

Chapter 2 The Olmsted Parks & Parkways

This Introduction is from "Cherokee, Iroquois and Shawnee Parks and The Parkways: A History," by Charles E. Beveridge and Arleyn A. Levee, prepared for the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy, 1992.

The Louisville park system has a special place in the work of Frederick Law Olmsted. It was the last park system that he designed, and so represents his most mature public work. Because of the size of the three major parks in the system, the distinctive landscape qualities of those parks, the extent of the parkways connecting them, and the limited number of destructive intrusions that have been placed in them, Louisville possesses one of the finest examples of an Olmsted park system.

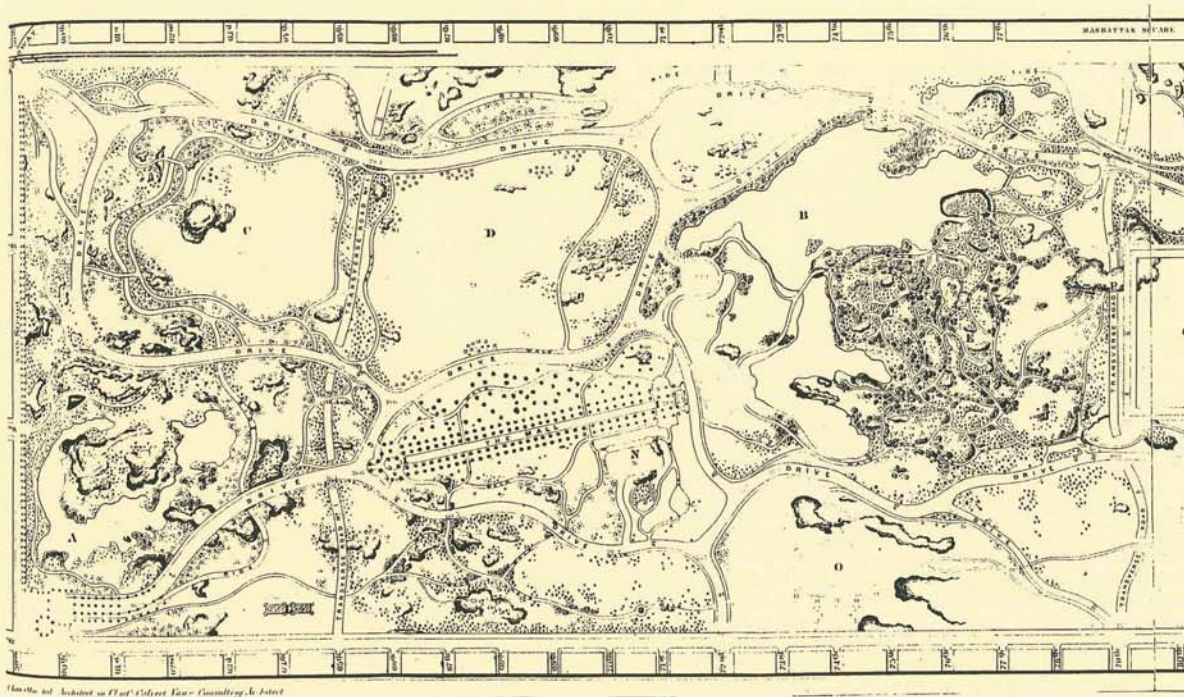
Olmsted began his work in Louisville in 1891, thirty-four years after he and Calvert Vaux began to prepare their successful competition design for Central Park in New York City. During his career, Olmsted had evolved a comprehensive concept of the role a park system could play in the life of a city, and had planned several systems. His stepson and partner, John C. Olmsted, worked closely with him in Louisville from the beginning, and directed the firm's work in the city over the twenty-five years following Olmsted's retirement in 1895. During that time, John C. completed several projects and expanded the system with new parks and recreation grounds.

Olmsted's Concept of a Park

The first and most important element of any Olmsted park system was a space large enough to permit the enjoyment of broad expanses of scenery. Olmsted gave a classic statement of his idea a few months before beginning his work in Louisville:

*"My notion is that whatever grounds a great city may need for other public purposes, for parades, for athletic sports, for fireworks, for museums of art or science, such as botanic gardens, it also needs a large ground scientifically and artistically prepared to provide such a poetic and tranquilizing influence on its people as comes through a pleased contemplation of natural scenery, especially sequestered and limitless natural scenery."*¹

Such scenery, Olmsted was convinced, offered city-dwellers much-needed relief from the confinement and artificiality of the city, with its hurried pace, noise, and hard-surface environment. The openness and



1. Plan of lower Central Park, New York City, 1862.

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"range" of the park, in particular, provided a restorative experience. To make this experience possible, Olmsted applied the art of landscape design to the site, reshaping the ground and carefully arranging the plantings. He also created systems of roads and paths that would make different kinds of landscape experiences available to persons using different modes of transportation—in wheeled vehicles, on horseback, on bicycles, or on foot.

Central Park had provided Olmsted his first opportunity to create such a park. In its plan [1], he and his collaborator Calvert Vaux had produced a design whose central purpose was the experience of landscape. They excluded museums, zoos and other public institutions of art, science and education, believing that they should have their own separate sites, carefully planned for their special use. Moreover, Olmsted and Vaux were willing to permit organized sports in a large landscape park only to the extent that the playing of those sports enhanced the general pleasure of all park users, and did not permanently take over any section of the park. While access to the restorative effect of scenery was the most valuable benefit a park could provide the people of a city, Olmsted and Vaux realized that a park must also be a place for socializing. For this purpose they included in Central Park a long, formal Mall extending diagonally into the park in its lower section. There carriages could pass and repass while pedestrians strolled down the central walkway, all for the purpose of "seeing and being seen." The designers also created settings for social gatherings—picnicking and informal sports—on the open meadows.

Between 1865 and 1890, Olmsted went on to design eight more major urban parks: Prospect Park in Brooklyn, beginning in 1865, Delaware Park in Buffalo in 1868, Washington and Jackson parks in Chicago in 1871, Mount Royal Park in Montreal in 1877, Belle Isle in Detroit in 1881, Franklin Park in Boston in 1886, and Genesee Valley Park in Rochester, N.Y. in 1888. He and his partners also designed parks in several smaller cities.

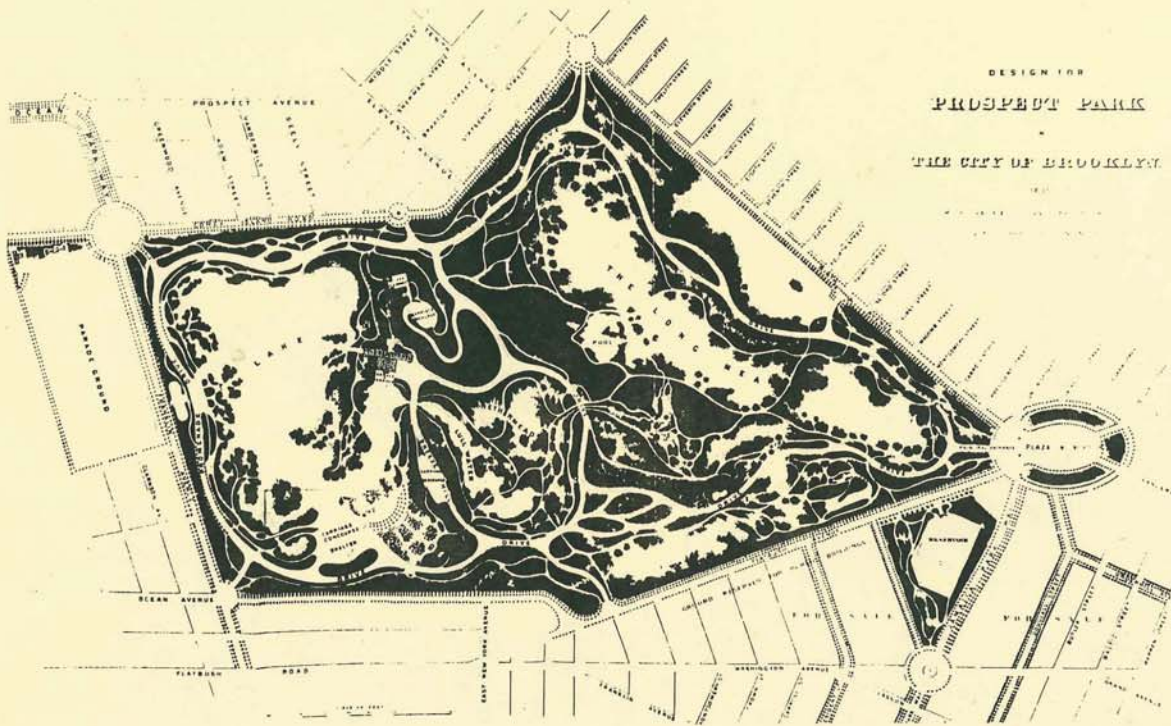
In Olmsted's projected park system for Louisville, Cherokee Park was to be the place of "sequestered" and apparently "limitless" scenery, consisting of:

*"superb umbrageous trees, standing singly and in open groups distributed naturally upon a gracefully undulating green sward . . . such scenery in higher perfection than, with large outlays to obtain it, is yet to be found in any public park in America."*²

This was the classic kind of park scenery for Olmsted, which was the most important landscape element of all his major urban parks. It was gently, gracefully undulating terrain with scattered shade trees and open groves, with a carpet of dense, green turf [2]. As Olmsted observed in his first (and classic) description of such scenery:



2. View of Long Meadow, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, c. 1900. (FLONHS)



3. Plan of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, 1870. (FLONHS)

"It consists of combinations of trees, standing singly or in groups, and casting their shadows over broad stretches of turf, or repeating their beauty by reflection upon the calm surface of pools, and the predominant associations are in the highest degree tranquilizing and grateful, as expressed by the Hebrew poet: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."³

Olmsted believed there was a universal quality to this kind of scenery. The openness and graceful flow of the land, producing a "sense of enlarged freedom"⁴ and ease, was particularly important:

"... a park as a work of design . . . should be a ground which invites, encourages & facilitates movement, its topographical conditions such as make movement a pleasure; such as offer inducements in variety, on one side and the other, for easy movement . . . yet all of a simple character & such as appeal to the common & elementary impulses of all classes of mankind. But the quality of ease must underlie the whole."⁵

Not only the contour of the land and the shape of the park space, but also the grades and curves of walks and drives were intended to add to the sense of openness and ease. The close-mown grass contributed to this experience, since it created a broad-spreading carpet to walk across in most seasons. The open, unstructured recreational space provided by the greensward area of the park also served a social function. It permitted groups from different walks of life and sections of the city to picnic and play next to each other in a way that was not possible elsewhere in the city.

The Park System

In addition to the landscape park of three hundred acres or more, Olmsted proposed to provide cities with public open spaces that would make available a variety of scenic experiences and would also supply opportunities for a wide range of recreational activities. These places, too, were intended to create a sense of community, and served as a meeting ground for all persons in the city with a particular interest.

