worked for them were sufficiently trained to open their own firms or do well working for the competition. Even though a core group of about ten men and women stayed for over twenty years each, turnover was fairly rapid in the lower ranks.

Complaining that one of these assistants was late getting down to breakfast, John Charles Olmsted complained that, Mr. Sloet was the third planting assistant who had worked on the job during the year. The first man left the firm; the second man was too busy with other work and had to turn the job over to Sloet.

When Sloet came, he expected the job to take not more than two weeks but had stayed for four weeks, finally leaving that day. Work was going very slowly and it was getting too late in the year for planting. John Charles Olmsted wrote that Sloet might return in December and if the ground wasn't frozen too hard may get some tree holes and shrub beds dug and prepared.<sup>106</sup> The turnover of men doing the supervisory work was not good for business. Each time a new man came out, he had to acquaint himself with the work and the workers doing it. Clients did not like it and it meant more work for the Olmsted office too. John Charles Olmsted had other work to do too.

He enjoyed having men from the office assist him, but he did not see much of them except for the rare meal. Also, having a man from the firm help with the work did not help John Charles Olmsted with the eight or ten reports he had to do at one time nor with the letter writing and consultation with clients.<sup>107</sup> Sometimes the clients could not wait for John Charles Olmsted to make notes and send them back to Brookline to be turned into designs. "Of course, if I were at our office I should have a draughtsman working out my ideas but they are in a hurry to get on with the work so I can't send it home to be worked up after I get home. It is getting to be a great nuisance trying to do work so far away."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 17, 1909.

<sup>106</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 19, 1916.

<sup>107</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 5, 1907.

<sup>108</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 12, 1908.

## **Good Days/Bad Days**

In his letters, John Charles Olmsted often remarked on whether or not it had been a good day. From this rather broad generalization of good and bad, it is possible to discern what drove John Charles Olmsted in a positive way and what held him back in his work. Sometimes, the bad came with the good. "I like the wild open landscape very much and I only regret to be planning to spoil it with roads and houses and stables, it would be fine if one man would buy the whole of it and just keep it as it is. This sort of work is so good for my health that I feel as if I ought to be glad to do it for nothing pay [except] all my expenses! But of course we must stick to business."<sup>109</sup>

While patterns emerged over the years of what constituted a good or a bad work day, it is difficult to assess his career in these terms. The impact of the complications of his poor health, World War I, and the fact that the end of his career coincided with the first year after the war combine to make it difficult to offer sweeping generalizations about his work on the road. Instead, what emerged were consistencies that followed John Charles Olmsted throughout his career: his commitment to his work and the profession, and an optimism that he could make a positive difference in the American landscape. Negatively, he never stopped complaining about the amount of time he thought he wasted most days; he rarely had enough time to do his work in the way he wanted. Yet he hardly ever turned down a job, although he missed his wife and daughters every day. "I'm getting homesick. I want to get back to them and you," he wrote.<sup>110</sup>

But his complaints were generally comments on the lack of efficiency of doing work on the road. No Miss Bullard was there to break into a meeting and tell him that his next appointment was waiting. No office boy fetched John Charles Olmsted's plans or office supplies.

His standards never wavered during his career nor did the volume of the work. At the age of 65, he was still managing 50 jobs at one time. Although he wrote that he was "naturally slow in

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<sup>109</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 5, 1906.

<sup>110</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 28, 1911.

drafting, writing, making notes on ground, staking work and photo work,”<sup>111</sup> he oversaw 3500 jobs during his tenure as head of the office.<sup>112</sup>

### Good Days

What constituted a good day also often included: trains running on schedule, not being rushed with his work, being outside and walking, good weather, good landscape, good help, either in the form of a man from the office or the services of a local competent draughtsman or typewriter.

A good day usually included a client who seemed satisfied that he had gotten his money’s worth in the form of good advice.<sup>113</sup> When the landscape was “beautiful,” and the clients were disposed to treat him respectfully, it made John Charles Olmsted want to do everything he could on the job.<sup>114</sup> “I enjoy the work because it is a beautiful property and is going to be improved in a good fashion,” he wrote about a private estate in Louisville, Kentucky. He liked to see his planning work realized even though he was disturbed by minor changes made without the courtesy of consulting him.<sup>115</sup>

Good weather played a factor in the enjoyment of his work. “It is good healthful work besides being interesting because the ‘ground covering’ is so beautiful and the views so fine,” he wrote from Good Ground, New York.<sup>116</sup> Despite extreme frustration with a number of factors concerning his plan for the Panama-California Exposition, John Charles Olmsted loved the climate of San Diego, California. Writing about a drive with Dawson, by then an associate member of the firm, he was impressed by the 30 different blooming species in Balboa Park. “Goodness! It is going to be hard to tear myself away from this flowery place!”<sup>117</sup>

### Bad Days

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<sup>111</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 6, 1907.

<sup>112</sup> Pray, James Sturgis. “John Charles Olmsted: A Minute on his Life and Service.” prepared for the Board of Trustees of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Landscape Architecture, vol 12, no. 3 April 1922. P. 132.

<sup>113</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 12, 1900.

<sup>114</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 19, 1905.

<sup>115</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 12, 1906.

<sup>116</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 21, 1906.

Conversely, a bad day included: bad weather, riding in a carriage that made him feel ill, poor health, uncooperative clients, lack of resources to do a good job, too much work, not enough time to write reports, too much rushing around, time wasted, and deficient resources in local draughtmen, and the almost always incompetent typewriters and other women (rarely, a man), hired to help him finish a report. He thought his visits to jobs and clients were always too brief. Going to a place and doing plans there saved valuable time and enabled him to make “better and more acceptable” designs. But he accomplished more planning at home with the “aid of trained assistants” than he did away from home when he tried to elaborate plans alone.”<sup>118</sup> He wrote that it was a great disadvantage to be away from the office for such long periods of time. Pressing to finish a job meant doing less than the best with other work.<sup>119</sup> But being at the office had its problems too. Referring to a plan that was a month late, he wrote, “I seem to get no time to do my studying of plans at the office and that is the one thing I can do best and enjoy doing.”<sup>120</sup>

### *Bad Weather*

Bad weather factored into his experience of a site. In Frankfort, Kentucky, walking around a site, he was bothered by rain and changed his mind about noting data on the topographical map he carried with him. “It was too flimsy to expose to wind and drizzle and besides it takes longer to scale each measurement. So I just sketched on cards by my eye with little regard to correct proportions and jotted down the figures and notes.”<sup>121</sup>

But no matter where he worked, his enjoyment of the beauty of nature was diminished by his anxiety “as to the almost certain partial failure of my ideals which detract from the pleasure of my work.”<sup>122</sup> He recognized that a park plan, even with grass and bushes and trees, took years to fill in and be complete. “Anyhow, there are few artificially created park scenes that can compete with wild natural scenes.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 22, 1910.

<sup>118</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 11, 1898.

<sup>119</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 14, 1899.

<sup>120</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 11, 1902.

<sup>121</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 1, 1908.

<sup>122</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 5, 1899.

<sup>123</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 9, 1900.



Out in the field, John Charles Olmsted was often alone; he had to bring everything with him. “I left my baggage at the Reform Club to pick up on my return tonight but am carrying my overcoat, big Kodak, extra roll of films, my tripod, my field glass and five Shredded Wheat biscuits and a stick of chocolate. I expected to eat two Shredded Wheat biscuits for breakfast and two for lunch and one for dinner in buffet returning this evening.”<sup>124</sup>

### *Too Much or Too Little Work*

There was always the conflict between having too much work to do and not wanting to refuse good employment. He often had to leave one city for another before feeling like he had finished enough work to go onto a new job. “It certainly bothers me more to have too much work than too little because I have some income to piece out deficient earnings if I had too little work.”<sup>125</sup> But John Charles Olmsted never allowed himself to have too little work. His 1916 trip West when he was 64 years old included 40 jobs, 24 of which were new, and, he had to write out records and often letter and reports, even on the small jobs.<sup>126</sup> Of course, this did not include his jobs back East. Even so, he never lost the joy of satisfying clients. “He agreed to my formal garden plan and didn’t mind the expense of walls or anything. Which made me happy and leads to my staying longer. I not only like bringing the business into the firm, but like having my plans accepted when made,” he wrote home.

Five months later, as World War I still raged, he wrote home that his business was “gradually all disappearing. Perhaps I shouldn’t say all. I mean a number of the most important and best paying ones.”<sup>127</sup> During the war a number of the firm’s men were drafted into the Army and the firm had to do with a reduced number of men. Also, clients did not feel disposed to spending money on their landscapes. Construction on a number of jobs that came into the firm during the war was not started until it was over.

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<sup>124</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 29, 1902. John Charles Olmsted was in Pennsylvania Ferry.

<sup>125</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 9, 1908.

<sup>126</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 31, 1916.

<sup>127</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 14, 1918.

During this time, John Charles Olmsted and family moved from their rental house at 16 Warren Street to his wife's larger family home at 222 Warren Street.<sup>128</sup> The move involved many renovations to 222, as John Charles Olmsted called it in his letters. "That matter of economizing is so uncongenial and so strange to me that I am constantly dodging it. I suppose we ought to economize in general and particular. I am always doing a little in particular but I am averse to the general cut down."<sup>129</sup>

### *Lack of Exercise*

Any day was a bad day that did not include exercise for John Charles Olmsted. He attributed all physical ills to a lack of exercise. "I hardly know what to do. Whether to sacrifice my work in quantity and quality or sacrifice my health which may very likely result the same in the end." He wrote that he used to pay more attention to his health before he was head of the firm. Because of the burdens of being senior partner and having no one else to ease them except his already overburdened half-brother, he thought that he had no options.<sup>130</sup> He worried about Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s lack of exercise too. "I fear that Rick neglects his exercise. I know that I don't get enough to keep my bowels active. One can always yield to the need of spending all day at one's desk. One quits one's desk for lunch and supper but to quit for exercise always seems like quitting for mere idleness."<sup>131</sup>

### *Tricky Clients*

A bad day might include meeting with a park commission that was more interested in avoiding public opposition than agreeing to the best design solution. Instead of making decisions based on his professional advice, this sort of client yielded to public opinion, often to ignorance. "That kind of man I cannot like to work with or for. He is the kind who after a million has been spent to create a beautiful meadow... would be disposed to yield at once to the pressure of ... citizens for a speedway to be built right through the middle of it. I never feel safe with such men."<sup>132</sup> A bad client did not want to spend the money it took to do a good job. "They can perfectly well afford the luxury of employing a high-priced professional advisor but the local tradition are

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<sup>128</sup> Fairsted, the Olmsted office, was approximately equidistant from both addresses.

<sup>129</sup> John Charles Olmsted July 9, 1918.

<sup>130</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 23, 1900.

<sup>131</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 28, 1918.

against it. They do not realize that times have changed and old standards no longer apply,” he wrote in reference to a group of individual clients in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>133</sup>

Such frustration continued through his career. In Columbus, Ohio to do a design for the Lima State Hospital, John Charles Olmsted had problems with the commissioners. “They do not appreciate landscape work. They are farmers and business men and ‘practical’ men. They do not allow me to incur draughting and traveling expenses needed to put my ideas in shape and do not understand plans and simply ignore them and settle each practical question as it come up without regard to any general plan or policy.” He went on to write that that the commissioners were no different from any other group for whom he worked. “I find college presidents and so on just about as indifferent to having a general plan worked out by an expert and then sticking to it.”<sup>134</sup>

Time was a valuable commodity and his clients kept stealing it from him. In Louisville, Kentucky to confer with commissioners for a park in nearby Anchorage, Kentucky, he despaired. “Sorry they make me waste so much time. Perfectly uselessly.” He imagined that the commission was made up of local politicians and small business men who would pick at every detail and try to bargain him down in price. “...I rather fancy they really have no idea of [hiring me] but are merely dallying with the idea to please the ladies and because politicians dislike to say no positively and have done with it.”<sup>135</sup>

Clients could be frustrating. At the University of Ohio, John Charles Olmsted noted that the university buildings looked awful and he wrote that he would have to make more visits there because “they will not write and ask for advice-they will spend ten times as much time, many hours in fact, discussing the matter with Tom, Dick or Harry who are not experts rather than spending ten minutes dictating a letter to us.”<sup>136</sup>

While clients could be problems, he recognized that sometimes he was the problem. He remarked that he had not gotten much park work in Seattle recently since one of the

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<sup>132</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 17, 1900.