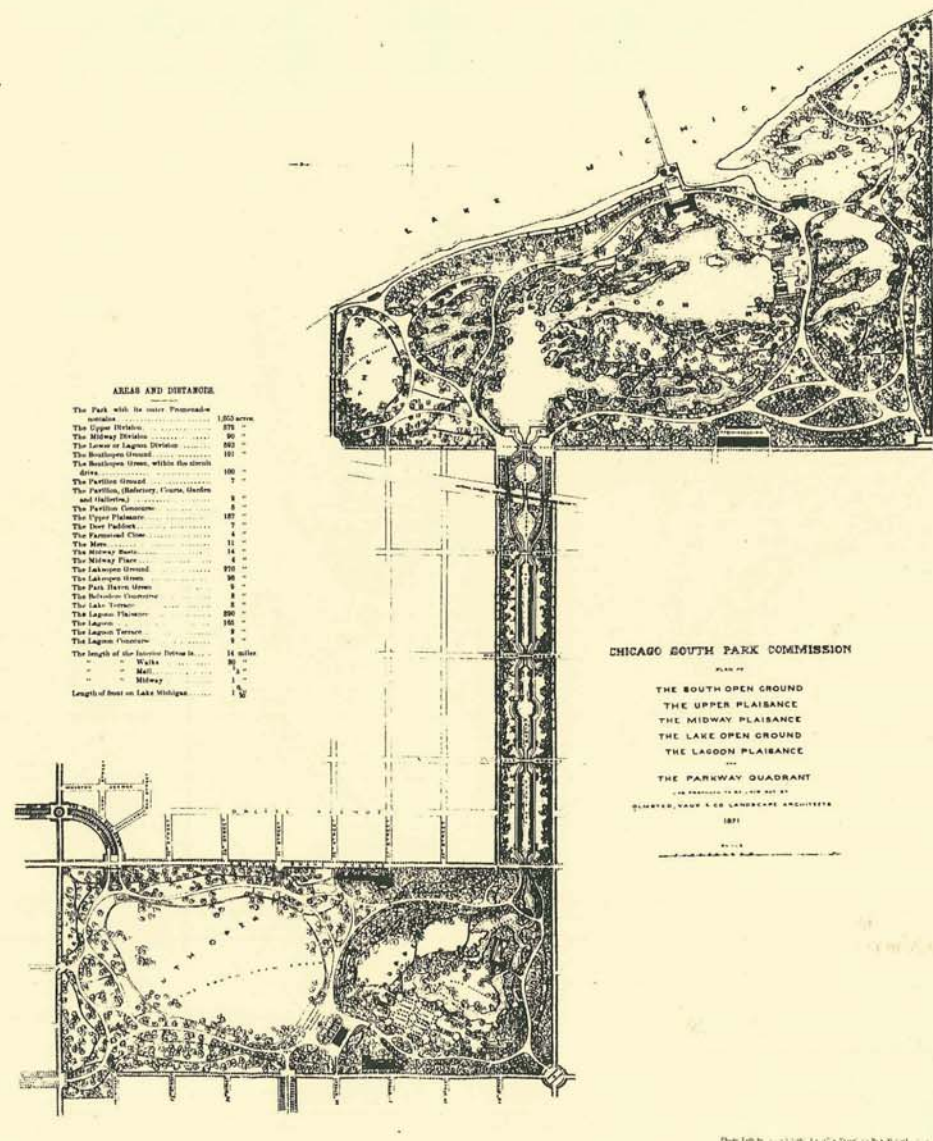
In New York City, for twenty years following the designing of Central Park, Olmsted attempted to create a varied recreational system for the city. But the two major sites that he was asked to plan, Morningside and Riverside parks, were nearly vertical precipices with only a narrow strip of flat land at the top. Both were too close to Central Park to benefit other sections of the city. Olmsted planned promenades and outlooks at the top of each, adding distinctive gathering places unlike anything in Central. But he criticized the failure of the city to provide for its most pressing recreational needs.⁶

Beginning immediately after the Civil War, however, he had more success elsewhere. In 1865 he and Calvert Vaux began to design Prospect Park in Brooklyn [3], then the second largest city in New York State. They convinced the city to redraw the boundaries of the park, and so

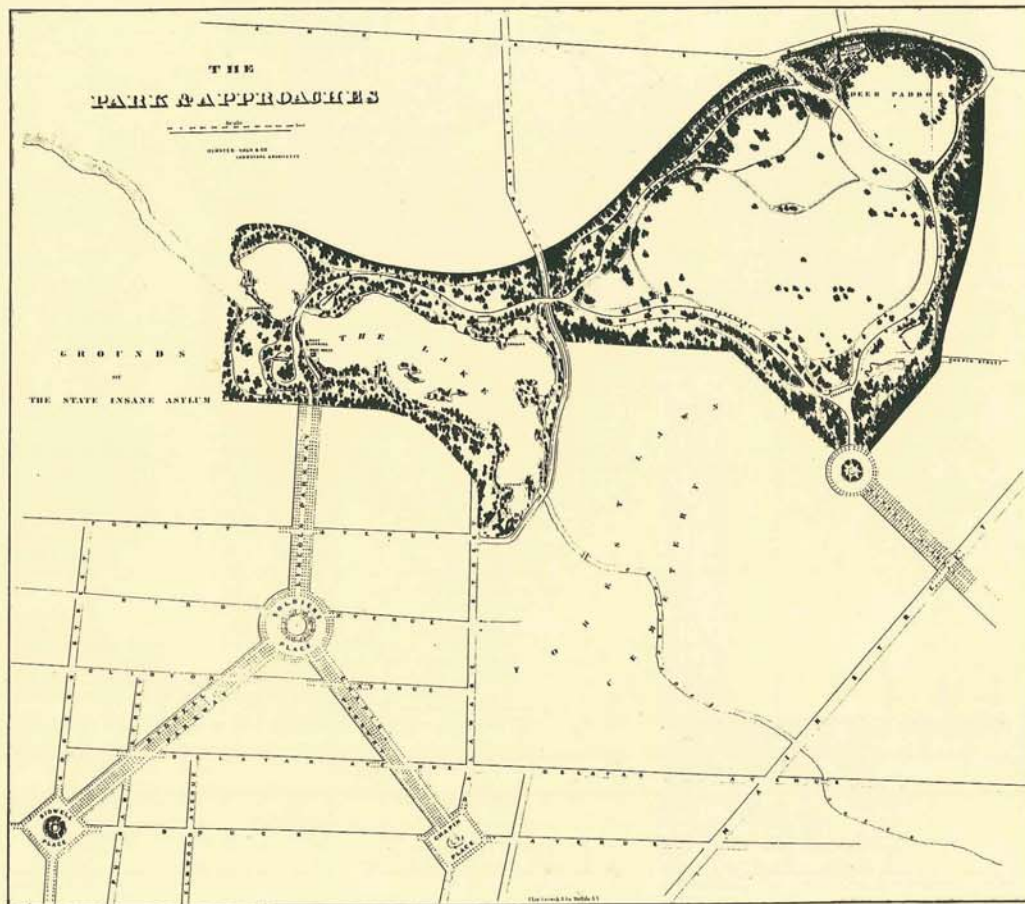
avoided having it bisected by Flatbush Avenue. The new park area made it possible for them to create their classic example of park design, with the flowing open greensward of the Long Meadow, the narrow watercourse and steep hillsides of the "Ravine," and the broad expanse of the Lake. In other sections, Olmsted and Vaux planned places for the gathering of large crowds: a music grove with nearby carriage concourses, a large refectory and boat house on the lake, a promenade area on the opposite lakeshore, and a Lookout concourse with spectacular views over the outer harbor of New York. On the perimeter of the park they provided for other activities that needed their own separate space where they would not intrude into the landscape—including a small zoo and a children's playground. Across Flatbush Avenue from the park they proposed siting of a number of public educational institutions—libraries, museums, etc., while next to the park at the opposite end they planned a separate area for military maneuvers, large public gatherings, and team sports. Within two years they designed a smaller space, 30-acre Fort Greene Park, with local playground facilities, a Revolutionary War memorial, and an open space for military maneuvers or public gatherings of up to thirty thousand persons. Their one other project in Brooklyn involved creating a plan on unusual principles for a small neighborhood square. The process of designing small squares as well as large parks for a city's recreational system was something Olmsted would repeat in Louisville.

In the years between 1865 and 1875, Olmsted and Vaux also elaborated their park system concept through extensive projects in Buffalo and Chicago [4]. Beginning in 1871 their work for the South Park Commission for Chicago involved planning two large sites totaling a thousand acres and connected by a narrow mile-long strip of land. They planned inland Washington Park for active sports and picnicking while at Jackson Park, on a lakeshore site of beach and swamp, they proposed to create a "water park" with more extensive area for small boats than any other park in the world. As they would do elsewhere, they took the natural condition of the two sites as the basis on which to build two totally different landscape and recreational experiences.⁷

It was in Buffalo, however, beginning in 1868—more than two decades before Olmsted began his work in Louisville—that he and Vaux first planned a unified multi-element park system. The key feature was Delaware Park [5], consisting of a large meadow and adjoining lake. This park was to be devoted almost exclusively to the enjoyment of scenery. Two other, smaller, sites in other sections of the city provided space for activities that would have intruded on the scenery of the park. The 56-acre "Parade," on high ground overlooking the city and Lake Erie, was to serve as a place for military maneuvers and large public gatherings. Here Vaux designed a remarkable restaurant that added to the festive character of the place, and he and Olmsted also planned a comprehensive system of play equipment for children. The third site, the 32-acre "Front" was on the shore of Lake Erie, and contained facilities for waterside welcoming ceremonies, organized team sports and music concerts. In this way, the two landscape architects created separate spaces in three different neighborhoods of the city,



4. Plan of Chicago South Park, 1871, showing Washington and Jackson parks and Midway Plaisance. (FLOHNS)



5. Plan of Delaware Park, Buffalo, 1871. (FLONHS)

each with facilities not found in the other. Most of these facilities were intended to be used by the whole city population.⁸

The first period of Olmsted's work on the park system of Buffalo was over by 1876, but a decade later he returned to plan a new system for the south side of the city. The feature he most wanted was a lakeside park similar to the still unrealized plan for Jackson Park in Chicago of fifteen years before, with facilities for swimming, boating and other sports—a different landscape experience and a place for active sports that might otherwise intrude into the scenery of Delaware Park. The issue, he declared was "Twenty years hence shall Buffalo have one park, of a poor, confused character, or two, each of a good, distinct character."⁹ However, the city failed to support his desire for a second, lakeside park. He had to content himself with planning two small inland sites, one of 75 acres and the other of 150, which he described as "dilemmas—too large for local grounds, too narrow and cut up for parks."

In 1876, just as his first period of park-making in New York, Brooklyn, Chicago and Buffalo was coming to an end, Olmsted began to plan his most extensive park system—that of Boston, Massachusetts. The "Emerald Necklace" of park space that he designed for the city extended twelve miles from Charlesbank on the Charles River to Marine Park on Boston harbor. It included a number of kinds of landscape: harborside, marshy fens, a narrow rivercourse, scattered ponds and, in Franklin Park, broad meadows, an artificial lake with heavily-planted shores, and a "Wilderness" of natural forest amidst rocky outcroppings. There was also provision for promenades along the water's edge and for swimming, boating, gymnastics, natural history study, organized team sports, lawn tennis, and picnicking. An additional element in this system was the Arnold Arboretum, part Boston park, part Harvard University scientific collection, and part scenic reservation. A continuous system of parkways and paths connected the open spaces. In 1890 Olmsted's protégé and partner Charles Eliot took the leadership in creation of a whole outlying system of scenic reservations with parkway connections. Key elements of the natural scenery of the region were thus preserved for public enjoyment: the rocky outcroppings of the Blue Hills, the ponds of Middlesex Fells, the shores of the Charles and Mystic rivers, and the ancient Waverly Oaks in Belmont.¹⁰

Olmsted's last park system before beginning his firm's half-century of work in Louisville was in Rochester, New York. The city was comparable in size to Louisville, as was the decision to create three major parks. As with the Louisville system, the natural configuration and scenery of each site provided the key for its design. The unifying theme of the Rochester parks was preservation of the shores of the Genesee River, which ran through the center of the city and provided the waterpower for Rochester's industries. On the low, flat flood plain above the city was 355-acre Genesee Valley Park [6], consisting primarily of green-sward and scattered groves of trees, the classic Olmsted park landscape. Below the falls in the city was 300-acre Seneca Park, running in a narrow strip along the top of the Genesee River gorge, with numerous