<sup>133</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 11, 1906.

<sup>134</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 29, 1914.

<sup>135</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 14, 1915.

commissioners went off the board. He attributed this situation to his hurried visits in the past and neglecting stops to get acquainted with the new commissioners. He did not give them enough time and “they felt slighted and had no encouragement to consult him farther.”<sup>137</sup> Park business was “fussy with lots of details.” The worst of it was that the work could not be done at home like plans based on good topographical maps of properties he had only seen in a general way.<sup>138</sup>

### *Women Clients*

Women were just as challenging clients as their male counterparts. Walking down the street, John Charles Olmsted was confronted by Mrs. Talbott driving by in her car. She made him get in the car “with three or four of her unhealthy children” so she could talk about some work she wanted him to carry out on her property. “Very enthusiastic, but poor Mr. has to supply the money and with so many expenses as socially ambitious people have it’s hard to find it!, ” he wrote home.<sup>139</sup>

Social climbing as well as flightiness, in this case changing their minds on selecting lots in a development, “is said to be characteristic of women.” He wrote that this problem was not unknown in men and was due to a lack of practical business experience in business. He further cited the problem of a woman who wanted, initially, to give unconditionally a large piece of land for a park. He despaired that the city now might refuse it because she had come up with a list of conditions for the gift.<sup>140</sup> He was not a misogynist. When he was hired to choose the architectural plan for a new dormitory for a college in Columbus, Ohio, he was impressed by a female architect’s work. “I was in sympathy with the woman’s work but it had too many amenities and half the students as others’ work. The university wanted economy and although I was drawn to her work, it had to be rejected.”<sup>141</sup>

He believed in the prevailing thinking of the day about women. “So far as I have heard the opinions of scientists that they find that women average quicker witted than men but have less

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<sup>136</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 28, 1907.

<sup>137</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 11, 1907.

<sup>138</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 26, 1907.

<sup>139</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 24, 1915.

<sup>140</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 7, 1906.

<sup>141</sup> John Charles Olmsted September 29, 1906.

staying power intellectually and physically in case of prolonged heavy mental work.” He wrote that he did not understand why women were upset because they were not hired for the same jobs as men. He thought that women should “calmly accept the situation.” Pointing out that men were not all of the same in ability, he reminded his wife that men of lesser abilities and strength took different jobs from ones of greater intellectual capacity and physical endurance. “I do not see what all the fuss is about.”<sup>142</sup>

## Reports

Reports always took up much of John Charles Olmsted’s time. In speaking about the promise to have plans completed for an university, he wrote, “These promises to have things done at a certain time are about the most worrisome thing that occurs in our practice. But the worst is a promise to get a report ready by a certain time.”<sup>143</sup> He wrote two kinds of reports; the first was a report of a site visit. “It seems a waste of time but a record is necessary as I cannot remember all the facts I learn and such works sometimes continue for years and I never know when I may need to refer back to the record. Besides the men in office are liable to need to look up my record.”<sup>144</sup>

The second type of report was the written explanation of a plan and ideas for future work that accompanied all park planning and bigger jobs. These park reports were divided into three sections: the first part was suitable for publication; the second part contained his suggestions for land to be added to the park and was not for publication because speculators might act on the information; and the third part contained detailed advice for the park superintendent for implementation of part one.<sup>145</sup> These reports were often long and always painful. “I wish I never had another report to write! ... At 5:00 P.M., I finished the Dayton report and letter as to it and I have since mailed it. Thank goodness! I hate these reports! 117 pages.”<sup>146</sup> Often he had to read the reports to park commissioners. “I got to the Essex County park office about 9:20am. I read

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<sup>142</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 9, 1910.

<sup>143</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 14, 1899.

<sup>144</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 8, 1911.

<sup>145</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 15, 1915.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

part of my report to Church and Reynolds before lunch and some more after lunch but only got to page 108.”<sup>147</sup>

Report writing plagued John Charles Olmsted throughout his career. “It would be well enough and nothing to complain of if it were not for the awful delay in getting that revised Essex County Parkway report done. It is like a nightmare hanging over me all the time especially every time I get some other job to do.”<sup>148</sup> It did not matter where he was; he never seemed to have enough time to write. “I wish I could disappear and write solely on those two reports [Anchorage, Kentucky and Niagara Falls. NewYork]. But worst of all is to return to the office. There I’m kept busy every day and get no time for report writing. But I don’t dare to ‘disappear’.”<sup>149</sup>

## Lecturing

Meeting a client rarely meant meeting with one person. John Charles Olmsted got many of his jobs from his client contacts. Businessmen took him to their clubs where he met their friends and colleagues and that almost always lead to other jobs. Planning a public job required him to go to park commission meetings. John Charles Olmsted presented his plans to these meetings as well as giving lectures on the firm’s work. He also lectured to groups, especially in college/university towns. He was inclined to be very critical of his performance at these lectures. “I did not talk long enough to bore them but I don’t think such esthetic considerations appeal much to the businessmen who compose the committee.”<sup>150</sup>

While in Champaign, Illinois to do some work at the University of Illinois, John Charles Olmsted dined at the president’s house and afterwards lectured to a large group. Leading up to the firm’s design work involving university grounds, he noted later that he surprised himself by speaking fluently to the crowd. Starting with brief sketches of the worthies (A.J. Downing, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted), he followed by describing the kind of work the firm carried out. “I talked straight along with scarce any pause and surprised myself by my readiness.

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<sup>147</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 15, 1914.

<sup>148</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 12, 1915.

<sup>149</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 1, 1915.

<sup>150</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 29, 1907.

Of course, any one ought to be able to talk on his own profession as his mind is certainly familiar with lots of ideas.”<sup>151</sup>

## **Money**

Sometimes John Charles Olmsted had to stay in one place and finish work in order to get paid. Finishing a report on park boundaries in Portland, OR meant that he could present his work at a commission meeting and collect payment for the bill. Finishing a couple of reports allowed him to collect bills to pay his traveling expenses. Sometimes he left anyway and did so with regrets. “It forces upon me the conviction that I am trying to do too many things and yet it would seem foolish to refuse good employment. . . . It certainly bothers me to have too much work then too little because I [would] have some income to piece out deficient earning if I had too little work.”<sup>152</sup>

He was always concerned about the amount of money he was bringing into the firm. “I should like to help any worthy and appreciative person at little cost, but being busy enough with better paying work I am apt to feel glad when I escape small jobs.”<sup>153</sup> He usually worked in rapidly growing cities where he saw developers buy former farm land for suburban development at \$100-\$200 an acre and sell it from \$800-\$1000 an acre.<sup>154</sup>

Besides having to worry about the quality and volume of work he was able to do on the road, John Charles Olmsted had to keep track of the expenses incurred. He wrote to his wife about spending a whole day trying to work out his cash account expenses for a trip from Brookline to Portland, Oregon with stops on the way. Having traveled west for sixteen clients, he combined them into sixteen headings or accounts, although he visited more places than that.

First he divided the general traveling expenses among fifteen clients in such a way that no one was charged any part of the expenses beyond his city. From Brookline to Chicago, all fifteen

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<sup>151</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 11, 1906.

<sup>152</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 9, 1908.

<sup>153</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 28, 1910.

<sup>154</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 27, 1910.

clients shared the expense but not equally. From Chicago to St. Paul, fourteen clients shared it. Obviously this meant that he had one client in Chicago. Then he made a side trip to Winnipeg for one client and afterwards traveled to Spokane, Washington so he charged the side trip to the Winnipeg client and then deducted the \$55 it would have cost to go directly from St. Paul to Spokane, dividing that sum among thirteen clients. The expenses from Spokane to Kennewick were divided among nine clients, and then the trip to Portland was divided among eight clients.

In addition to charging everyone an allocated share of the general travel expenses, he charged each client with the special expenses incurred on the particular jobs, such as car fare. Also, he totaled all the expenses of living in a particular city (including hotel bill, food, waiter tips, boot/shoes cleaning), averaged it to be so much a day, and charged the appropriate clients for that part of the trip. He believed that the share for each client of general traveling expenses was low except when he stayed and wrote reports, as he did for the Uplands subdivision in Canada, or to draw a big plan, as he did for the Portland, Oregon park commission. There the living expenses were high, over \$100 for the former and \$140 for the latter.<sup>155</sup> The expense was also high in terms of John Charles Olmsted's time to figure out these expenses; he had spent a whole day figuring them out.

Getting to a place and figuring out his expenses in a city often proved difficult. "I spent a lot of time sorting out my traveling expense account so I could make out bill tomorrow against the Park Commission here. I found how my time was divided while here.

Portland Parks--2.5 days

Uplands plan--3 days

McMinnville College--2 days

Mrs. JF Failing--visit and plan--1.5 days

Hazel Fern Farm--.5 day

Henry Hewett .25 day

JC Ainsworth .25 day

Vista Ave. .5 day"<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 10, 1909.

<sup>156</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 4, 1907.



He worked out that out of fifteen days, ten and one-half of them were billable. He wrote that the rest of his time was spent in letter and record writing, errands and odds and ends. He was not up to date with all his records but he wrote that he had spent time on each of them and some were complete. "I would have got along better here if I had not had that Uplands plan to revise but I do not regret that. It is a good paying job and deserves all the time I have put on it and more too."<sup>157</sup>

In estimating costs for his clients, John Charles Olmsted typically gave a high price, with the idea that "I did not want to guess low as it has a better effect to come down step by step as the result of further study."<sup>158</sup> Sometimes he bid too high in order to avoid doing the job. "But worst of all everything done must be of the very cheapest so I scared him off by naming a good large sum for our probable expense. That ended it and I am relieved."<sup>159</sup>

### **Panama-California Exposition**

The range of John Charles Olmsted's experience on the road may be seen in his work for the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, California. This job demonstrates the range of John Charles Olmsted's abilities and gives the reader the full scope of the joys and frustrations of a landscape architect/planner doing business on the road in the first twenty years of the twentieth century.

### **History of the site**

In 1868, 1400 acres were set aside in San Diego for a city park. Despite frequent disagreements between open space proponents and those against it, by 1909, only a hundred acres had been landscaped.<sup>160</sup> A high school (five acres), home for elderly women (not yet built), and a nursery (thirty-two acres) were the only elements planned for and built in the park, all located in the southeastern portion of the city. In July 1909, C. Aubrey Davidson, founder of two banks and the president of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, suggested to the group that San Diego stage an exposition in 1915 to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal. Even though San Diego

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 18, 1906.

<sup>159</sup> John Charles Olmsted October 15, 1909.

(39,578) had a small population in relation to Los Angeles (319,198) and San Francisco (416,912), Davidson pointed out that San Diego would be the first American port of call north of the canal on the Pacific Ocean coast. Davidson suggested that an exposition would call attention to the city and bolster the economy. The Chamber of Commerce gave permission to Davidson to look into the matter and in September 1909, the Panama-California Exposition Company was formed. Real estate developer Colonel David “Charlie” Collier was selected to be Director-General of the Exposition. Collier chose City Park as the exposition site, Mission Revival as the exposition style, and human progress as the theme.<sup>161</sup> The Exposition was planned to be built in the southeastern section of the City Park near the high school, as an extension of the city.