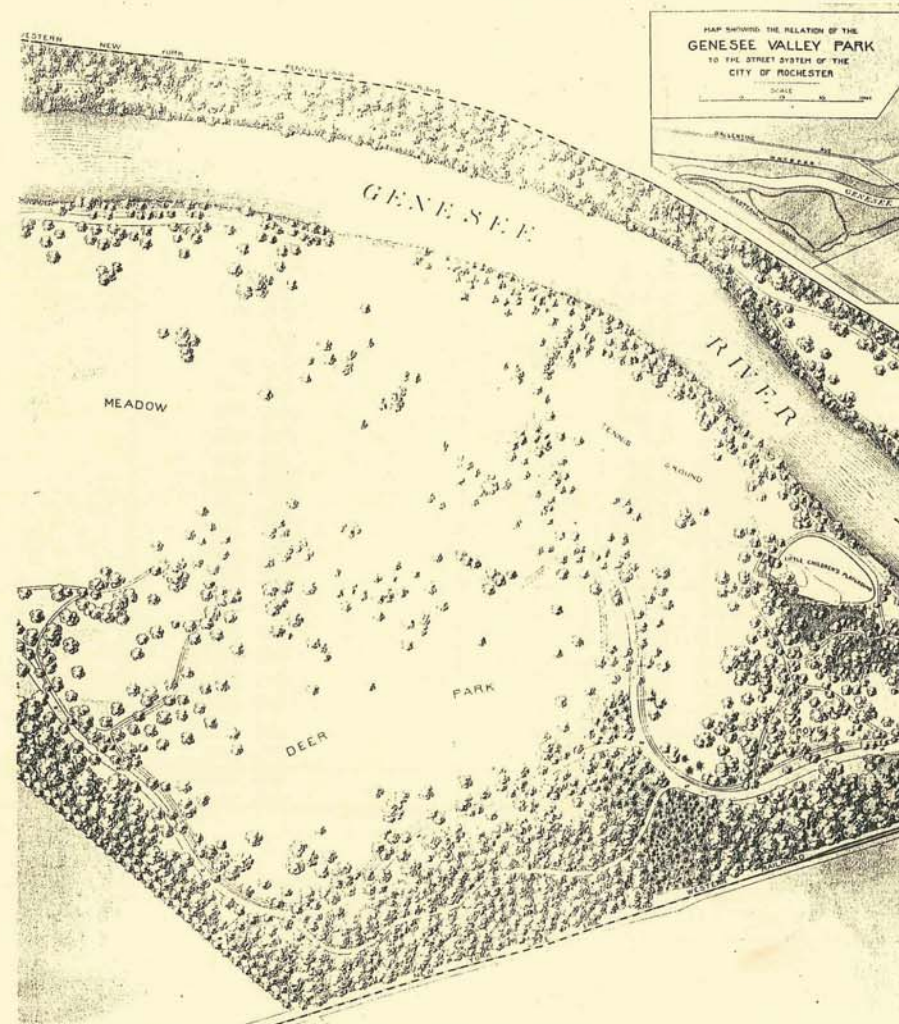
paths down the steep incline to landings along the river for boating and fishing. The third site, 55-acre Highland Park on a hill overlooking the city, was to serve as a vista-point. Originally part of the nurseries of the nationally prominent firm of Ellwanger & Barry, it was also to contain an arboretum of shrubs and low-growing trees.

Since the terrain of Seneca and Highland parks was unsuited for organized sports, Olmsted provided for a number of places in Genesee Valley Park for active recreation. He reserved the principal meadow area for informal, unstructured use, and set aside a second meadow as a deer park. In the section closest to town he planned a picnic grove, a children's play area, and a space for lawn tennis. Then, on a narrow strip of parkland on the opposite side he concentrated all the facilities for organized sports: boat houses for rowers, gymnastic grounds and ball fields. The lack of a second park with suitable terrain, therefore, led Olmsted to include a number of features in the major landscape park that were not conducive to the enjoyment of scenery. This was very different from the approach he was able to take, for instance, with Cherokee Park in the Louisville system. His plan for Cherokee Park focused more exclusively on the experience of scenery than did any of his previous park designs. It contained fewer provisions for other activities than any other park that he designed—even than Delaware Park in Buffalo, with its boathouse/casino and boating on the lake.

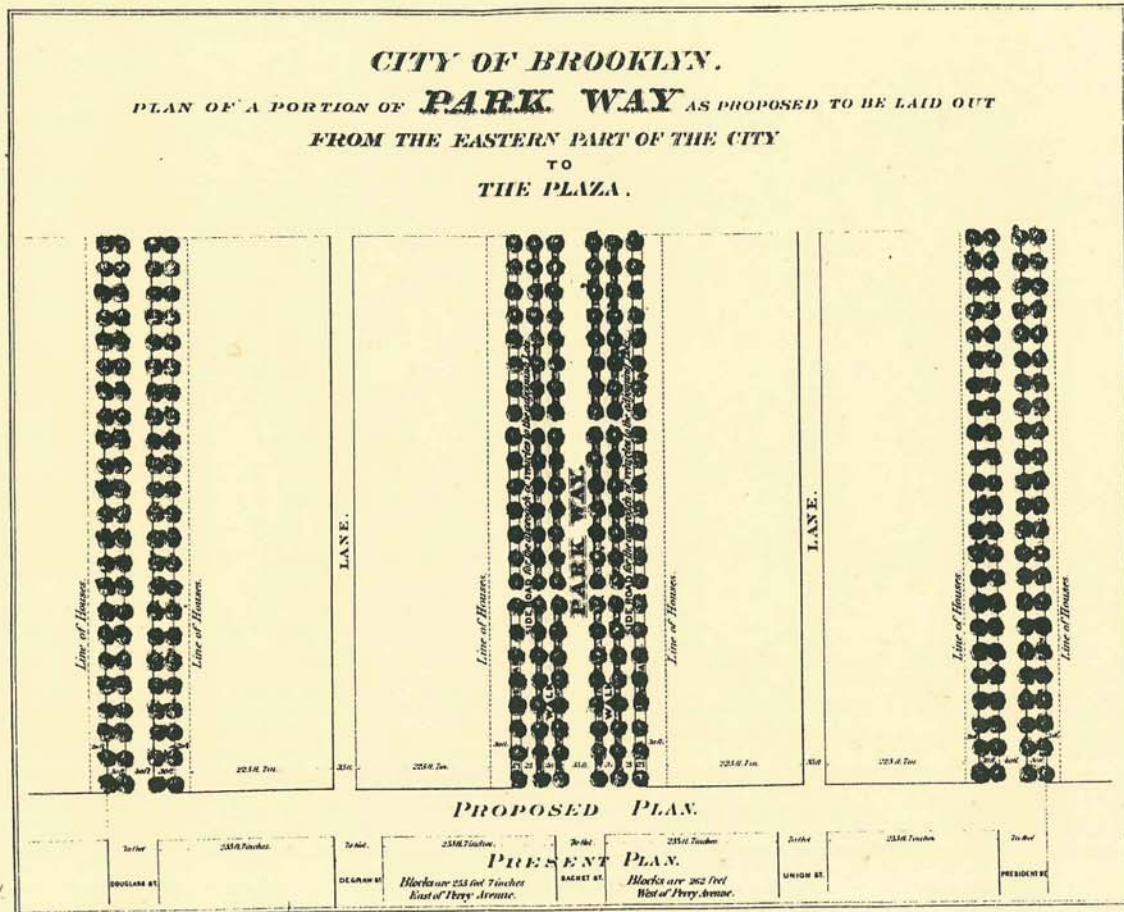
The Parkways

Creation of parkways that would connect elements of a park system and so structure the growth of a city was an element in the urban design of Olmsted and Vaux beginning in the 1860s. Their first comprehensive proposal, which included coining the term "parkway," came in a report to the Brooklyn park commission in 1868. The design they proposed at that time had a central smooth-paved carriageway 65 feet wide that was specifically designated the "Park Way" [7]. It was flanked by two 25-foot sidewalks, outside of which 25-foot side roads provided access for carriages and wagons to adjoining houselots. These five ways were separated by 7.5 foot medians and outside the access roads were sidewalks 12.5 feet wide. Each median and the sidewalk had a single row of trees planted along it. The total width of the parkway, including the sidewalks, was 210 feet. While the outside roads allowed access to the front of houses, which had a 30-foot required setback, the plan provided for alleys at the back for deliveries, trash collection, and access to carriage houses.

The key innovation in the plan was the separation of each mode of travel from the others, and particularly the provision of a smooth-surface drive for the exclusive use of carriages. Even the famous boulevards constructed in Paris by Napoleon III beginning in 1850 did not provide for separation of carts from carriages. The closest approximation in Paris to the Olmsted-Vaux parkway was the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, which formed the grand approach to the Bois de Boulogne from the Arc de Triomphe. On this avenue, wheeled traffic, pedestrians, and



6. Section of General Plan of Genesee Valley Park, Rochester, N.Y., 1890. (FLONHS)



7. Plan for Parkway, Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, 1868.

equestrians were separated from each other, but there was no planted median between the spaces reserved for each.

Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn was soon constructed following the plan of 1868, running three miles from Prospect Park to the city line. Soon after, Ocean Parkway, also 210 feet wide, was constructed for six miles from the park to Coney Island. This was, however, only part of the system of parkways that Olmsted and Vaux wished to see created in Brooklyn. The complete system they envisioned would have connected the half-dozen principal sections of the city with Prospect Park, and in addition would have connected the park with Manhattan and Central Park.

Beginning in 1868, Olmsted and Vaux also planned parkways in Buffalo [8]. One set of 200-foot-wide parkways connected Delaware Park with wide streets running to the city center and to the Front on Lake Erie, while the other ran two miles to the Parade, making a total of three miles of these wide parkways with various numbers of ways running along them and containing six to eight rows of trees. Existing tree-lined avenues connected these parkways with the city center and the Front, making it possible to move through the city while enjoying the amenity of parklike space. As late as the 1950s these were the most impressive of Olmsted's parkways. But the Dutch Elm disease devastated them, and replacement plantings are just now beginning to restore some of the original feeling to the parkways that still exist. The most important parkway, Humboldt Parkway running between Delaware Park and the Parade was completely destroyed in the 1960s with the construction along its whole length of a sunken expressway (which also ran at grade across Delaware Park, destroying the quietness of the meadow and completely separating the meadow from the lake).

The Buffalo parkway system was articulated by major circles at the ends of the parkways that are reminiscent of the Parisian boulevards. This gave an added dignity and impressiveness to the system. The treatment of the junction point of two parkways leading to Delaware Park was particularly monumental: this was Soldiers Place. This solution for the junction of three parkways is strikingly different from any that was either planned or carried out for the three Louisville parkways at their meeting-point in the vicinity of the University of Louisville.

The Buffalo parkways also provided neighborhood recreation grounds. As Olmsted summarized their effect:

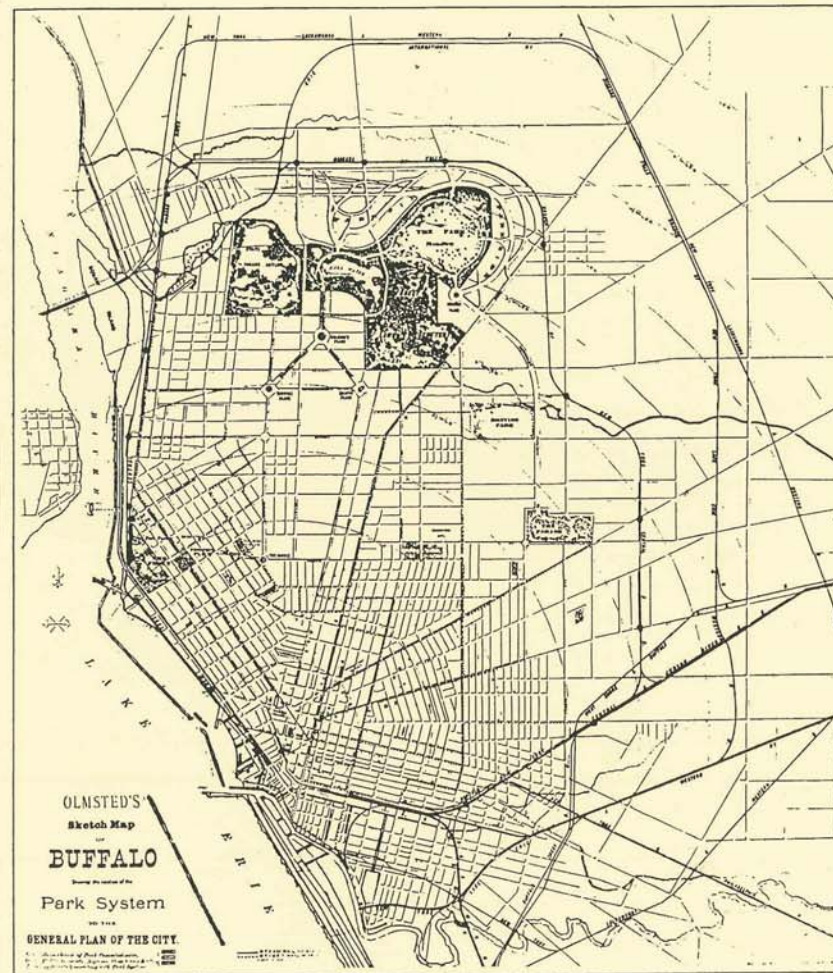
"... at no great distance from any point of the town, a pleasure ground will have been provided for, suitable for a short stroll, for a playground for children and an airing ground for invalids, and a route of access to the large common park of the whole city, of such a character that most of the steps on the way to it would be taken in the midst of a scene of sylvan beauty, and with the sounds and sights of the ordinary town business, if not wholly shut out, removed to some distance and placed in obscurity. The way itself would thus be more park-like than town-like."¹¹

These parkways also created residential neighborhoods. This was particularly true of the triple set of parkways that coalesced at Soldiers Place near Delaware Park. There Olmsted used the parkway to promote the development of a prosperous residential area near a park that he designed. He assumed that in most cases his parks would give rise to such development, but he seldom had the opportunity to use parkways to structure such an area. In addition to this section, Olmsted planned a series of residential neighborhoods north of Delaware Park, using the park as the focus of community planning. His firm was later to accomplish this in a much more complete way in the area north of Cherokee Park in Louisville.

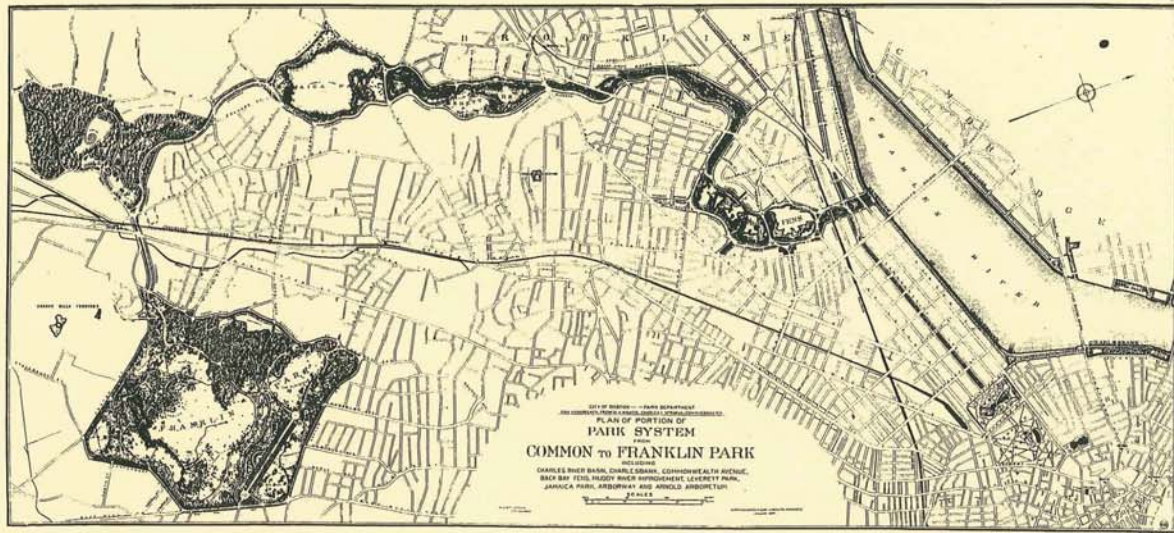
In Chicago, too, Olmsted and Vaux made and carried out plans for parkways in the late 1860s. Two parkways some 200 feet wide ran from the northern end of Washington Park to the city line a mile and a half to the north. The partners also designed a six-mile parkway between the suburban community of Riverside and the city of Chicago (since lost by lane expansion). That parkway was remarkably similar in width and general arrangement to the plan that Olmsted drew up for Southern Parkway in Louisville more than two decades later.¹²

Olmsted's most complete system of parkways connecting the major elements of a city's park system was the single loop of Boston's Emerald Necklace, running the dozen miles from Marine Park on the harbor to Charlesbank on the Charles River and by Commonwealth Avenue to the Public Garden. He began work on this system in the late 1870s, but construction of the parkways in it lasted well into the 1890s [9]. The sections of parkways along the Back Bay Fens and Riverway were unusually wide, since they encompassed the whole watercourse that Olmsted had redesigned as public recreation space. The rest of the system had four sections: (1) a 220-foot-wide section of the "Arborway" connected Jamaica Pond and the Arnold Arboretum; (2) a second section of the Arborway connected the Arboretum and Franklin Park; (3) 110-foot-wide Columbia Road ran eastward from Franklin Park toward Boston harbor; and (4) the Strandway, 165 feet wide, ran from Columbia Road to Marine Park. This extensive parkway system has suffered losses to its integrity in recent years. Most of the circuit is still intact, but the Columbia Road section has lost most of its trees, medians and feeling of amenity.

Olmsted's final opportunity to create a system of parkways before beginning the design of his last system, in Louisville, came in Rochester in 1888. Although that park system, like the Louisville system, had three principal elements, Olmsted and his staff apparently made no comprehensive effort to provide parkways connecting the park to the downtown and to each other. They did prepare a plan for a carriage drive and pedestrian path that would have run along the Genesee River from Genesee Valley Park and city streets at a dam half a mile downstream. The plan for Seneca Park included an avenue with a wide central median running west for a few blocks, but no parkway connection was proposed with the other parks or the city center. Mount Hope Avenue, an already existing, wide, tree-lined street, was to be the



8. Plan of Buffalo Park and Parkway System, 1876. (FLOHNS)



9. Plan of Boston Park System from Boston Common to Franklin Park, 1894. (FLOHNS)

access route to Highland Park from the city. Creation of a unified parkway system in Rochester was especially difficult because the two large parks, Genesee Valley and Seneca, were on opposite sides of the city and could not be directly connected by a parkway running through undeveloped and inexpensive property. A similar problem hampered the Louisville park commissioners in their efforts in the early years to make Broadway serve as a parkway connection between the downtown and Cherokee Park in one direction and Shawnee in another.

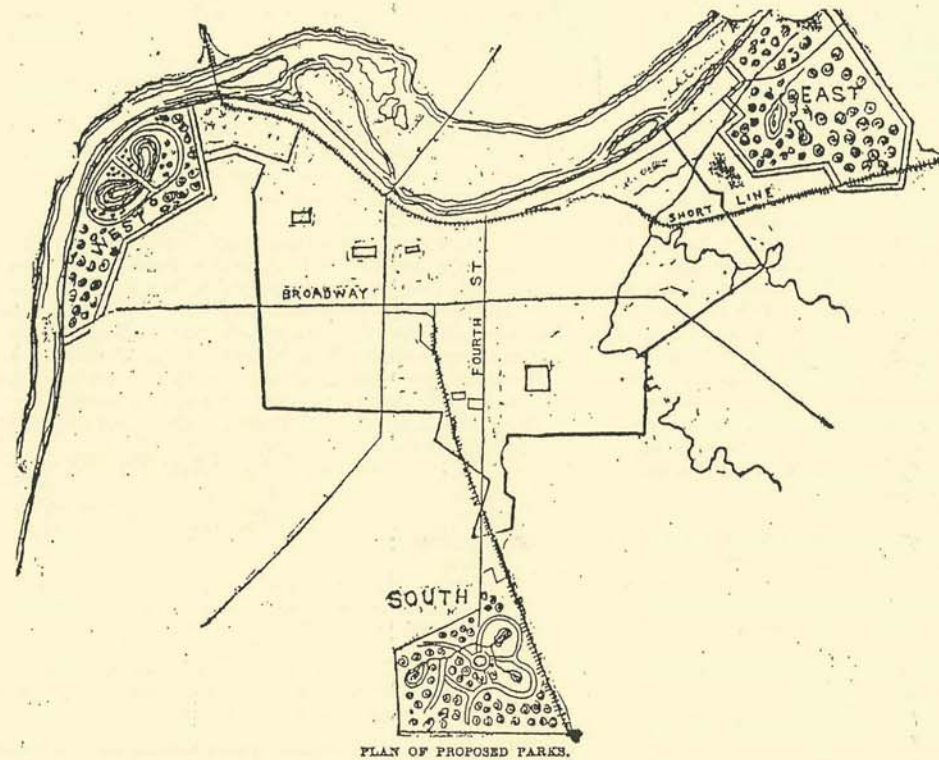
The Louisville Park System

By the time that he began his work in Louisville in 1891, then, Olmsted had been planning park systems for over a quarter-century. The park and parkway systems created by Olmsted and his partners were the most complete and best known in the country. He had been the leading designer, nationally, for the park movement that had swept the country since the Civil War. Whether the influence was direct or not, the first formal proposal for a park system in Louisville, made by the Salmagundi Club in 1887, was close in concept to Olmsted's past practice. It particularly resembled his park systems in Buffalo and Rochester. It was also reminiscent of the Chicago Park system, which had a separate complex of parks for the three major geographical segments of the region—the north, west, and south sides. Indeed, the report on public parks drawn up by the Salmagundi Club in June 1887 made specific reference to Prospect Park, Central Park, and the Buffalo Park system. The author was Andrew Cowan, who was to alternate with John B. Castleman as chairman of the park commission for many years. He had lived in Chicago for some time prior to the great fire of 1871, and testified that his sources in that city reported universal satisfaction with and benefit from the park system there.¹³

The Salmagundi Club proposed a three-park system for the city [10]. One of the sites, on the Ohio River north of Broadway on the west side, corresponded to one of the three park sites selected by the board of park commissioners following its creation in 1890. The eastern park proposed by the Salmagundi Club was to be located between the Ohio River and the Short Line Railroad, with its western boundary approximately at Zorn Street. When the Water Board, which owned part of the riverside site, refused to give the park commission full control of it, Andrew Cowan, then park commission president, and the other park commissioners acquired land along Beargrass Creek as an alternate park location. This site became Cherokee Park. Nor was Burnt Knob, the site of present-day Iroquois Park, included in the Salmagundi Club proposal. Instead, the third park of their system was to be located just south of Churchill Downs.¹⁴ However, Mayor Jacob purchased Burnt Knob during his administration, and created "Jacob Park" there. By the time the park commission was created in 1890 he had already laid out a carriage road to the top. In consequence, that park became the site of Olmsted's third park design, Iroquois Park.