Despite an announcement from the City of San Francisco for a competing exposition, San Diego proceeded with its plans. Collier worked out a compromise with the planners for the San Francisco exposition that they would support San Francisco’s bid for an international fair if they could hold a smaller fair of their own. Even though the San Francisco group tried to undermine the San Diego group, \$1,000,000 of stock subscriptions were sold and the voters of San Diego approved \$1,850,000 in park improvement bonds.

### Olmsted Brothers gets the Job

On November 9, 1910, George W. Marston, chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, hired Olmsted Brothers to design the general layout of the Exposition and the landscaping plan. The Olmsted firm was at least the second choice.<sup>162</sup> Daniel Burnham, the Chicago architect and planner of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois, was the first choice. Collier argued that the Committee should hire the best designer, not just for the presumed high quality results, but also for the good advertising and the ability to attract people to the Exposition. Luckily for the Olmsted firm, Burnham turned Marston down because of prior commitments, and Olmsted Brothers was hired for a flat fee of \$15,000.

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<sup>160</sup> Montes, Gregory. Balboa Park. 1909-1911: “The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan. San Diego”: The Journal of San Diego History, vol. 28, no. 1. P. 46.

<sup>161</sup> San Diego Historical Society. Panama-California Exposition-San Diego-1915-1916. 1996. <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/pancal>. P. 1

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3 West Coast landscape architects Samuel Parsons, Jr. and John Nolen were also considered.

John Charles Olmsted arrived in San Diego in early November 1910. He wrote his wife, “I enclose clippings which show (with usual discount for reporters’ errors) about how matters stand.”<sup>163</sup> Three days later he was working on the plan for the Exposition, meeting with the surveyor, Bissell. They discussed bridges and buildings, methods, and cost of construction. The park was cut up by deep ravines, 100-150 feet deep, and John Charles Olmsted suggested that bridges would facilitate traffic east and west.<sup>164</sup>

### The Plan

Although he regretted the incursion of the high school and an “Old Womens Home” into the park, John Charles Olmsted realized that they would be difficult to remove and he incorporated them in his plan. He imagined that the proposed stadium, auditorium, outdoor gymnasium, and tennis courts could be used after the Exposition, with the auditorium becoming an indoor gymnasium and the rest of the buildings used by the school also.

For the Exposition, he planned wide boulevards and arcaded sidewalks covered with flowering vines. He designed the bridges spanning the deep canyons in a Mission style. In another ravine/canyon, he planned an Italian garden. “I never bothered much about Italian gardens because our climate isn’t adapted to them. But here it is different. It’s just the thing,” he wrote to his wife. He suggested that his sister Marion come out to San Diego and help with the design and execution of this garden.<sup>165</sup>

By November 21st, John Charles Olmsted had completed his design and the estimate for the job, \$1,567,000, including the four permanent buildings the park commissioners wanted to build: the art museum, auditorium, Greek theater, and the stadium. He already sensed that the price was too high and that he would have to go through the “tedious and painful process of cutting down.”<sup>166</sup> On the next day, he met with the Exposition Commission, and they liked his design but said that

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<sup>163</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 8, 1910.

<sup>164</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 11, 1910.

<sup>165</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 15, 1910. While Marion did not officially work for the firm, she had a “good eye.” Besides assisting in the landscape plan for Fairsted, it was she who chose the red color for Fairsted, insisting that the original gray color was drab. After Frederick Law Olmsted’s death the firm paid her an allowance for photographs of gardens she took on a couple of trips to Europe.

<sup>166</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 21, 1910.

the cost was prohibitive and must be reduced. "I dread that operation," John Charles Olmsted wrote home.<sup>167</sup>

### Help Planning the Exposition

John Charles Olmsted received both solicited and unsolicited help from locals. W.D. Cook, who had worked in the Olmsted office in Brookline from 1892-1905 and was now living in Los Angeles, came to help with estimating and drafting, but he had work in Los Angeles too and kept going back for other work. "I should like someone to help me but I don't feel like getting a man from our office until the survey is completed so he can stay long enough to be worthwhile."<sup>168</sup>

Bissell, the surveyor, helped him with the estimate, but he was unreliable and had to be watched all the time, so John Charles Olmsted could not do any other work. "Besides he makes mistakes and is all the time inclined to name too low prices—a very unsafe assistant."<sup>169</sup> When the Exposition Committee was deciding how to choose an architect, John Charles Olmsted spoke up and recommended that they not hold a competition but just hire Irving Gill, who had designed the best Spanish Mission style buildings.<sup>170</sup> Gill had a bad reputation in terms of engineering and the business side of architecture, so John Charles Olmsted suggested that an engineer be hired to help with those aspects. The Committee wanted to open the competition to West Coast architects but compromised by asking only San Diego architects to compete. This would not be the only time that the Committee disagreed with John Charles Olmsted.

There were daily interruptions to his work. Members of the Exposition Committee and the Park Board showed up without warning to discuss their own versions of the plan and ideas for its development. They had participated in the original stock subscription and felt that this enabled them to offer their opinions. The president of the playground association called and talked for quite a while but John Charles Olmsted did not think that he helped him much. A businessman "tackled" John Charles Olmsted just at his going to lunch to detail his plans for the park.

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<sup>167</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 22, 1910.

<sup>168</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 21, 1910.

<sup>169</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 28, 1910.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

“Mr. Freeman, the publicity man, amuses me most he is so eager and ingenious in getting up articles and advertisements to pay expenses of exposition circulars and so contemptuous of truth and accuracy in the pictures.”<sup>171</sup> Freeman brought an illustrator to trace John Charles Olmsted’s plan to turn it into a bird’s eye view of the Exposition. “I suppose he will imagine lots of domes and pinnacles and colonnades and cornices and porticos and all that sort of thing. I told him flat roofs and pergolas would probably predominate.”<sup>172</sup> John Charles Olmsted worried that the illustrator had done the tracing in such a hurry that he would turn roads into water basins and brooks into paths and pools into buildings, etc.

George Marston, Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee, met frequently with John Charles Olmsted too. When Marston said that some of the Park Commission members, another group that John Charles Olmsted had to contend with, wanted to cut down on the number of buildings for the Exposition, so that there would be more money to improve the park, John Charles Olmsted did not protest. More money for park improvements was the stuff of his dreams, but he did comment that Collier, the prime booster of the Exposition, wanted these buildings and should be allowed to have them.<sup>173</sup>

A couple of days later, John Charles Olmsted had done a rough design and estimate for the art museum. The Committee was very pleased and decided to invite local architects to propose plans. Marston thought that John Charles Olmsted’s estimate was too high but the Committee did not want John Charles Olmsted to redesign it, nor were they interested in spending less on it. Even so, the next day, John Charles Olmsted designed a smaller museum building. He estimated the cost by “taking its cubical contents and multiplying them by 20¢ which is a far ordinary price for a very plain but fireproof building such as this is proposed to be.”<sup>174</sup>

He received numerous bits of advice from local help as well. A gardener named Kilpatrick (“I suppose one of his ancestors killed some Pat or another”) called to offer his services.<sup>175</sup> A sculptor called too, and besides his services, he offered lava that he owned for use in the

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<sup>171</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 23, 1910.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 30, 1910.

<sup>174</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 2, 1910.

Exposition. He suggested the lava for sculpture and for architectural ornament. John Charles Olmsted thought that the photographs of the sculpture showed the work to be “very spirited and poetic in conception,” and he wrote that he would hire the man to do some garden sculpture for the Exposition.<sup>176</sup>

Along with doing plans for the exposition, John Charles Olmsted also worked on plans for City Park, now renamed Balboa Park. Studying Samuel Parsons, Jr.’s earlier plan for the Park, he wrote out criticisms of the plan and suggestions for further study on the ground. Bissell took away a fresh print of the topographical map at 200’—1” scale for the purpose of making a new estimate of cost, but the very next day, John Charles Olmsted had to do over the work himself. He had asked to have his revised plan transferred in pencil to a fresh print of the old contour map. “I enjoy draughting plans generally but this time I was aggravated and delayed by the bad draughting that an assistant of Mr. Bissell had done for me.”<sup>177</sup> His object was to prepare a clean copy of the new plan on the ten foot contours topographical map for the purposed of making a second preliminary estimate and then adjusting and reducing until he could get the cost down to where the Committee required.<sup>178</sup>

### Plea for Help

In frustration, John Charles Olmsted asked the Committee for permission to have draughtsman Harold Blossom from the Brookline Olmsted Brothers office come out and help him, at a cost of \$200 a month. He also asked that Fred Dawson, a member of the firm, be allowed to join him. The Committee granted his requests along with his proposal to have Frank Allen come before the Committee as a potential Director of Works for the Exposition. John Charles Olmsted had worked with Allen before on the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition in Seattle (1907) and he knew that if Allen was employed, “then the work would be put through in good shape and economically.”<sup>179</sup> Allen had made his reputation by completing the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition buildings before the Exposition was scheduled to open. John Charles Olmsted wanted Irving Gill appointed official architect so he could confer with him as to any needed

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<sup>175</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 11, 1910.

<sup>176</sup> John Charles Olmsted November 22, 1910.

<sup>177</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 9, 1910.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

modifications of the plan.<sup>180</sup> His sister Marion was making plans to join him.<sup>181</sup> Maybe competent help would be there soon.

### Keeping Up with other Work

While in San Diego, John Charles Olmsted tried to keep up with the work he had brought with him. Reports for the cities of Dayton, Ohio and Charleston, South Carolina needed to be finished. When John Charles Olmsted heard that Cook was urging a commission in Los Angeles to hire him to do a city plan, he wrote, “I really don’t hanker after it. What I like is planning. I have had a good dose of that today and enjoyed it.”<sup>182</sup> Using a Sunday to work on a subdivision plan for a client in Calgary, he knew that it was the one day that the “exposition people” would not bother him. His client seemed in a hurry. “Judging by past experience it will take the office a good while to get it draughted after I send it there and then it has to come to me for corrections and then back again to the office and so on.”<sup>183</sup> Every job had its ripples—there was rarely a job that could be finished in a timely fashion.

Still without outside help, Bissell finished the revised estimate. John Charles Olmsted considered leaving San Diego but decided that he would stay and write his long reports while continuing to direct the design through Dawson and Blossom when they arrived. “And the architect may be appointed soon so I may be able to give him my ideas and criticize his work.”<sup>184</sup>

John Charles Olmsted also got caught up in other work in the San Diego area. He designed a playground in the Golden Hill district for the Playground Society. “As it come in Balboa Park, it comes under my jurisdiction to design,” he wrote.<sup>185</sup> While he waited for the Exposition committee to make up their minds regarding the architect, he continued his work on the design for the rest of the Park, studying lines for part of a circuit drive in preparation for a general planting plan. He also had to re-lay out the golf course to accommodate the proposed planting in

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 10, 1910.

<sup>181</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 14, 1910.

<sup>182</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 4, 1910.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 14, 1910.

<sup>185</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 20, 1910.

the park. A new golf and country club house designed by architect Irving Gill was proposed for the block north of the park.<sup>186</sup>

#### Dawson, Blossom and Sister Marion

When Dawson arrived, he selected an office and set about to furnish it.<sup>187</sup> Blossom spent an afternoon in Balboa Park, familiarizing himself with the portion of the park planned for the Exposition.<sup>188</sup> The office was primarily for Blossom, as John Charles Olmsted liked to work in his room on jobs that did not concern Blossom and only used the office to supervise the workers. The office had north light and two windows. It was furnished with a big drawing table, rolltop desk, small table and chairs, spittoon, waste paper basket, and three drop lights.<sup>189</sup>

Marion was put to work collecting flowers, drying them and getting the names so far as she could. "I put her at it just to supply her with some occupation. It may help us to learn the names too, especially Mr. Blossom," wrote John Charles Olmsted to his wife.<sup>190</sup>

Demanding a \$20,000 salary, Frank Allen arrived and met with the Committee. While the Committee agreed to the sum, financial stipulations were introduced into his contract. If the park loan, now in doubt, was considered to be invalid, the Committee wanted the option of terminating his contract. If for some reason the Exposition was not going to proceed, the committee wanted to be able to terminate his contract, with an additional year's pay. John Charles Olmsted doubted that Allen would agree to these stipulations. "It will be a nuisance if he declines," John Charles Olmsted wrote.<sup>191</sup>

#### Irving Gill: Architect of the Exposition?

Gill was John Charles Olmsted's first choice even after a less than perfect presentation before the Committee that was reviewing the work of three local architects for the job of Exposition architect. In Gill's presentation, he argued that architects were "slaves of tradition" and used the

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<sup>186</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 13, 1911.

<sup>187</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 23, 1910.

<sup>188</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 27, 1910.

<sup>189</sup> John Charles Olmsted December 28, 1910.

<sup>190</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 8, 1911.

<sup>191</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 14, 1911.



predominant style rather than the most fitting style to the particular job. According to John Charles Olmsted, Gill then proceeded to show that he was guilty of the same design crimes himself. "He has not had the severe scientific and logical training needed," John Charles Olmsted wrote. "Still, I like his work very much."<sup>192</sup>

### Bertram Goodhue: Architect of the Exposition!

His half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., thought otherwise and wrote to Bertram Goodhue, an architect with whom he had worked and asked him if he might be interested in the architect's job for the Exposition. Goodhue was known for his Baroque Spanish Colonial style buildings and "he was elated at the thought of designing a Spanish style exposition in the evocative Mediterranean setting of southern California."<sup>193</sup> Even though the Committee had decided to hire a local architect, Goodhue, who considered himself "a shark on the sort of stuff (Spanish Colonial style) they ought to have and am pretty familiar with California conditions," lobbied influential friends for the position.<sup>194</sup>

Goodhue's friends prevailed and he was given the job as "Advisory and Consulting Architect" of the Exposition in January 1911. His job was to prepare general designs for the Exposition's ground plan in cooperation with John Charles Olmsted and all of the architecture and detailed designs for a few of the permanent buildings. Gill's role was reduced to doing detailed designs for the remainder of the buildings and they were subject to Goodhue's approval.<sup>195</sup> Allen's Division of the Works was in charge of any other designs. "They are to get \$31,500 between them. They estimate that of this Mr. Gill will get \$7500 and Goodhue \$24,000 of which \$9000 is for the Art Museum, \$4000 for traveling expenses, \$3000 for office expenses and \$8000 for his consulting services."<sup>196</sup> John Charles Olmsted conceded that it was that Goodhue was a good architect. Unfortunately, he advocated the Spanish baroque colonial style rather than the Mission style that John Charles Olmsted thought was appropriate for the Exposition.

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<sup>192</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 18, 1911.

<sup>193</sup> Montes, Gregory. Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan. San Diego: The Journal of San Diego History, vol. 28, no. 1. P. 50

<sup>194</sup> quoted in Montes, Gregory. Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan. San Diego: The Journal of San Diego History, vol. 28, no. 1. P. 51.

<sup>195</sup> Montes, Gregory. Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan. San Diego: The Journal of San Diego History, vol. 28, no. 1. P. 51.

<sup>196</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 25, 1911.

American expositions were known for their Neo-Classical style of architecture. John Charles Olmsted bucked this trend in Seattle for the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition, using what he called the Russian style for buildings, a monumental rustic log style. The Mission style would have fit with the prevailing style of architecture in San Diego and the planned low buildings would have shown the landscape in a better fashion.

In his designs for an additional building for the high school and the technological building, Gill used his simple Mexican style unit system. In this design style, all the rooms were alike, including windows, multiples of a single unit.<sup>197</sup> For the Exposition museum, Gill came to look over John Charles Olmsted's reports for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.<sup>198</sup>

With help from the office on the ground, John Charles Olmsted allowed himself to work on other pressing jobs in the mornings. In the afternoons, he worked on Exposition plans. Even in choosing Spanish names for the streets and canyons, he despaired that the Committee was so used to monitoring every detail that they would not even allow him to select these names. "I have put an awful lot of time on the matter first and last and yet have not brought it to a final shape so far as the whole park is concerned. I have enough names for the Exposition grounds I guess, all located."<sup>199</sup>

John Charles Olmsted found that he kept having to change scales in the plans he was working on for the Exposition. "I had to redraw practically every line to fit the contours but in many cases the change was slight and I was surprised that the 200' scale maps with its ten foot contours had proved such a fairly reliable guide in making my first plan."<sup>200</sup>

### A New Site for the Exposition

By April 1911, Allen advocated for a different site for the Exposition. Allen wanted the site moved to the western side of the park, arguing that John Charles Olmsted's southern site was objectionable because it was on the poor side of the city instead of the rich side. He argued that

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<sup>197</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 21, 1911.

<sup>198</sup> John Charles Olmsted March 2, 1911.

<sup>199</sup> John Charles Olmsted January 19, 1911.

<sup>200</sup> John Charles Olmsted February 23, 1911.

his site would be cheaper to develop too. "On the other hand, his site extending, as it would, into the middle plateau of the park I regard as very damaging to the landscape design of the park as I propose it should be after the exposition is over. I don't know how it will come out. I do hate to accept an idea that is bad in design because money reasons force me, yet I do know art must bow down to money considerations so often."<sup>201</sup>

A few days later, Allen came up with another reason for moving the Exposition--the cost of the electric loop railway up to the front entrance advocated by John Charles Olmsted. John D. Spreckels, first vice-president of the Exposition company and its biggest private donor, also owned among other types of business, a railroad company. He wanted to put an electric railway through Balboa Park and John Charles Olmsted suspected that he was behind the plan to relocate the Exposition.<sup>202</sup>

John Charles Olmsted revised his plan to cut costs and show that his plan was the best one. "It's an awful job this cutting down process. It hurts one's feeling after having planned a fine thing to have to eliminate so many interesting features."<sup>203</sup> He eliminated five bridges, all the Spanish garden, all the Mesa Vicaino, the parade ground, the military camp ground, the aviation field, the tent city, the village of foreign government buildings and the Canada de la Maleza, the agricultural college, the plaza external arcades and the stadium.

It was a difficult situation. Allen's job was to do the estimating of cost and since he did not like John Charles Olmsted's site, it made work difficult. It was to Allen's advantage to have John Charles Olmsted's design be too expensive. "It is getting very tedious to me and very disagreeable beside. I have no idea how long it is going to last." In order to have his site approved, Allen tried to prove to the Committee that with the available money, John Charles Olmsted's choice of site was too expensive. "It is wearing on me but he can rest assured that the Exposition is going to remain on my site. I can be a little obstinate myself upon occasion!"<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 3, 1911.

<sup>202</sup> San Diego Historical Society. Panama-California Exposition-San Diego-1915-1916. 1996.

<http://www.sandiegohistory.org/pancal>. P 3.

<sup>203</sup> John Charles Olmsted April 28, 1911.

After the Exposition matter was settled in his favor, John Charles Olmsted planned to turn the job over to Dawson. “The trouble is that Allen persists in trying to persuade everyone concerned that the site he recommends will give them a far finer exposition than that I have selected and worked up.” Working on the third preliminary plan, he reduced the plaza and main grouping of buildings and lessened the grading, writing that if the estimate did not come in low enough, he did not know what he could do with it.<sup>205</sup>

The situation troubled him. “I have a good deal of discouraged feelings at times—why won’t people let me alone and behave properly about the Exposition and let me get home?”<sup>206</sup> He worried that the estimate on the third revised plan would be too high and that would impede his getting away to Seattle for another job. Even if he did get away, he wrote that he would have to come back and consult with Goodhue on his architectural plans for the Exposition buildings.

He attended the Committee meeting where Allen advocated his alternative site. John Charles Olmsted did not think that Allen made a very thorough argument. The meeting ended by Allen asking the Commissioners to come and see the site. Marston, the head of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, asked John Charles Olmsted to talk about this alternative site but the meeting disintegrated with everyone talking at once, and John Charles Olmsted not able to put forth his arguments completely. While he thought that the majority supported his site, he was beginning to understand that he might lose this fight. “Still one never can tell as most of them will veer over to whichever side seems to be most popular or is supported by the largest member of important and influential people.”<sup>207</sup>

Nine days later, Allen finished the estimate on John Charles Olmsted’s revised plan and told him that the cost was now low enough that it warranted execution and that he would recommend it to the Committee. “I hope the question of the site will then be decided in favor of mine but there is no telling what the two new park commissioners may decide.” Two new Exposition commissioners might put off the decision until they had a complete understanding which was

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<sup>204</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 1, 1911.

<sup>205</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 5, 1911.

<sup>206</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 8, 1911.

<sup>207</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 10, 1911.

proper, but unfortunate.<sup>208</sup> More than a week later, the president of the park board told John Charles Olmsted that they were determined to carry out his plan.

### Third Site!

John Charles Olmsted left at the beginning of June to go back to Brookline, safe in the assumption that his plan would prevail. By July, there was another complication; Goodhue had put forth his own site for the Exposition. John Charles Olmsted's plan called for a southern location as an extension of the city; Allen suggested a western site and Goodhue suggested putting the Exposition in the central portion of Balboa Park. When Goodhue suggested the central park location, Allen abandoned his idea for a site and advocated Goodhue's plan. Back in Brookline, John Charles Olmsted wrote his wife (who was in Maine) that Goodhue's site was far worse than Allen's because it placed the permanent building in the middle of the level open part of the park and necessitated an electric railway across the middle of the park.<sup>209</sup> The Exposition Committee voted for John Charles Olmsted's site but he had not heard yet from the Park Commission; he was optimistic.

In late July, Director-General of the Exposition, Charlie Collier came to Brookline to discuss the matter, trying to win over John Charles Olmsted to the central Balboa Park site. John Charles Olmsted was not convinced and wrote the following night letter to the Committee:

Understand exposition site is to be discussed farther. We hope you realize that no advantage for exposition that has been claimed for central site can possibly compensate for ruining the most important part of Balboa Park. All permanent improvement at the site would be utterly inharmonious with any rational landscape development of that part of park. All such formalities should be confined to outer margins of park. This principle would be satisfactorily accomplished at proposed southern site. Our study of scores of large parks justifies us in asserting with the utmost confidence that Balboa Park if left free and open in central part will be worth far more in the long run than any advantage can be secured to the exposition by changing it to the central location.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> John Charles Olmsted May 19, 1911.

<sup>209</sup> John Charles Olmsted July 13, 1911.

Again, John Charles Olmsted had to revise his plan and in mid-August he sent it off to San Diego. "I hope that Goodhue will now agree to it. If so I think the worst of our controversies (of course, amicable) will be over. He seems not to enjoy working in design with a landscape architect. The trouble now will be to get the cost down to the required limit."<sup>211</sup>

But the worst was not over. On August 31, 1911 a majority of the Buildings and Grounds Committee and all the City pro-Exposition Park Board voted to move the Exposition from John Charles Olmsted's southern site to the 167 acres on Vizcaino Mesa at the center of Balboa Park. Upon receiving the news by telegram, John Charles Olmsted wired back his resignation as landscape architect for the Exposition and Balboa Park, stating, "Our professional responsibility as designers will not permit us to assist in ruining Balboa Park."<sup>212</sup>

Marston, chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, one of the few Committee members who had voted to retain the Olmsted site, resigned in November. Publicly, Marston said that he resigned for business and health reasons but he wrote to John Charles Olmsted that the Firm's resignation was his primary motivation for leaving the Exposition. "It will be a life-long regret to me that San Diego lost the services of you and your Firm."<sup>213</sup> Gill quit too, after discovering graft in buying building materials in Allen's Division of Works.<sup>214</sup>

### *Aftermath*

Back in the Brookline office, John Charles Olmsted kept a file of articles about the Exposition. The last one was dated, September 13, 1911, from *The San Diego Sun*. It is a letter placed on a page with articles and titled, "Object to moving the Exposition; want opinion of taxpayers." The letter, addressed to taxpayers, told the readers that the Olmsted firm "has spoken and with no uncertain sound. They will not risk their professional reputation for \$15,000. Were they not

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<sup>210</sup> San Diego Historical Society. [Panama-California Exposition-San Diego-1915-1916](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/pancal). 1996.