In his plan for the Louisville park system, Olmsted took the differing terrain and scenery of the sites of Cherokee, Iroquois and Shawnee parks as the basis for the distinctive landscape character of each park. He then planned uses for them that were compatible with the scenic experiences they could provide. He and his partners intended each park to serve certain needs of all residents of the city, and wished them to be used by persons from throughout the city. In Olmsted's concept, Cherokee Park was dedicated almost exclusively to the enjoyment of scenery. In fact, his plan contained fewer provisions for other activities and purposes than any other park that he designed. Within his overall conception for the Louisville park system, Shawnee Park ably supplemented Cherokee. Since it contained over 200 acres, the park could supplement the scenic aspects of Cherokee. Shawnee had views of river scenery from atop the banks, and Olmsted planned a formal promenade and viewing area on the bluff. The principal river overlook was arranged for concerts, and had space for floral displays. Shawnee was also to be the one park that provided access to the Ohio River for bathing and boating. Moreover, the size of the park made possible an extensive lawn area of twenty acres with gently modulated surface and scattered shade trees, a greater single expanse of greensward than was feasible in Cherokee Park. This open greenspace also was to be a place for playing field sports, as well as picnicking and general public gatherings. In this way, Olmsted transferred to Shawnee Park a number of activities that he often had felt constrained to include, somehow, within the principal landscape park of a city. The size of the Louisville sites meant that the city had three areas large enough to fit Olmsted's concept of a park, which was more than any other city possessed. (The Buffalo system had only one large space, Delaware Park, while the Parade and Front were only 56 and 32 acres, respectively. Likewise, the third element of the Rochester system, Highland Park, was only 55 acres in size. And, despite the great extent of the Boston system, containing at least nine distinct spaces totaling over 1100 acres, only Franklin Park had the size, scenery, and patterns of use that qualified for Olmsted as a park.)

The third principal component of the Louisville park system was Iroquois Park. Its steep terrain was not suited to providing the open park-like scenery that Olmsted preferred in an urban park, and in any case Cherokee and Shawnee parks would have those qualities. Olmsted preferred for each park in a city to have a distinctive character, so he proposed to treat the Burnt Knob site as a scenic reservation. The area contained forest scenery such as he had experienced with much pleasure during his journey on horseback through the upland South from Mississippi to Virginia in the summer of 1854. Iroquois, then, would provide "a treasure of sylvan scenery, alternative and supplementary to the treasures which you would have on your other properties, the grandeur of the forest depths in the dim seclusion of which you may wander musingly for hours." That scenery would be "extended and increased and given diversity and made more interesting," by inexpensive managing and planting.¹⁵



10. Park System proposed for Louisville by the Salmagundi Club, 1887. (FLONHS)

2. The Olmsted Parks & Parkways

Much of the land in the outer sections of the Iroquois Park site, near the boundaries, was open fields. This provided the opportunity for creating open groves and small clearings along the lower circuit road that merged with the dense forest on the higher slopes. Throughout the park, the Olmsted firm practiced "aesthetic forestry," which they described as "the art of caring for and developing forests and woodlands as component parts of landscapes." Their approach involved management of the woods in a way that heightened and simplified the special scenic character of each section.

In earlier years, Olmsted had played an important role in securing the reservation of nationally significant scenery, as at Yosemite and Niagara Falls, but creation of scenic reservations was a relatively new development in his treatment of urban park systems. Nor had the existing forest been a central feature of many of his urban parks.

Mount Royal in Montreal, where he began work in 1874, had been the first place where the terrain and climate was clearly unsuitable for "parklike" scenery of open greensward and groves. Accordingly, Olmsted had realized that the forest character of the site was the essential landscape element to be dealt with. On Belle Isle in Detroit, a few years later, he made the existing forest on the site a key element of his plan. Later, in Seneca Park in Rochester, N.Y., he developed much of the area as a scenic reservation of forest. Most of Seneca Park consisted of the heavily wooded steep sides of the Genesee River gorge below the city. Olmsted provided trails along the edge of the gorge, with several paths descending to landings on the river. Manipulation of the forest vegetation was to be minimal, amounting to preservation of existing scenery rather than creation of a new landscape.

The next stage in the scenic reservation movement occurred when Charles Eliot, Olmsted's student and partner from 1893 to 1897, expanded Olmsted's concept of scenic reservations in urban areas by securing the creation of Boston's metropolitan park system. Most of that system was made up of areas of outstanding natural scenery. This process began in 1891, the same year Olmsted began his park work in Louisville, and Eliot participated in the planning of Iroquois Park.

Another element of the Louisville Park System as planned by Olmsted and his firm was the series of parkways connecting the three major parks. Part of this system, Southern Parkway, had already been conceived as Grand Boulevard, connecting Jacob Park with Third Street at Shipp Street; Mayor Charles Jacob had secured donations of land for the 150-foot-wide boulevard from landowners along its route. This was wider than most of the boulevards of Paris, only a few of which were more than forty meters wide, but Grand Boulevard was not as wide as the parkways that Olmsted had designed during the previous twenty years. He devoted a good deal of time to working out a solution for the 150-foot limit of Southern Parkway, finally settling on a 40-foot central drive for pleasure carriages, flanked on either side by a 28-foot median with a 14-foot path and two rows of trees. Outside the median was to be a 20-foot access road for delivery wagons, with a row of trees and

sidewalk outside of that. The Olmsted firm also drew up plans in 1892 for parkways from Southern Parkway to Cherokee and Shawnee parks, following the general course of present-day Eastern and Western (or Algonquin) parkways. In 1907 the firm made an additional, detailed planting plan for the section of Eastern Parkway between Castlewood and Bardstown Road. Parkway construction took place episodically: Eastern Parkway was completed c. 1912, while the final links of the parkway to Shawnee Park was not constructed until the late 1920s.

Beginning in 1891, Olmsted and his partners also designed the smaller elements of the Louisville system of parks and open spaces. He and his firm completed plans for Boone Square, Logan Square and Kenton Place during 1891, well before completing their design of any of the large parks.¹⁶ Under the leadership of John C. Olmsted, the firm went on to design a dozen additional parts of the city's system, including Tyler, Seneca and Chickasaw parks.

Louisville's legacy of landscape design by the Olmsted firm is an extensive and valuable one. The present master-planning process undertaken by the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy offers an important opportunity to re-examine that legacy. It will make it possible to plan so that the citizens of Louisville receive full benefit from their Olmsted legacy while meeting present and future recreational needs. In the process, the master-planning team will use modern understanding of the ecological process to secure the long-term health of the trees, shrubs and grasses that make up the scenery of Louisville's century-old Olmsted parks.

Notes to Chapter 2

- 1 Frederick Law Olmsted to Henry Van Brunt, Jan. 22, 1891, Vol. A12, p. 579, Olmsted Associates Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as OARLC).
- 2 "Report of F. L. Olmsted & Co., Landscape Architects," in Board of Park Commissioners of the City of Louisville, *First Annual Report* (Louisville, 1891), p. 56 (hereafter cited as "Annual Report").
- 3 Olmsted, Vaux & Co., "Report of the Landscape Architects," Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1866), p. 20.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 5 Frederick Law Olmsted, "Address to the Prospect Park Scientific Association," (1868), National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Mass. (hereafter cited as "FLONHS").
- 6 Frederick Law Olmsted to Salem H. Wales, October 11, 1873, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Volume 6, *The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), pp. 651-53.

- 7 Olmsted, Vaux & Co., *Report Accompanying Plan for Laying Out the South Park* (Chicago, 1872); Victoria Post Ranney, *Olmsted In Chicago* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 25-31; Daniel Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), pp. 39-44.
- 8 See David Schuyler, "Cityscape and Parkscape," Charles Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted's Vision for Buffalo," Arleyn A. Levee, "The Olmsted Firm in Buffalo: The Next Generation," and Francis R. Kowsky, "Calvert Vaux and the Architecture of Buffalo's Parks" in Francis R. Kowsky, ed., *The Best Planned City: The Olmsted Legacy in Buffalo* (Buffalo, 1991).
- 9 F. L. and J. C. Olmsted, "Plan for a Public Park on the Flats South of Buffalo," in Buffalo, N.Y., Park Commission, *The Projected Park and Parkways on the South Side of Buffalo. Two Reports by the Landscape Architects.* (Buffalo, N.Y., 1888), p. 7.
- 10 See Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System.* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).
- 11 Frederick Law Olmsted [signed Olmsted, Vaux & Co.] to William Dorsheimer, October 1, 1868, in Buffalo, N.Y., Park Commission, *Preliminary Report Respecting a Public Park in Buffalo, and a Copy of the Act of the Legislature Authorizing Its Establishment.* (Buffalo, N.Y. 1869), pp. 25-26.
- 12 The Riverside parkway had a 42-foot "central roadway especially adapted to pleasure drive," an equestrian path 12 feet wide on one side of the drive and a 12-foot-wide "Walk or footway especially adapted for pleasure walking" on the other. Two 6-foot borders, each with a row of trees separated these three separate ways, and two other six-foot borders with trees separated them from a twenty-foot access drive and ten-foot sidewalk on each side (Frederick Law Olmsted to Leverett W. Murray, April 24, 1869, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874.* [Baltimore, Md., 1992], pp. 343-45).
- 13 "Public Parks. A Plan to Promote the Pleasure, Happiness and Prosperity of the People," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 5, 1887, Bodley Collection, The Filson Club.
- 14 *Loc. cit.*
- 15 "Report of F. L. Olmsted & Co., Landscape Architects," in *First Annual Report* (1891), p. 56.
- 16 See Frederick Law Olmsted to Andrew Cowan, July 31, 1891, Vol. A15, p. 387, and Frederick Law Olmsted to Thomas H. Sherey, Nov. 7, 1891, Vol. A17, p. 354, OARLC.

The Olmsted Vision for Louisville

Prepared by Landscapes, Westport CT

Historic designed landscapes are natural environments that have been altered by planned human interactions. The Louisville parks and parkways have value as designed landscapes and works of art because they are the product of recognized masters—landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., John Charles Olmsted and the members of the Olmsted firm. The mission of the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy is to preserve the legacy of the Olmsted parks and parkways. Therefore, the historic value of these public landscapes is recognized as a starting point for the inventory and analysis process.

One component of the planning process is determination of "the period of historic significance" for these landscapes. The period of Olmsted significance for Louisville is from the 1890s to 1916 with some continuing contact through the 1930s, spanning the years of the Olmsted firm's park and parkway design and implementation, and during which the city shaped these public spaces in accordance with the concepts and plans of the Olmsted firm. The Louisville Olmsted parks and parkways are listed on the National Register of Historic Places for their significance as designed historic landscapes created under the vision of the Olmsted firm. This designation recognizes their importance as cultural resources for the city and region and affords the protection of advisory review over federally funded projects that impact these historic resources.

During 1991 and 1992, Olmsted Historian, Charles Beveridge, PhD, and Arleyn Levee, landscape historian, conducted extensive research on the original development of Shawnee, Iroquois and Cherokee Parks and the Parkway system. Their research gathered the written and graphic record in great detail into several volumes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century history. These compilations and summary reports have served as constant reference materials for the master planning process and as sources for many of the quotes used in this report.

The Olmsted Vision for Louisville Community

"My notion is that whatever ground a great city may need for other public purposes, for parades, for athletic sports, for fireworks, for museums of art and science, such as botanic gardens, it also needs a large ground scientifically and artistically prepared to provide such a poetic and tranquilizing influence on its people as comes through a pleased contemplation of natural scenery, especially sequestered and limitless natural scenery."—Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., Correspondence, January, 1891.

The development of three relatively large but distinctive parks and a system of interconnecting parkways for Louisville was a mature conceptual framework for Olmsted that had been tried, with varying degrees of success in other cities. Here the unique qualities of the Ohio River frontage (Shawnee Park), the pastoral, rolling valley surrounding Beargrass Creek

(Cherokee Park), and the promontory and near surround of Burnt Knob or Jacob's Park (Iroquois Park) were each intended to provide entirely different kinds of scenery and recreational experience for Louisville's citizens. In planning their improvements as public parks, the character of each area was a basis for the designs. The improvements were directed toward enhancing access, scenic experience and diverse recreational opportunity in each park. Each park was planned as a unified composition, organized for a complete landscape experience. This sentiment is concisely stated in a letter dated May 24, 1899: "Everything that is done, that is visible from the surface at any rate, should be in harmony with a comprehensive, sensible general plan."

The 1893 General Plan for Shawnee Park [1] uses the riverfront setting and topography of these lands as the inspiration for the park designs. The two principal features of the park design are the three concourses—north, south and middle—affording extensive river views and direct access to the river slopes along pedestrian paths and the expansive, control lawn on nearly level ground. This great lawn, edged with enclosing plantings, was intended as Louisville's place of broad, green scenery and as the setting for large public gatherings.

The 1897 General Plan for Iroquois Park [2] shows a nearly square area of park land with the open center of Summit Field at the top of the hill, wrapped in the dark, sloping forests of the hillside. The forest and summit, with a series of scenic outlooks, is the essential nature of Iroquois Park. These lands were set aside as a preserve and developed for access and enjoyment with the forests remaining essentially intact. The Olmsted design and construction addressed the conservation of the forests and the plantings to blend with the adjacent woodlands. The design also addressed the creation of narrow areas of greensward with shade trees along the park margins. These more level and rolling spaces provided pastoral scenery that contrasted with the native forests of the hillside and they were adaptable to the varied uses.

The 1897 General Plan for Cherokee Park [3] shows the irregular shape of the park as it follows the rolling topography of the Bear Grass Creek Valley and neighboring hills and ridges. The lands of Cherokee Park, an example of open, undulating, bluegrass countryside, were shaped as a park to accentuate the qualities of landform and regional vegetation. The design centers on the sinuous, wooded creek valley, with the rolling hills to the south shaping the visual and physical spaces to experience them. The sinuous drive and paths rise and fall, winding through this interesting landscape affording views over the green hills into woodlands and along the creek itself.

The Parkways, as an interconnected system, are the fourth component of the Olmsted vision for Louisville [4]. The principal concept of these wide routes was to provide a spacious, tree-lined corridor through the city that connected to the parks. These 150 foot and 120 foot wide corridors were intended for multiple uses with three pavements for bridle, bicycle and vehicle use originally planned. Along Southern Parkway the extra width afforded room for three routes, while the narrower Eastern and Western

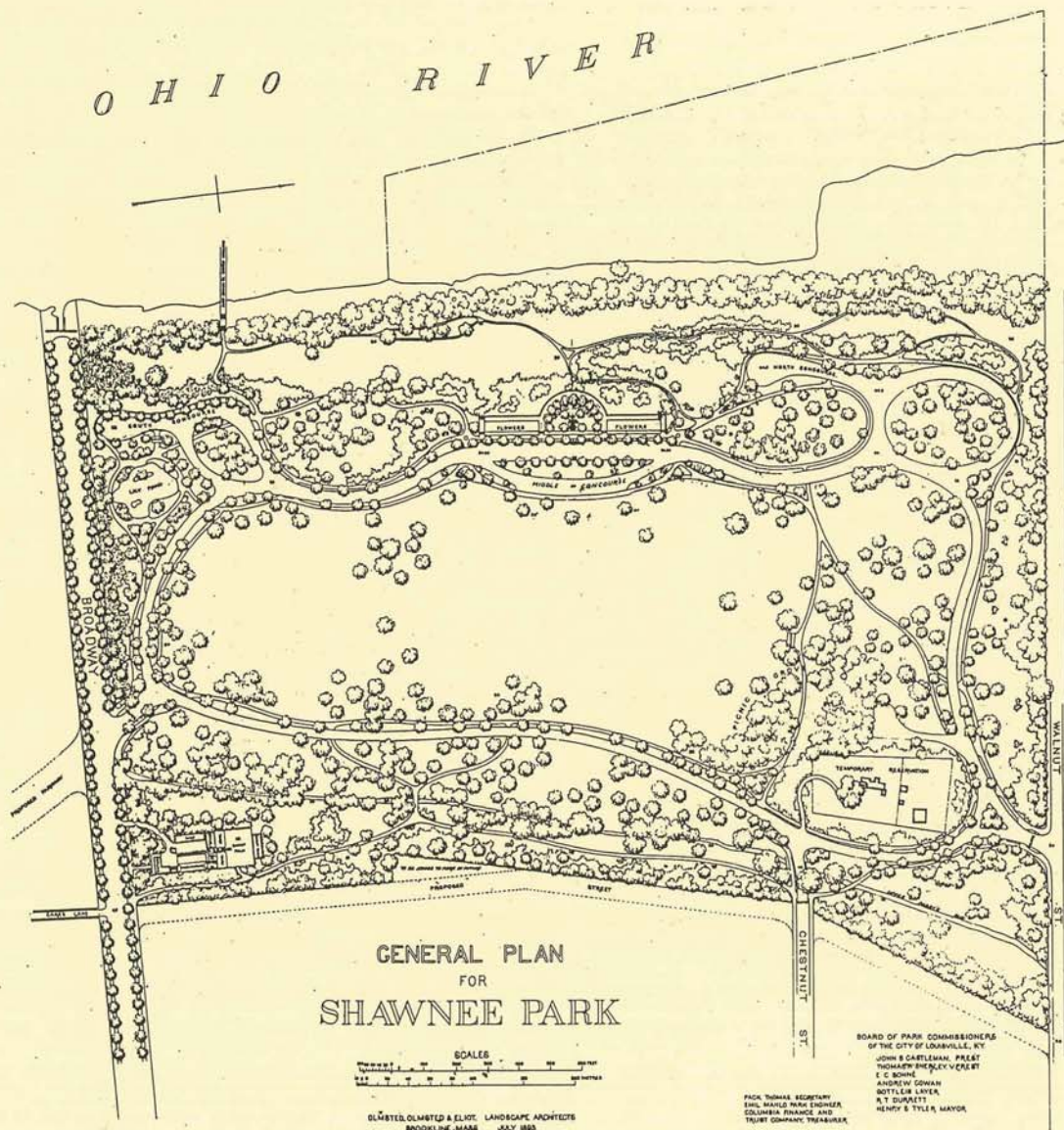
Parkways provided only a central drive and pedestrian sidewalks. The parkways, ill-linked and now degraded, remain a green corridor that requires improvements to recapture their design intent and meet their potential.

The enhancement of the Louisville parks for diverse public use was planned to provide three types of recreation. Each park was enriched as a natural, scenic environment so that passive recreation could be enjoyed in these broad open lands, as a contrast to their confined, urban setting. Places to gather and to pursue active recreation were incorporated into the park designs to provide these varied recreation opportunities. The three parks provided opportunities for diverse recreational pursuits. Olmsted defined the types of recreation to be enjoyed in parks in three terms:

- *Recreative*: the calming influence of nature, generally called "passive recreation" today. It is the ability to experience a park as a place of nature—different from the city—to walk, sit, relax, enjoy scenery;
- *Gregarious*: to enjoy the park with others sharing the public spaces with friends or relations or with strangers in a civilized, friendly manner. This type of use is generally thought of as "Group Use" today, in both programmed and unplanned gatherings of people; and
- *Exertive*: athletic activities that work the body and improve physical health, called Active Recreation today, both as facility-based sports such as baseball, basketball or tennis, and as non-facility pursuits such as bicycling, running, roller blading and horseback riding.

One quality of the Olmsted landscape that is lacking in the Louisville parks today is that of ease. The park users were intended to easily move through the landscape enjoying the spaces, alone or with companions, in passive, or active recreation pursuits. Currently in Louisville the circulation systems for pedestrians, vehicles, bicycles and horses are fragmented, confusing and sometimes dysfunctional. This is caused in part by the fact that portions of these systems have been lost over time and other segments were never fully constructed. In other cases, new drives, paths or entrances present confusing choices.

The experience of the parks was intended to be a positive one. Today that sense of ease in park use is compromised by the deterioration of the pedestrian path systems, which makes movement through the parks and along the parkways difficult and the degraded condition of the parks overall, which negates the experience of park and parkway use. While many park areas are in good condition with support structures or recreation elements fully serviceable, in other areas, erosion, drainage problems, trees in poor health, dysfunctional equipment, dumping and other evidence of disrepair or dereliction are readily visible. These negative conditions detract from the nature of the park experience with two results: first, recreation in the parks is less positive; and second, the experience can be tainted by feelings of insecurity or lack of personal safety. Real crimes in parks are publicized broadly, adding to feelings of insecurity. Conditions of dereliction and confusion can also spark vandalism. These issues must



1. General Plan for Shawnee Park, Louisville, Kentucky, July 1893, by Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot, Landscape Architects. (FLONHS)

be directly addressed through improvements in physical condition and management changes, especially to the circulation systems. The reinstatement of ease of use should be a constant consideration in rehabilitating the parks and the parkways.

The Character of the Park & Parkway Landscapes

Each of the Louisville parks had their own character as a pre-Olmsted landscape; some of these qualities were retained, with enhancements and additions during the design process to create an overall composition of publicly accessible, usable and enjoyable park lands. The qualities of the parks and parkways conveyed by their materials, spaces and finishes are referred to as character-defining features. Over time, these physical and spatial aspects have been either retained, lost, altered or overlaid with contemporary elements. The character-defining features of historic landscapes include: (1) Topography; (2) Circulation; (3) Vegetation; (4) Natural Systems and Water Features; (5) Landscape Structures; (6) Site Furnishings/Objects; (7) Surroundings/Setting; and (8) Spatial Relationships. Throughout the Louisville Parks and Parkways their historic significance is evident, to a greater or lesser degree. Certain features of these historic landscapes are more intact than others. The following descriptions of each character-defining component of these Olmsted landscapes address the overall park and parkway system. The Olmsted approach to, current status of and issues about each historic character-defining feature are each discussed below.

Topography

The topography of each park is unique to its area and geology. The pre-design topography was altered in the Olmsted development years for drive and path locations and in the vicinity of major features, such as Willow Pond, which was created at that time. The general approach to topography taken by the Olmsted firm was to work with the existing grades, fitting in the circulation elements so that they blended effectively into the surrounding landscape. For example, path alignments might follow the shape of the contours, moving gently up or down the grade with as little disruption to the landform as possible. This matching of circulation to the shape of the land created horizontal alignments that were curvilinear and non-geometric. Path and drive margins were often graded to provide surface drainage in shallow grass swales using an ogee curve form. Figure [5] shows the construction of a drive in Iroquois Park with graded margins using the ogee curb and grass swale at the edges.

Today much of the topography in the parks is intact. Specific areas of erosion or drainage failures have altered the landform. Changes in topography due to drainage pressures are most evident in Iroquois Park in a number of locations on the slopes of Burnt Knob. Changes in topography have also been made to accommodate active play fields and equipment, new structures and, in the case of Shawnee Park, a berm was created to hold back flood waters. Some amount of soil loss has taken place over the years. Subtle changes in topography are caused by natural forces, such as wind, water and weathering.