<http://www.sandiegohistory.org/pancal>

<sup>211</sup> John Charles Olmsted August 17, 1911.

<sup>212</sup> Montes, Gregory. Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan. San Diego: [the Journal of San Diego History](#) vol. 28, no. 1. P. 60.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* P. 61.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* P. 51.

heralded as the very highest authority in the country as park designers?,” asked the five signatories who identify themselves as stockholders of the Exposition.<sup>215</sup>

The stockholders attacked the decision to move the Exposition in two ways: lack of proximity to the downtown and the cost of the change of site. They wondered where all the visitors would be housed. No hotels were located near the new site. The Olmsted site was in walking distance of the business district and hotels were already in place. According to the stockholders, the Olmsted site would not mar the scenic effect of the park while the new site destroyed it. On the financial side, the group wondered who was going to pay for the required bridge to the new site. They suggested that the City would run out of money and that it would come out of the taxpayers’ pockets. “Taxpayers of San Diego, what do you think of that prospect? The Olmsted Bros. have spoken; now let us hear from you!,” the stockholders exhorted the readers.<sup>216</sup>

Despite all protests, the site was moved. John Charles Olmsted never referred to the job again in his letters. A year’s worth of work plus a big fee was gone. Despite advances in technology and a pragmatic attitude towards his work (different from that of Frederick Law Olmsted), when it came down to principles, ideas learned in his childhood guided John Charles Olmsted’s decision.<sup>217</sup> A park was still a park.

## Conclusion

John Charles Olmsted experienced problems with almost every job. Although he suffered with changes frequently made to his designs throughout his career, from revisions in specified planting to the intrusion of monuments into parks, to sloppy implementation, among many, he was barely able to tolerate them. In the end, it was the landscape itself that inspired him and made all the difference. In this one case, it was too important—the suggested changes were too big.

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<sup>215</sup> Frederick, Alphonse, et al. “Object to moving the Expo; want opinion of taxpayers.” The San Diego Sun, September 13, 1911. Olmsted NAB/NAC Collection, Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

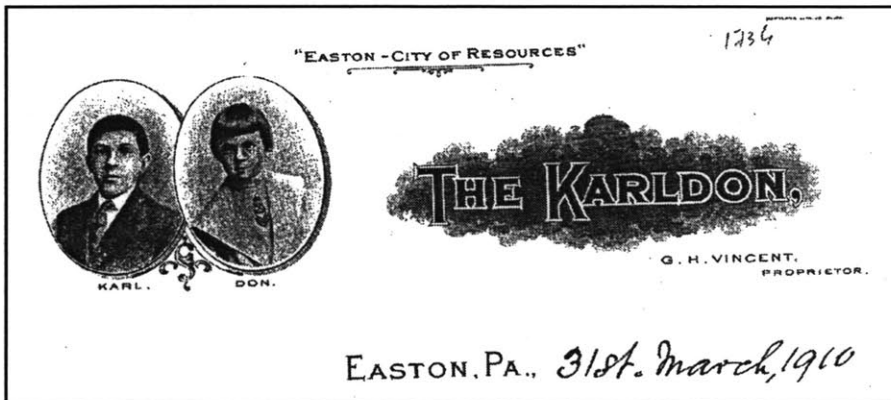
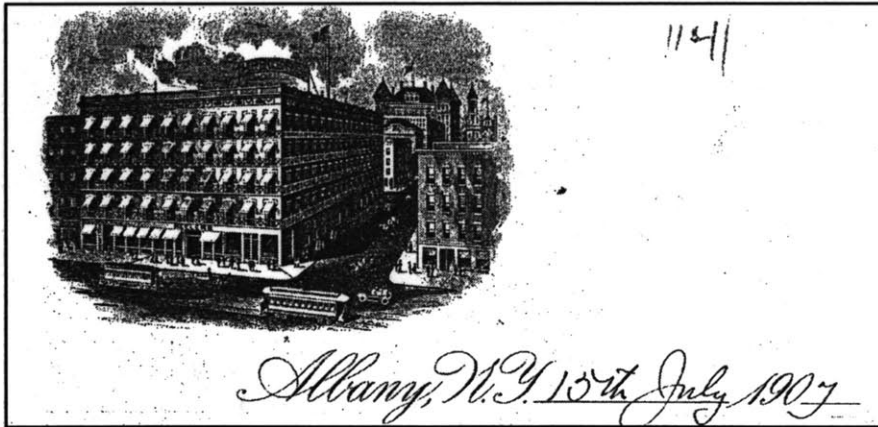
<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

In San Diego, his plan for the Exposition was an extension to the existing city, and his plan assumed that the city would grow to the edge of the park. His plan for Balboa Park was based on passive recreation. Goodhue's changes were not slight; they challenged every design and business principle that John Charles Olmsted held to be important. For Goodhue, it was all about the buildings being placed on the most prominent place on the site. Once again, the architect had overruled the landscape architect. One more time, local politics had won the day over good design. Although John Charles Olmsted had encountered these problems before, this time their effect was too great and he could not overlook them.

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<sup>217</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted was not amenable to changes in his designs. John Charles Olmsted was a far more flexible designer.

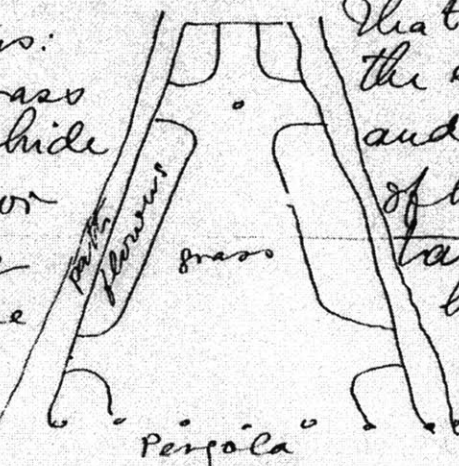




John Charles Olmsted stayed in a variety of hotels across the country. The images of the hotels on their stationery revealed a bit of the cities and the reach of modern transportation. That is, except for The Karldon, which showed the owner's sons images and the reason for the name of the hotel.

Although the other two letters were written a year apart, the Hotel Dacres' stationery showed Walla Walla, WA as a city still using horses for transportation while on the Albany, NY hotel stationery, electric streetcars and automobiles, along with a few horses are on the street. 1906, 1907, 1910. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

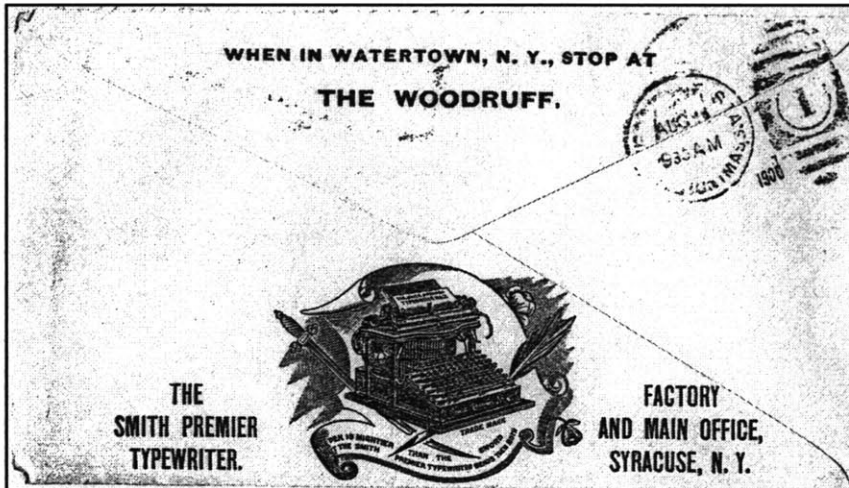
had shown me their garden & greenhouse by electric light he took me back to my hotel, 8. 10<sup>PM</sup>. He has a sort of joke I call it in his garden. There was a triangle of grass with a flower bed around it with entrances and he added two more so it was thus:



made the grass shape of a hide was in honor who was a The greenhouse had many and lighted nicely: One pink Australian aster I took for salmon color. I suppose the artificial light introduced a yellow tinge. I wired office to tell you "letter mailed Monday will reach me here". It does not look now as if I could leave before Wednesday night. Maybe not then. Ever your loving husband.

That he said the exact and that of his father tanner! had a flowers up very

John Charles Olmsted's daily letters to his wife were filled with details of his day, including clients, work on site and in the hotel, travel, and food. Occasionally, when he thought that his wife would be interested, he included sketches. In this letter he drew a sketch of a garden that amused him. The owner, a park commissioner in Dayton, OH had configured his lawn to look like a skin of an animal because his father had been a tanner. March 16, 1918. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



John Charles Olmsted disliked the advertising that hotels put on their stationery and envelopes. Since most travelers were businessmen, the Smith Premier Typewriter Company was an obvious choice for the hotel stationery. August 1906. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Pasco, Wn. 9 Dec. 06.  
 989  
 My Dear wife:  
 I am at the Eagle Hotel, un-  
 known to fame, small but comfort-  
 able. When I asked at Hotel Portland  
 the clerk looked in a book of hotels of  
 all cities & said there is no hotel at Pas-  
 co. He advised me to wire the station  
 agent to look up a room for me in a  
 private house. However, the conductor  
 of the train said there was a hotel &  
 as it proved. When I got here I ask-  
 ed the station agent & he said there  
 were two. I asked which was the best  
 but before he replied someone said  
 these are the hotel men with lanterns.  
 So I said aloud outside "hotel" & one  
 seized my bag saying "Eagle House?"  
 So I went along with him a long block  
 along the main street parallel with  
 the R. R. & then a long block per-  
 pendicular to that. I think it is a  
 brick cornice house about 40' front-  
 age. It seems clean & my room is  
 furnace heated and comfortable.  
 I have to get up at 5.15 but it is

John Charles Olmsted took notes on site on small unlined blank cards. The advertising on hotel stationery and envelopes bothered him and sometimes, he wrote to his wife on these cards instead of hotel stationery. December 9, 1906. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

July '07

Shall be

9th Brookline & Sunapee

10th Sunapee & Train

11th Train & Syracuse

12th } Syracuse

13th }

14th } Dayton

15th }

16th } New York

17th }

17th leave New York P.M.

may arrive Newport

18th Newport & Brookline

19th Brookline & steamer

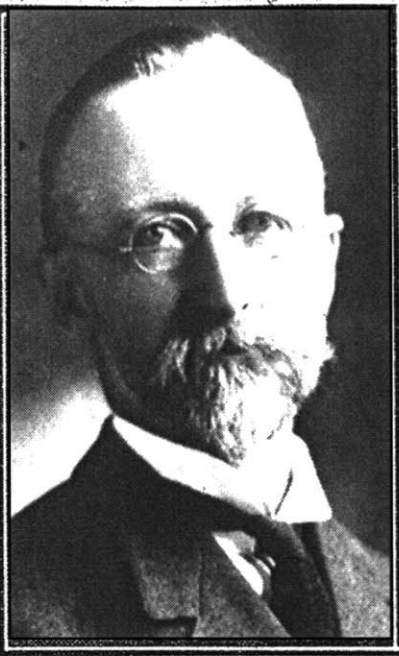
Although John Charles Olmsted liked to spend his summer weekends with his family in Maine, sometimes work interfered. Weather and clients often changed his plans. He wrote to his wife that he could never keep to his schedule, but that did not keep him from trying to assure her that he would be home soon. July 1907. *John Charles Olmsted Collection*. Special Collections, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



**PLAN LAY-OUT  
OF CITY GARDEN**  
*Dayton Journal*  
*Oct 16*  
 Moraine Is Visited by J. C.  
 Olmsted, Noted Land-  
 scape Architect.

**ARTIST OLMSTED  
TO REVISE PLANS  
FOR AUDUBON PARK**  
 Noted Landscape Expert Will  
 Endeavor to Reduce Cost  
 of Improvement.

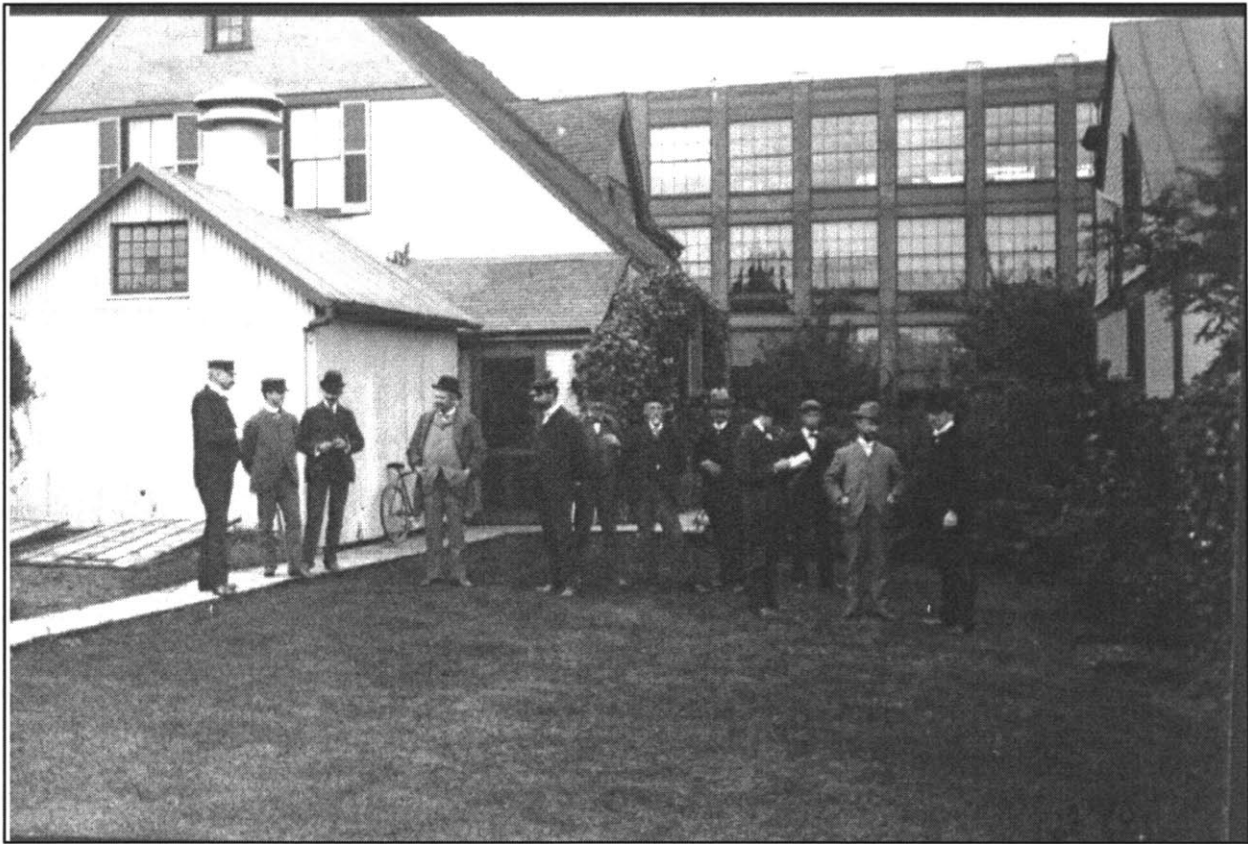
**WHITMAN COLLEGE**  
**FAMOUS ARTIST  
VIEWS GROUNDS**  
 JOHN C. OLMSTED ARRIVES AND  
 WILL FURNISH PLANS FOR  
 BEAUTIFYING GROUNDS.



**JOHN S. OLMSTED,**  
 Of New York, Who Is in Winnipeg to  
 Lay Out Grounds in Kildonan Park.  
*Winnipeg Telegram, May 3*  
**LANDSCAPE ARTIST FOR GOV**  
**EXHIBITION IS IN CITY**  
 John C. Olmsted, of New York,  
 Working Out Landscape Plans  
 For Kildonan Park.

*Daily Union-Walla Walla*  
**LANDSCAPE ARTIST  
TAKES IN THE CITY**  
*Dec 13, '06*  
 Delegation Shows John Olmsted the  
 Natural Beauty of Walla  
 Walla.

John Charles Olmsted never was pleased with articles about him and his work. These headlines show a variety of the articles written about him on the road. Note the misspelling of his name in the upper right hand article.

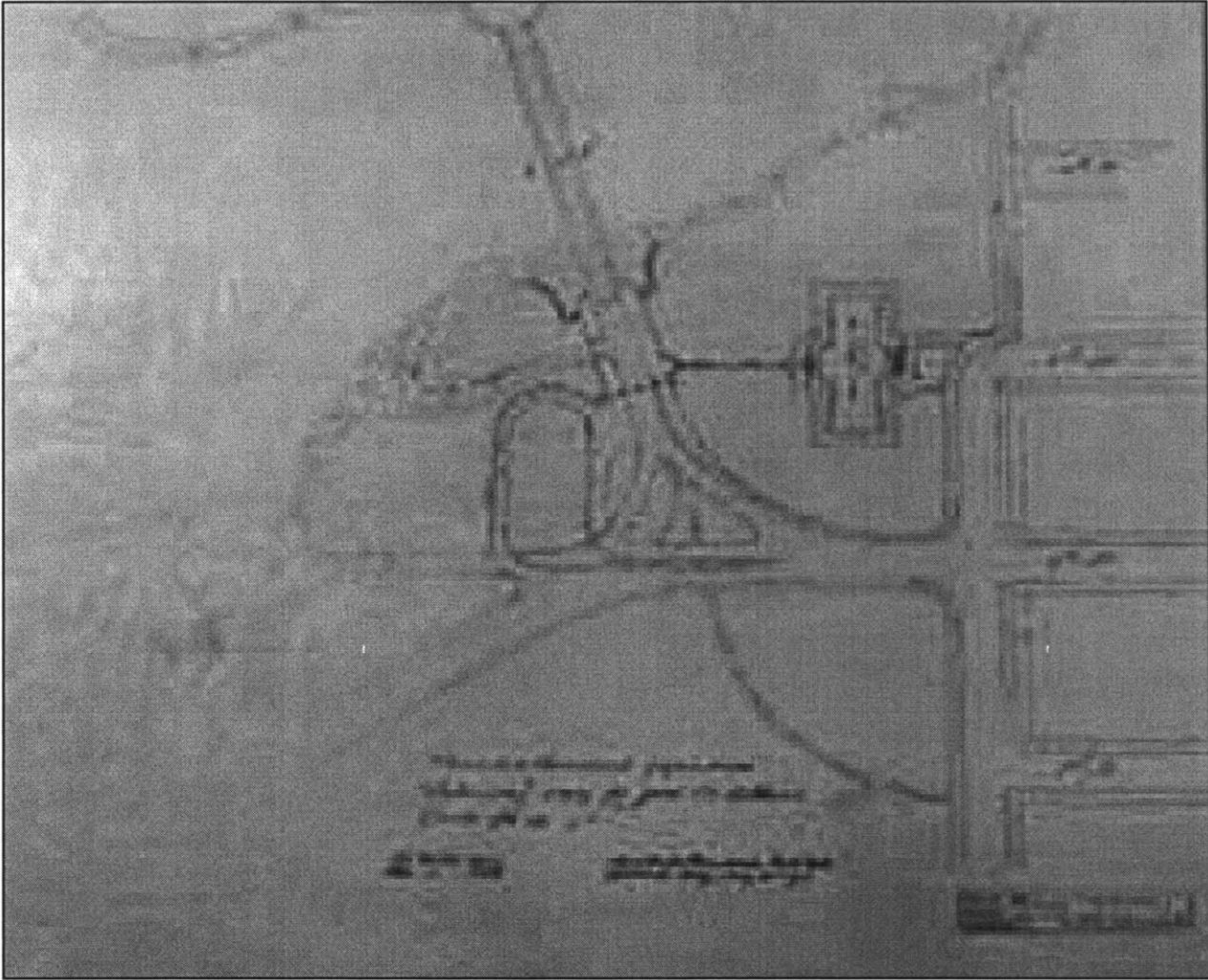


John Charles Olmsted and the managers of the National Cash Register Company, Dayton, OH, 1898. John Charles Olmsted was rarely photographed with his clients. He stands in front of one of the manager's houses. He completed many jobs for the company and for the owner, including a park for employees. Job #5508. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



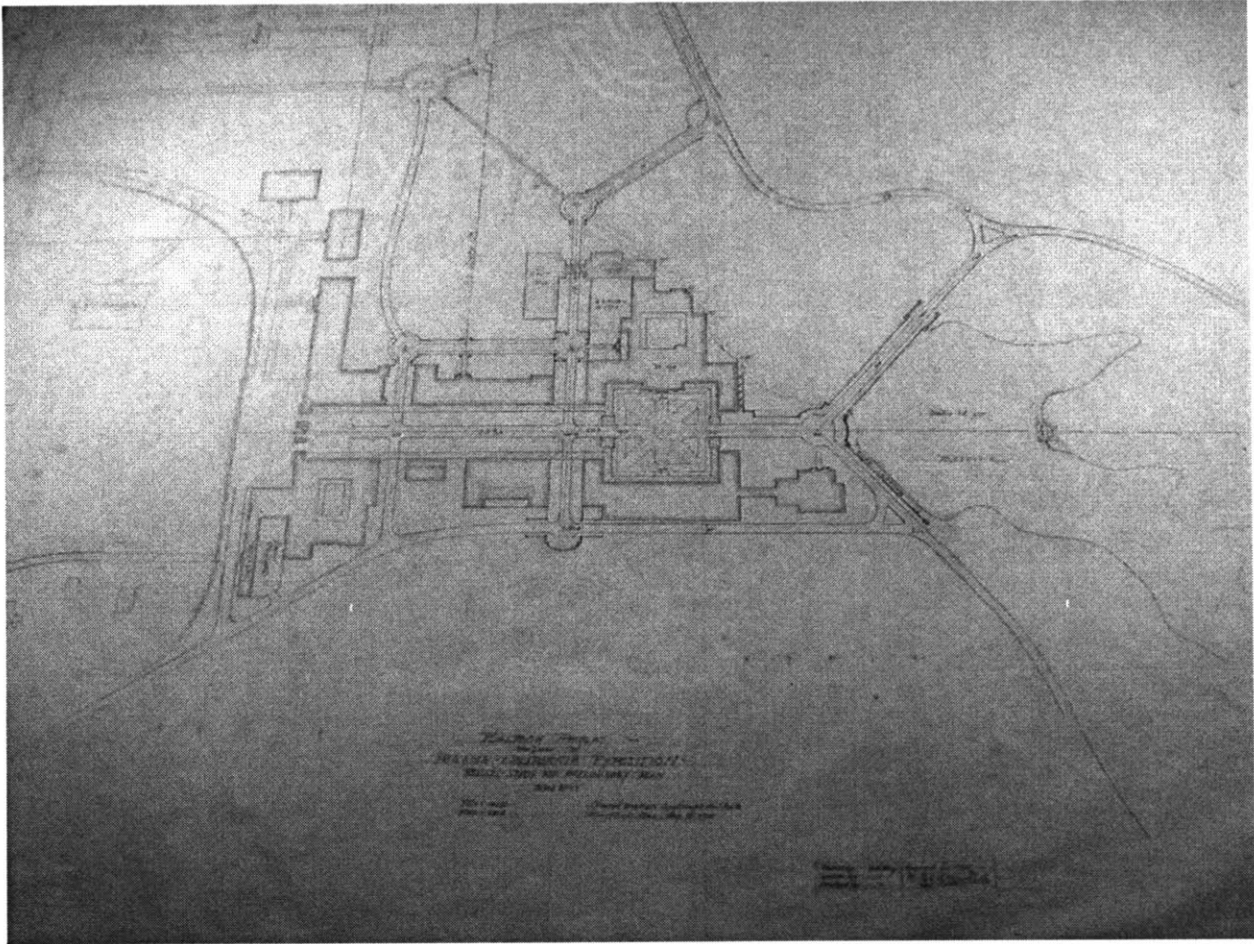
Photographs of park for National Cash Register Company. The photographs show details of a road through the park, rustic fence, woodland, and bridge. Job #3185. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