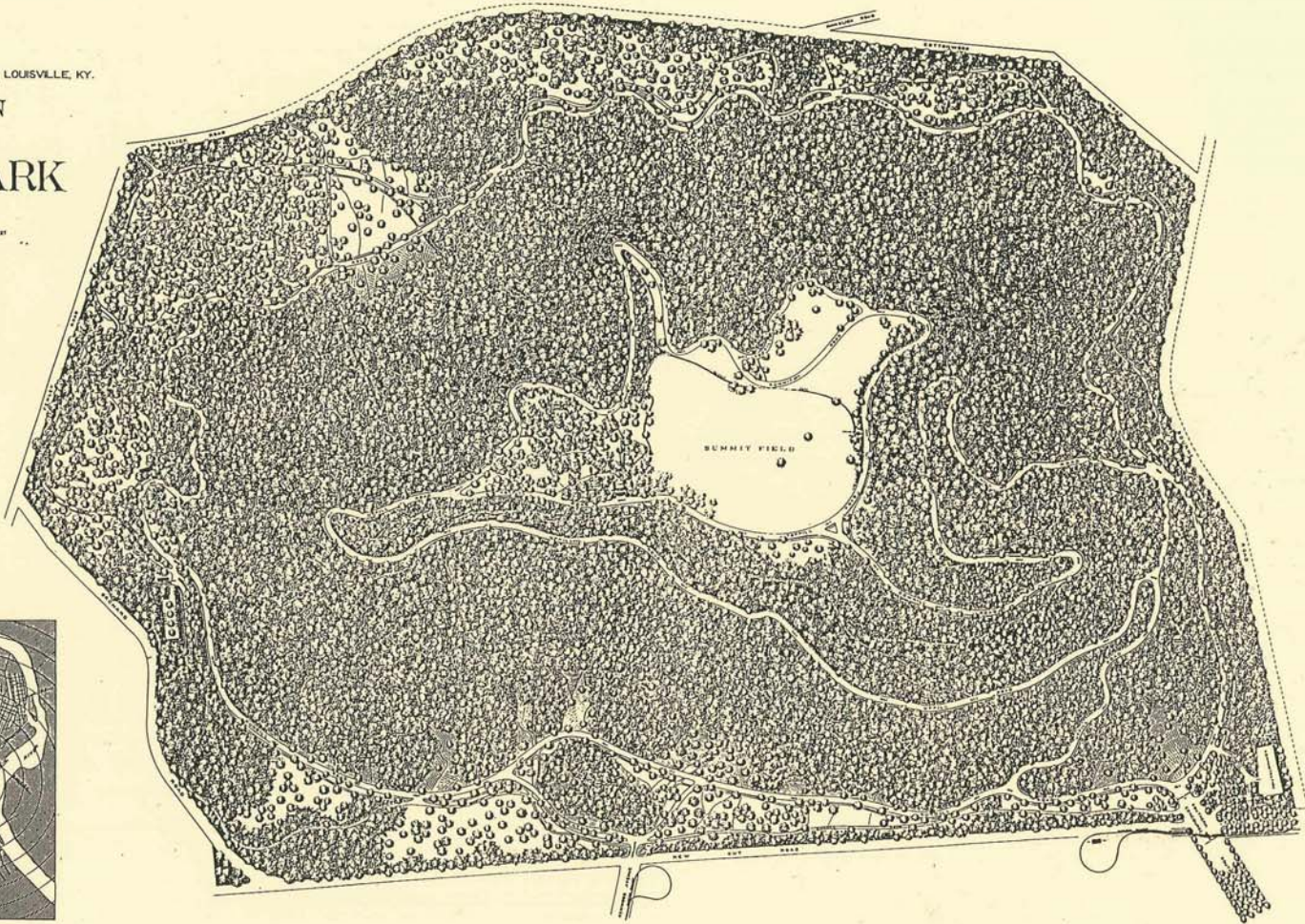
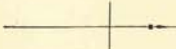
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE, KY.

GENERAL PLAN FOR IROQUOIS PARK

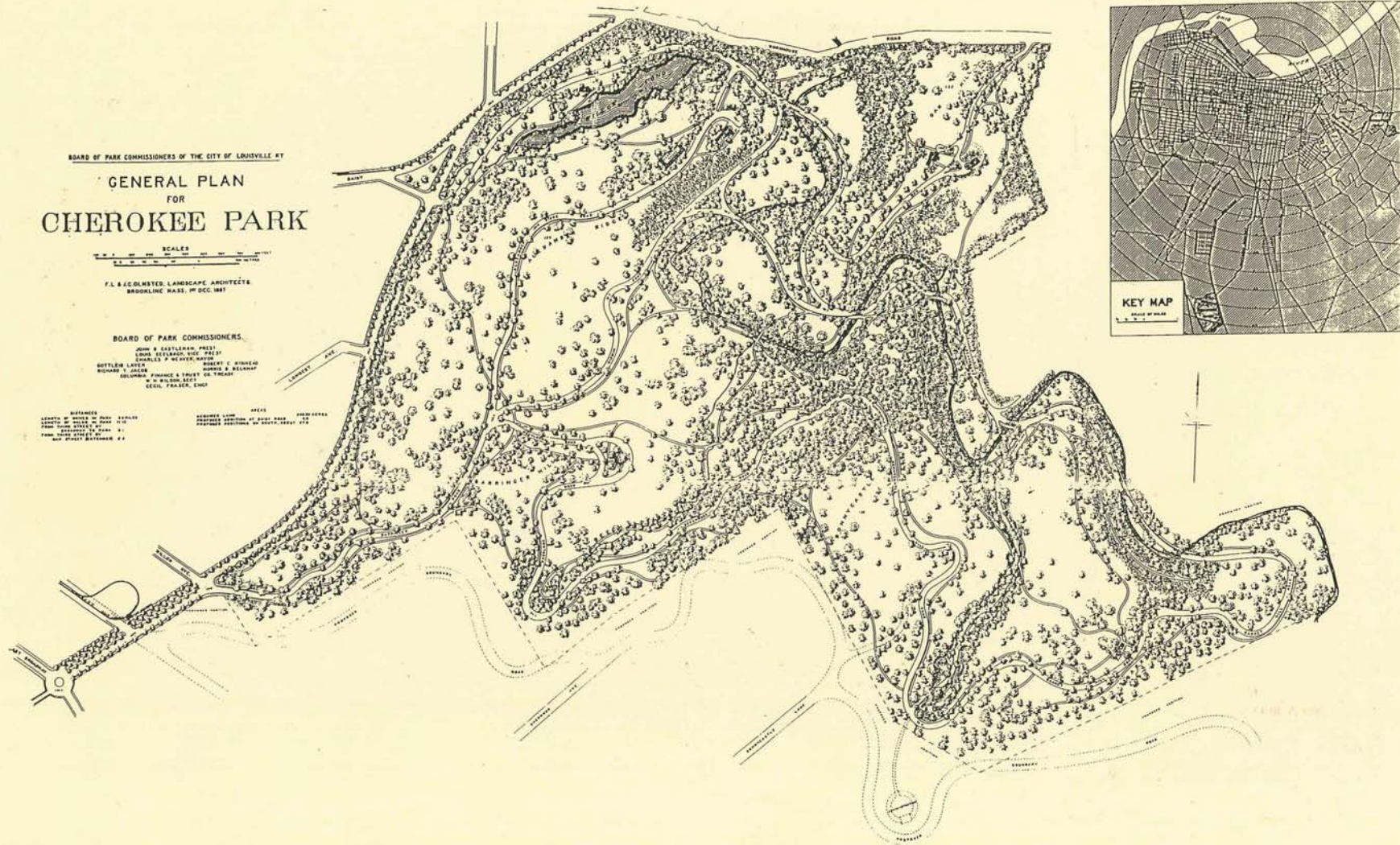
SCALES
1" = 100 FEET
1" = 200 FEET
1" = 400 FEET
1" = 800 FEET
1" = 1600 FEET
F.L. and J.C. Olmsted, Landscape Architects
Brookline, Mass.
1st. December, 1897.

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
John B. Galtman, President,
Linn Melancon, Vice President,
Charles Warren, Mayor,
Bartlett Lupton,
Samuel T. Jones,
Robert O. Hendon,
Homer S. Reiser,
Thomas Palmer & Trust Co., Treasurer,
119 Main Street, City Park, Kentucky.

SYMBOL	DESCRIPTION
(Symbol)	Proposed
(Symbol)	Existing
(Symbol)	Water
(Symbol)	Highway
(Symbol)	Street
(Symbol)	Boundary
(Symbol)	Proposed
(Symbol)	Existing
(Symbol)	Water
(Symbol)	Highway
(Symbol)	Street
(Symbol)	Boundary



2. General Plan for Iroquois Park, Louisville, Kentucky, December 1, 1897, by F.L. and J.C. Olmsted, Landscape Architects. (FLONHS)



3. General Plan for Cherokee Park, Louisville, Kentucky, December 1897, by F.L. and J.C. Olmsted, Landscape Architects. (FLONHS)

The protection and conservation of historic topography should be incorporated in future planning. The reinstatement of lost topography should be considered, especially in cases where rolling scenic areas have been flattened for sports, or natural drainage systems have been degraded. In several cases, the return to former topographic forms would address both scenic and functional requirements. Sports fields or areas for multi-use free play should be accommodated as inobtrusively as possible, with natural and historic topography retained to the greatest extent possible.

Circulation

Detailed circulation systems were planned to provide pedestrian and vehicular routes, and in some cases bicycle and bridle paths, throughout the park and parkway landscapes. The design of these systems anticipated a large volume of park users. In an Olmsted firm letter of 1896, (DR p 169) the approach to the pedestrian system in Cherokee Park is discussed:

"While experience shows that it is necessary where large numbers of people are to use a park to have walks, yet there should be no more of them than will answer the purpose . . . As a rule, however, it is necessary to have, at least, one wide walk follow close to each drive, as otherwise people will wear disorderly paths in the turf adjoining the drives . . . We shall show more walks on the plan than may be needed for some time, as we wish to provide for the greatly increased use of the park which we anticipate in the future. Thus such walks as are now needed should be built as part of a future system, and not merely with regard to present convenience."

The Olmsted firm developed these parks and parkways circulation systems for efficiency and ease of use. Each of these systems was built to a degree during the early years of construction. The 1928 aerial photographs indicate that a substantial portion of these drives and paths were constructed.

Aerial views from 1928 and 1974 reveal that these systems were functional in 1928 and degraded by 1974. Over time the gravel and cinder pedestrian and bridle pavements have been degraded and obscured. Drives have been resurfaced with asphalt and, in the process, widened or topped up to blend less effectively with the park landscapes. Vehicle parking often happens along drive margins following the policy of two wheels on pavement. This practice degrades the drive edge landscape and in many cases amorphous gravel areas have extended beyond drive edges to create parking space that is unkempt and obtrusive.

Lost circulation systems should be rehabilitated for contemporary uses in the historic locations with the same alignments to the greatest extent possible. As the historic drives and paths are rehabilitated, new segments will need to be added for disabled access and to accommodate current use. Olmstedian principles for fitting the circulation into the landscape must guide this process. The grading and alignment for parts of the Olmsted historic drives and paths are available on historic plans. These plans should be studied carefully as guides to the layout and grading for new path segments so that the new work harmonizes with the historic. Planning for drives will consider scenic quality and visual experience as well as

economy, safety and convenience. Planning for paths should consider the experience of the landscape, and the historic intent for ease of movement and lack of conflict, as well as other contemporary issues.

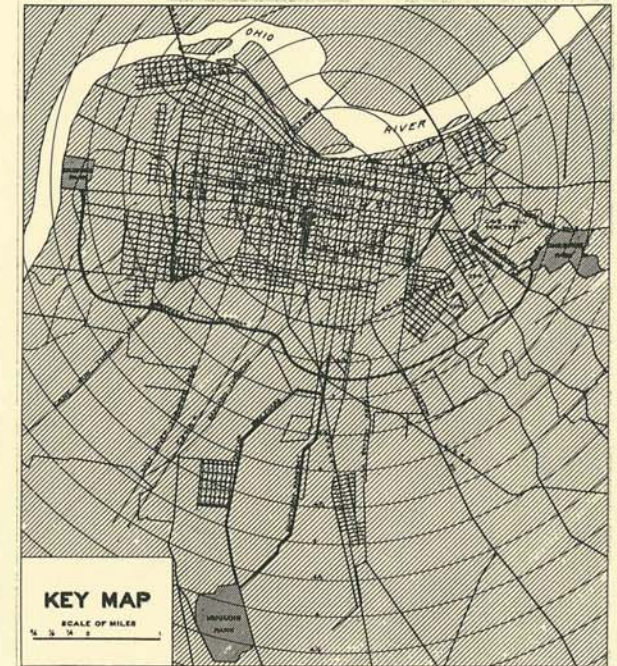
Planning for parking must address daily and frequent uses separately from peak events. Parking should be designed to minimize pavement and maximize green space. Parking area locations and sizes should consider access to destinations, safety and ease of use. By altering traffic patterns, parking for events can be accommodated both on and off site.