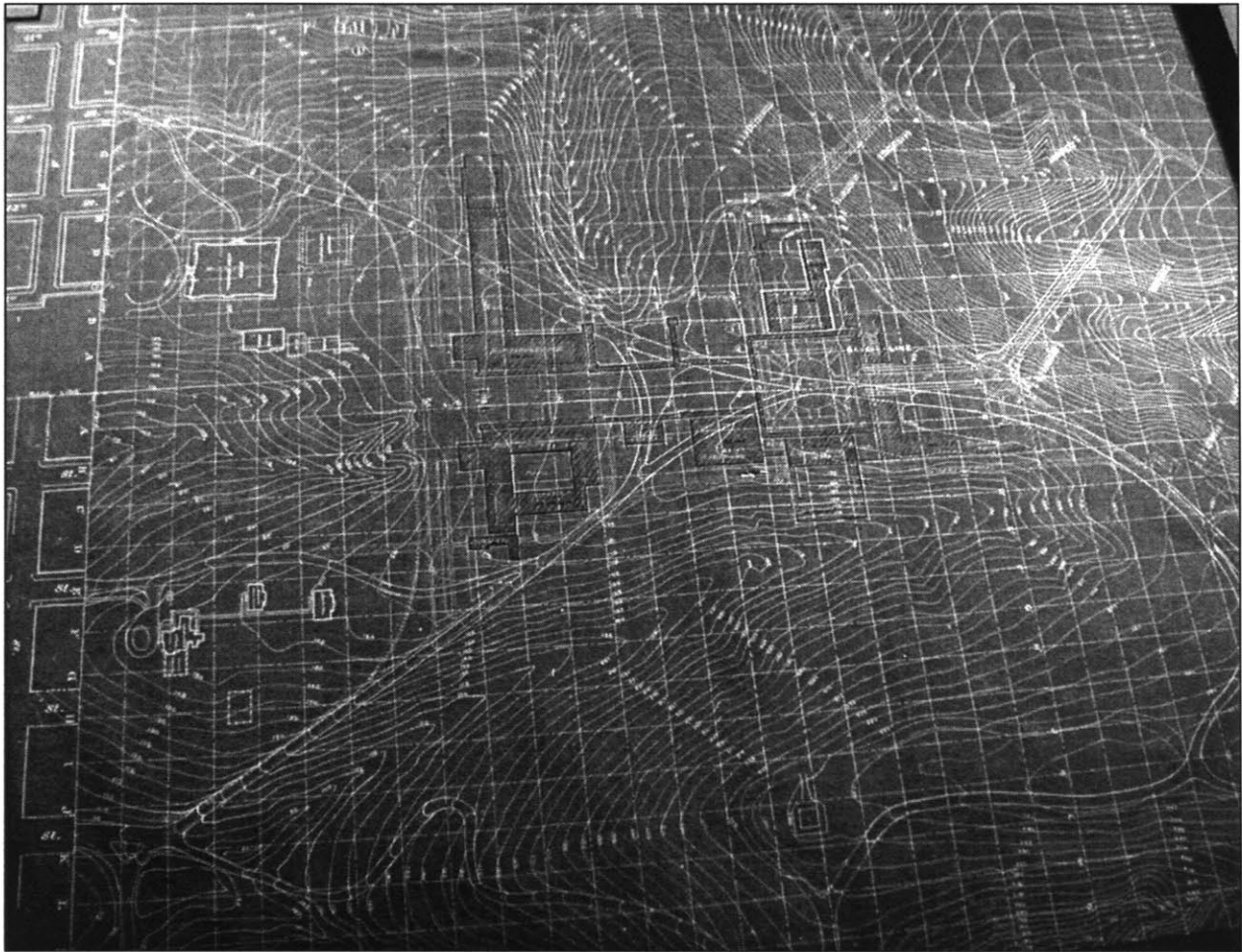


One of John Charles Olmsted's preliminary plans showing the Panama-California Exposition as an extension of the city. The grid of city streets has been extended to the Exposition entrance. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

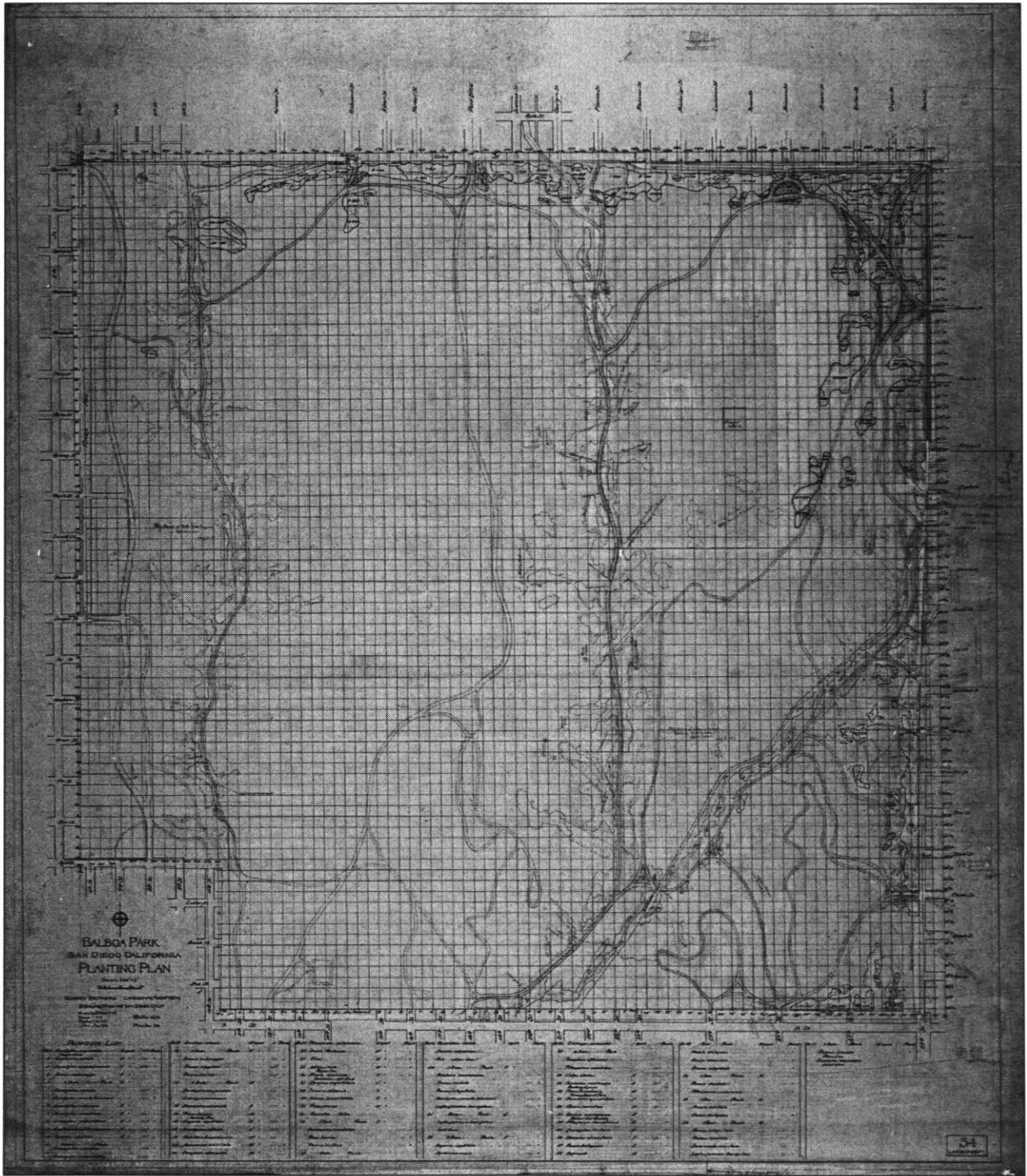




John Charles Olmsted planned wide boulevards and arcaded sidewalks lined with the main buildings of the Exposition. Four of the larger buildings were intended to be permanent (art museum, Greek theater, auditorium, and stadium) but the rest of the buildings were to be torn down after the Exposition. Panama-California Exposition. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



John Charles Olmsted's sketches on a blueprint showing the placement of the main boulevard of the Exposition and the four permanent buildings. This area of the park was a series of canyons so he designed bridges to span them. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

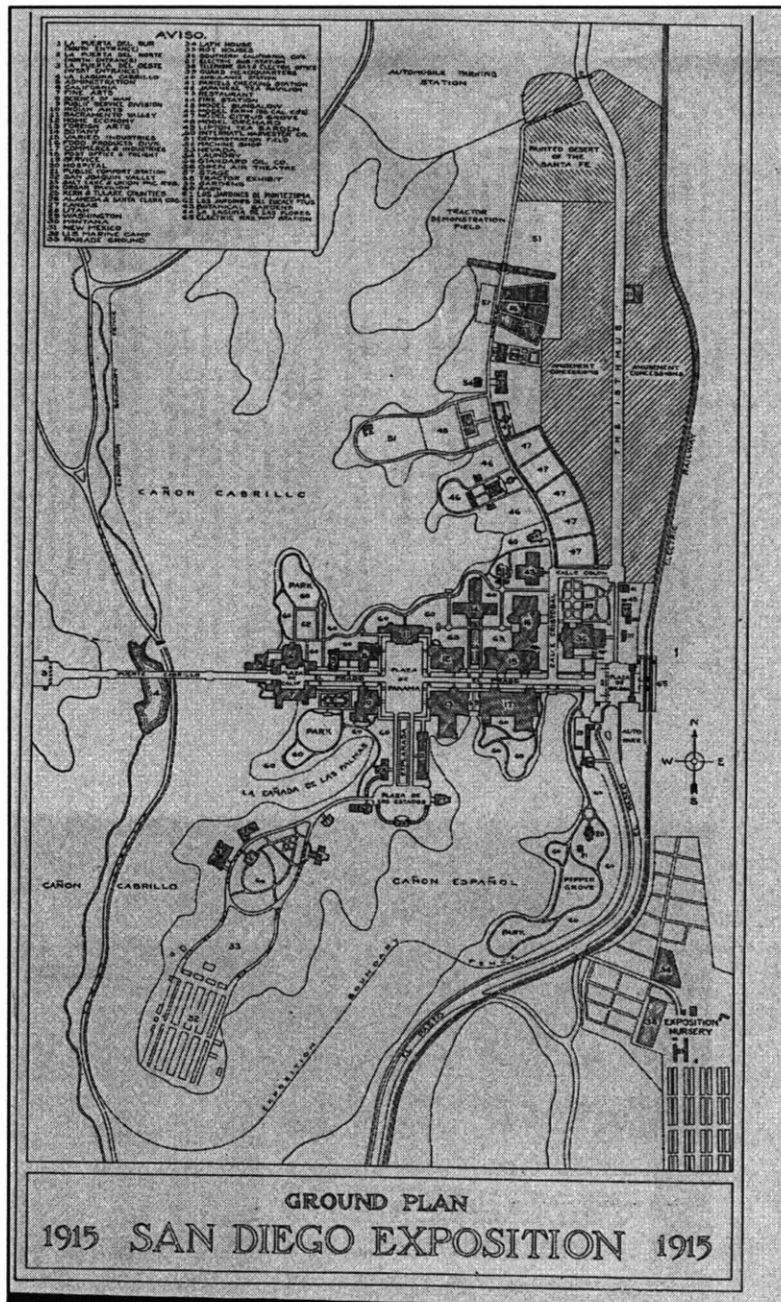


John Charles Olmsted believed strongly in his placement of the Exposition on the southern site and continued to work on plans even though there was strong opposition. Work was finished on the planting plan on the day that he sent in his resignation. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



# OBJECT TO MOVING THE EXPO; WANT OPINION OF TAXPAYERS

A group of Exposition stockholders tried to rally support for the Olmsted plan even though a new site had been chosen and the firm had resigned from the job. September 1911. Office scrapbook. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.



Plan of the Panama-California Exposition from the guide to the Exposition. 1915. This is the central plan for the Exposition that got built. While it used the element of buildings grouped around boulevards, its central location violated John Charles Olmsted's principles for park design. Office Scrapbook. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, Brookline, MA.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion**

When John Charles Olmsted died in 1920, the professions of landscape architecture and planning were very different from the time when he began his apprenticeship in his stepfather's practice in 1875. Many of these changes came about as the result of the Olmsted firm's pioneering efforts under his leadership. His dedication to the professionalization of landscape architecture and planning, at both the large scale of national practice and at the smaller scale of office practice, fundamentally changed the nature of practice, from the way that a job proceeded through the office to the accounting system, the filing system and the physical space. Under John Charles Olmsted's leadership, the firm grew from a small family firm into the largest landscape architecture and planning office in the United States. By developing an office system designed specifically to manage the ever-growing volume of work, the firm created the modern design office. Many of its systems are still in use today.

As one of the outstanding pioneers in the field, John Charles Olmsted made great contributions to the development of landscape architecture and planning. His writings as well as his designs importantly helped landscape architecture gain recognition as a fine art. In the plans he did for many cities across the country, he created much more than simply designs for individual parks. By knitting the park systems he designed to be part of growing cities, his planning work helped to guide the future growth of many of these cities.

John Charles Olmsted's role as the first president of the first professional society (American Society of Landscape Architects) and as the chairman of the committee that set the standards for membership and practice, affirmed him as one of the profession's leaders. He encouraged his half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., in his efforts to establish and then to head the landscape architecture program at Harvard University, the first in the country. He supported his half-brother in the belief that, brother, that, despite the time it took away from the office, the creation of an academic program would lead to a group of practitioners who had all been trained similarly and in the same curriculum. John Charles Olmsted strongly believed that the public and, especially, potential clients would not view the profession as a unified entity without this

academic support. He thought that until the public recognized the profession, the amount of work would fall short of its potential.

As senior partner in the firm, John Charles Olmsted proposed and directed innovations in both the physical design of the office space and the business operations. Standardizing the operations allowed him to travel knowing that the office was running efficiently, completing jobs within the time agreed and maintaining the highest quality. His exposure to some of the largest companies in the country as clients prompted John Charles Olmsted to borrow and adapt their practices to fit the firm.

Like his stepfather, John Charles Olmsted viewed each job as the working out of a solution to a client's problem rather than as an expression of himself. Men coming into the office were also taught this approach, which was unique to the budding profession. His insistence on creating the best design for a particular job, rather than having an office of individual stars with their own foibles, explains in large part why John Charles Olmsted's work is not remembered as being his own. It was all about the job, not the people who did the work. Further, the fact that many men worked on each design encouraged pride in the office's work. While some employees went on to open their own offices, a core group remained on the staff for for twenty years and longer.

With the help of Miss Bullard and Mr. Perkins, both long-time employees, John Charles Olmsted created an office structure that ran itself to a far greater degree than was customary when he began. The levels of hierarchy resulted in a system of checks and balances, ensuring that the quality of the work of the firm was maintained. Traveling for long periods of time, John Charles Olmsted needed to know that the office was functioning well. Everything from correspondence to the storage of plans had its own rules and regulations. Monthly business reports addressed these rules and regulations and adjustments were made until each system worked well. Office machinery was introduced as it was developed and it increased the efficiency of the business.

Out on the road, he had to deal with a business environment that was nowhere near as efficient. John Charles Olmsted contended with accommodations that may have suited the average business traveler, but not a landscape architect and planner. Rooms in hotels that were set aside

for businessmen did not fit a man wanting to do design work. Even though he traveled with all his tools of the trade, finding a place to work on plans was always a challenge. Typewriters and stenographers, hired by hotels to aid their visitors, were accustomed to typing a few pages, not the very long reports that John Charles Olmsted was always trying to complete. He was used to a certain level of excellence from the workers in the Brookline office that was never matched on the road. This imposed a great burden on John Charles Olmsted who would not compromise the quality of work done by the firm.

Not all of John Charles Olmsted's problems were caused by a heavy travel schedule and the resulting work. Throughout his career, he had to face up to the problem of working with architects who often wanted to dominate his jobs. When architects were involved, he was rarely the first hired. He also had to contend with local engineers and surveyors whose topographical maps were frequently drawn incorrectly.

If architects were a problem, local politicians, such as park commissioners, were worse. Not understanding his work, they rarely treated John Charles Olmsted with professional respect. He wrote that they were more concerned with not upsetting the local citizenry than with having the best design solutions. Local politicians influenced by architects, as in the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, were the worst of all.

Changes in the political landscape also meant trouble for him. At the beginning of his career, most of the cities he traveled to were run by a core group of wealthy businessmen. They formed park commissions and hired the Olmsted firm to lay out the parks and parts of the cities around them. They owned the land around park sites and had the Olmsted firm design developments and individual estates. During the course of his career, the situation changed. As the makeup of the commissions turned over, new members wanted to assert their judgments, and that meant changes to designs and more work for John Charles Olmsted. Of course, these problems occurred locally, too, and, while he was working in the Brookline office, he contended with the same issues.

As the work of the firm increased, having an Olmsted-designed suburban development became a status symbol, and John Charles Olmsted often went to cities where he saw advertisements for Olmsted-designed developments that the firm had no part in creating. Men made appointments with him just for the status it brought them. These time-wasting meetings and changes to designs were a strain on John Charles Olmsted's patience and health.

Although he was frequently homesick for his wife and daughters, business always came first. During his entire career, his honeymoon was his only extended vacation and that was interrupted by his half-brother who kept sending him telegrams telling him that he was needed at the office. Although he tried to spend summer weekends at the family house in Maine, more than a few of these weekends were spent working at the office or in traveling. Despite these many challenges, in the end, John Charles Olmsted enjoyed his work. His appreciation and love of the landscape hardly ever wavered and his contributions to it and the professions of landscape architecture and planning are still in use today.

#### Suggestions for future research

Research for this dissertation suggests future research. Thinking about Laurie Olin's comment that no successful landscape architect practicing today is more than six degrees of separation away from the Olmsted firm, I would propose a study of that subject. An Olmsted head the firm for 91 years. Creating a "family tree" of Olmsted employees and students and where they practiced and taught would reveal the sphere of the family's influence on the profession in past and present history. Have the Olmsteds continued to dominate the profession and to what degree?

When writing about Manitoba, Canada, John Charles Olmsted suggested a radical idea for cities' methods of acquiring and ownership of land. "The city meanwhile has grown so much that some speculator is doubtless buying it to cut up into lots. It's a shame all cities don't own all the land and merely lease it, revaluing it say every five years and making a new lease when the time is right for it," he suggested. A comparative study of the different ways cities did and did not acquire land and the results would make an interesting study.



Pursuing research on other influential firms with well-known landscape architects and planners, particularly in the mid to late-twentieth century after Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. retired and the firm lost its status, would be another avenue of study. With the elements of doing business in place, did other firms grow and develop in the same way? While we know that the Olmsteds developed modern design practice that is still in place today, did they develop patterns of business growth that have been repeated?

An edition of the letters written between John Charles Olmsted and his wife, Sophia White Olmsted, known as Fidio, would be of interest for the letters' revelations about marriage, family life and business in the early twentieth century. At the beginning of the marriage, Fidio was too scared to go to downtown Boston by herself. Quickly she learned to be independent and to run the household herself, bringing up their two daughters almost single-handedly. Another edition of the letters could be devoted to John Charles Olmsted's view of work on the road. He used the letters as a business diary.

Finally, a biography of John Charles Olmsted needs to be written. As more material from the Olmsted office is conserved, more information is available on John Charles Olmsted and the workings of the firm. The transformation of a small family firm into a large modern business after Frederick Law Olmsted's retirement in 1895 was accomplished under the leadership of John Charles Olmsted, whose contributions to landscape architecture and city planning have been under recognized, but who emerges, in this dissertation, as an extremely important figure. Although biographies are not the stuff of academic research, a biography written for a general audience might provoke interest in John Charles Olmsted in the way that a recent biography of Frederick Law Olmsted brought renewed interest in his work.

## **Bibliographic Notes**

### **The Collections**

The research for this dissertation could be compared to a treasure hunt in which the treasure was not known. At the beginning of the research process, many of the materials were not conserved. Subsequently, many materials relating to the business records were conserved, as were some of the plans for jobs. Other sources had deteriorated and were not usable.

Five collections provided the bulk of the research material. At the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. are the written materials for the jobs of the Olmsted firm, Olmsted Associates Collection. For each job, a microfilmed folder contains: letters from the client; letters to the client from the firm concerning the agreement for work, progress on the job, and reports on the plans, and bills; and reports on site visits by various workers in the firm. The business reports (1912-1924) form part of this collection. Letters written between various family members were examined in the Frederick Law Olmsted Collection. Laura Wood Roper, Frederick Law Olmsted's first biographer collected many materials from the firm during her writing, and these papers form the Laura Wood Roper Collection. Included in this collection is correspondence between Roper and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. on his recollections of the early days of the firm. Some of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s papers are included here too.

Plans and photographs for the jobs done by the firm are stored at Fairsted, the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, National Park Service, in Brookline, Massachusetts and are continuing to be conserved. Photographs of the office and of various family members and office employees are stored here.

Business records: accounting books, check registers, Cost Cards, employee records in various forms, and accession books, among others are available here too. The NAB/NAC files, consisting of articles, photographs, and pamphlets relating to landscape architecture and planning served as reference material for the firm. The office scrapbook, which contains a variety of sources, from office stationery to forms for buying plants, and billing records, record the changing business activities of the firm. The memoranda created by the firm were individual rules relating to the behavior of the employees, the use of the physical space of the office, and procedures for working. Rules changed over the years and more than one memorandum is included on most subjects. A cartoon book satirized life in the Olmsted office (1895). Other undated cartoons are included in the office scrapbook.

The daily correspondence (1898-1919) between John Charles Olmsted and his wife, Sophia White Olmsted, is stored in the John Charles Olmsted Collection at the Special Collections of the Frances Loeb Library at the Design School of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. These 5,200+ letters are augmented by letters from John Charles Olmsted's daughters, Carol and Margaret. Also in this collection are letters written to and by various family members, including letters written by Frederick Law Olmsted to his partners after he retired. Photographs of family members and of the Olmsted home and office are found here too. Materials relating to various

European trips taken by John Charles Olmsted (1877 and 1894), including written essays and photographs, reveal John Charles Olmsted's interest in the landscape and his powers of observation.

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