Vegetation

The parks and parkways were planned for specific plantings that augmented the existing vegetation and evoked a range of landscape characters with their different cover types. These plantings included both native and exotic species to achieve the intended effects, as shown in the collection of Olmsted planting plans and lists. Much of planned planting was implemented over the period of Olmsted involvement with the Louisville system.

Olmsted Involvement with the Louisville System.

The vegetation within Louisville's Olmsted parks and parkways today is a combination of mature historic plants and plantings, added plantings undertaken over the years and volunteer growth that has self-sown and thrived in the public landscape. Over time original vegetation has been lost due to natural aging, severe weather events (flood, tornado, etc.) and plant stresses due to planting in environmental conditions that were not well matched to the plant types. New plant materials have been added since the Olmsted era often without regard to either the plan or the environmental conditions. The vegetation types intended within the parks and along the parkway is relatively clear in the Olmsted era documentation. These types as designed have been color coded on the Olmsted General Plans and are shown for each park as the Historic Landscape Types Plans in the historic landscape analysis sections of the individual park chapters. As the vegetation of the parks and parkways is renewed, both native and exotic species should be considered for use in accordance with the Olmsted plans. Of course, invasive plant materials should not be used, but other exotic woody plants may be replaced in-kind, as appropriate, alongside native species. The following section introduces the terms, which are also used in the landscape management sections of this report, and describes their intended Olmsted content and effect.



4. Plan of the Parkways, from General Plan for Iroquois Park, Louisville, Kentucky, December 1, 1897, by F.L. and J.C. Olmsted, Landscape Architects. (FLONHS)



5. Initial construction of park drive in Iroquois Park, with graded margins using the limestone ogee curb and grass swales at edges, c. early 1900s (The Courier-Journal, Louisville KY)

Forest

Forest

Primarily existing plantings included an herbaceous ground plane of ferns and wildflowers, with woodland shrubs, understory trees, canopy trees and evergreens, located on level to rolling ground and steep slopes. The conservation and improvement of existing forest was an aspect of each park, and a dominant theme for Iroquois Park. Disturbed forest edges were augmented with seeds and plantings to match the effect of the adjacent growth. The Olmsted firm experimented with the planting of native seeds and acorns in Iroquois Park drives, blending disturbed margins back into the forest. This approach was likely used along the margins of the forest paths as well.

Glade

These small openings in the forest or woodland canopy were areas with partial sun and plantings of ferns, woodland wildflowers and some shrubs. They occurred most frequently at Iroquois Park along drainage ways and paths at the bottom of the slopes.

Woodland

Existing woodlands were augmented, to a greater or lesser degree, with additional plantings on the ground plane, shrub layer, understory and canopy, using both native and exotic species. These were more visually open woodlands with paths and drives on level to rolling ground. In a letter of 1899, the Olmsted firm indicates that the woodlands of Iroquois Park are improving and gives a sense of the important qualities of woods:

"The stoppage of pasturing and wood fires has enabled the natural wild plants to cover the ground . . . The trees are now not only not damaged by fire and the smaller and lower branched ones not denuded of leaves and twigs as high up as cattle can reach, thus helping to still further shade the ground, but the trees having moister soil about their roots, develop more and much larger leaves and retain them more fully through droughts and later in the fall. The principal beauty of a tree is in its leaves and the great charm of a wood is in the abundance and luxuriance of the foliage, not only at the tops where even a maltreated wood has a good deal of foliage, but in delicate sprays of lower branches and twigs and on the young sapling trees and woody undergrowth. The mystery and intricacy of the wood which is due mainly to this lower foliage is of the utmost value. The mistaken policy of 'cleaning up' the woods should never be permitted except in comparatively small and irregular areas where undergrowth would interfere with picnickers and others gathering at certain places."

Mixed Woody Border Planting

These mixed woody border plantings were linear, mixed species plantings in narrow areas along park edges. The range of plantings included herbaceous groundcovers, shrubs, understory trees and canopy trees. Over time the parks were to be edged in dense groves of trees bordering on city streets and park boundary lines. In a letter dated May 6, 1896 the firm remarked on border plantings indicating their purpose and intended management:

"As parks are laid out in the main with regard to agreeable interior scenery and as they are in time apt to be surrounded with streets and houses which are out of harmony with the more natural scenes of the park, it is necessary to the enjoyment of park scenery to exclude from sight generally everything outside. For this reason thick plantations of shrubs and trees have been planted mostly with trees and very thickly. They should be thinned out from time to time to such an extent that the long-lived trees only will be left, and these must be given room to grow with full, dense tops. At the same time shade enduring shrubbery should be maintained in good health. As the outer trees spread, shrubbery and low growing trees should be added, especially where the trees show a tendency to lose their lower branches."

The plant lists for the Shawnee Park border combine native and exotic plants, many with large, coarse leaf textures. Lists are also available for some edges in Cherokee Park and these include a number of shrubs. The composition was naturalistic on level or rolling ground. If the current conditions one hundred years later reflected this design intent, the park edges would be framed in mature trees with an understory of lower trees and shade tolerant shrubs. This tree and understory planting would be akin to an open woodland.

Shrub Mass

These were horticultural plantings of deciduous shrubs with a limited number of evergreens. Multiple species of shrubs were organized in masses for visual and physical separation, decorative flowers, interesting texture, fall color, berries and seasonal effect. They were used at park boundaries to frame entrances, on slopes at Shawnee with views over them of the Ohio River and along some parkway frontages to provide separation from adjacent properties and in smaller spaces like Willow Park to shape the space, provide a variable green border and add seasonal interest. In general, these plantings were of a horticultural nature and relied on regular maintenance to thrive. The mass plantings on the Shawnee riverfront slopes failed to thrive and some plants selected were too tall for the retention of river vistas. 1893 views show this area as a tall grass meadow. Shrub masses were used in limited areas and may still be valid for selected park spaces in the future, such as the corner plantings at Willow Park or the entry area to Shawnee Park at Broadway.

Greensward

Mixed Turf with Shade Trees

Mixed species turf either cut or grazed allows free access on foot and visual contact with ground plane and topography, often planted with single grand trees or small groups to accentuate the shape of the ground and to create a constantly changing sense of the space as views move through the landscape. This was a sunny, open landscape effect, like the Great Lawn at Shawnee Park and the rolling slopes of Cherokee Park.

The greensward of the historic period was not akin to the lawn of today. Instead, it was composed of mixed grasses and forbs. Forbs, low growing herbaceous plants with leaves and flowers, give a coarser texture to the ground plane. Note that no tall grass is included in this range although photographic views from the early twentieth century show some tall grass and mixed species turf expanses within the parks.

Tree Groves

Existing deciduous trees were retained and additional ones planted to create open tree groves with individual trees and small groupings over turf. Mixed species turf, either cut or grazed, allowed free access on foot and visual contact with ground plane and topography. Deciduous canopy trees were more densely planted for picnic groves than the mixed turf with shade trees. These tree groves had a dappled quality to the light with more shade than sun.

Parkway and Street Trees

On some park frontages, parkways and other formal areas, deciduous canopy trees were planted in single or multiple rows with variations in spacing and organization. On the Southern Parkway plan, six rows of trees are indicated with the two outside ones planted in sycamore, the next two in red maple and the central two in basswood. When the parkway changed direction, this planting retained sycamore along the outside, with the next two planted with sweet gum and the center two planted in tulip poplar. This approach created a formal organization without planting a monoculture. The important design element of the parkways are the linear tree rows with regular spacing. The existing parkway tree plantings are predominantly native trees and are often mixed species. These mature trees represent the as-built condition and should be replaced in-kind as they are removed.

Creek/River

The Beargrass Creek, snaking through Cherokee Park, was a linear system that was the focus of this park's landscape. Plantings on water feature edges focused on shrubs and emergent aquatic plants, such as iris. It does not appear that the Olmsted firm was engaged in a detailed bank planting to stabilize Beargrass Creek but their letter of 1915 addresses the planting.

"There is much need of planting shrubs and vines (which will stand the floods) along the banks of the creek; where the slopes of the creek are gentle, and are now muddy earth, much of the summer and covered at best with coarse weeds, we advise that some quick-growing grass seed be planted..."

The seasonal Paddy's Run drainage through the eastern edge of Shawnee Park was another natural water feature that was incorporated into the park design as a grassy swale. Ohio River banks at Shawnee Park were edged with willow and poplar trees which were retained.

Special Features

These elements occur in the park landscapes as individual points of interest with scenic or educational value. They are not pervasive, but are focused in a particular area.

Water Feature

Willow Pond at Cherokee Park and the Lily Pond at Shawnee Park are two created water bodies with aquatic plantings. These open water elements were developed as a part of the Olmsted vocabulary as a contrast and complete to the pastoral greensward and the picturesque forest and woodland.

Flower Garden

In general Olmsted disdained garden plantings in parks thinking that they were too visually jarring and out of character with the broader landscape as cited in an 1899 letter (DR p213).

"There will be a demand, no doubt, from time to time, for the gaudy floral displays customary in many parks. Bright flowers, like most other beautiful things in nature, are desirable and all right in their places, but the magnificent grassy slopes and grand old trees of Cherokee Park have infinitely greater value than any bed of scarlet geraniums or other popular flowers. On no account should any formal or exotic floral embellishment be permitted in the park where it will compete with the beautiful and typical local scenery. There may be spots, however, which can be spared from the broad landscape of the park and which could be planted out from them."

In the Olmsted design the only floral display treatment was at the Shawnee Park Middle Concourse, Music Court.

Botanical Collection

In Cherokee Park the "Woody Plants of Kentucky" represented a botanical approach to park planting where trees and shrubs were located within the park as an element of scientific interest. Specific families, genus and species of plants were arranged in a naturalistic manner to blend with the other plantings while providing a public educational resource. This ar-

2. The Olmsted Parks & Parkways

rangement grouped plants together based on their botanical nomenclature but without regard to the ideal conditions for their growth. For example, woodland plants might be placed in a sunny greensward and wetland plants might be planted on dry slopes. The important aspect of this collection is the educational one, and includes Kentucky's plants within the park landscape.

These landscape types represent the range of the vegetation for the Olmsted parks and parkways of Louisville. In general, the diversity of historic landscape types should be recaptured although the issues of sustainability and maintenance intensity affect the future cover types. The vegetation of the parks has become more limited over time, providing less variety and less contrast with the urban setting. Vegetation was a critical element in separating the parks from the city both physically and visually. Certain landscape types were designed for specific locations in each park. The natural systems of different park areas—soils, water, microclimate—were unique. Vegetation treatments in the Olmsted era were likely tailored to these qualities. *A goal of future landscape management should be to reinstate the visual diversity and distinctive character of the park and parkway vegetation, considering the color, texture, form, and spatial qualities of the vegetation in each unique setting as well as ecological factors.*

Natural Systems

As designed historic landscapes, these parks are the product of a human response by the Olmsted firm to the natural systems, and therefore contain both natural and cultural associations. Iroquois Park, for example, has importance for its inherent ecological values, as well its history as a public park. National Park guidelines for historic landscapes call for the consideration of natural systems to include geology, hydrology, plant and animal habitats and climate. Some biotic resources may be particularly susceptible to disturbance and should be conserved and protected from adverse impacts. As planning proceeds, expertise in natural systems should be applied to the work. At the same time, the historic Olmsted imprint should be respected and incorporated into planning so that both cultural resources and natural resources are fully addressed.

Landscape Structures

Structures within the park and parkway landscape were designed to serve park uses. These built elements are secondary resources within the primary resource of the landscape. They were initially intended to merge with the landscape in a compatible manner—their site planning, design and details complementing the surrounding park. Some original structures remain, others have been lost or replaced and additions have been made. For example, the bridges in Cherokee Park serve the utilitarian purpose of carrying park users across Beargrass Creek but they are obtrusive elements in the park landscape. Contemporary restrooms and picnic shelters have been developed as utilitarian elements often standing out from, rather than harmonizing with, the surrounding landscape. Effective site planning, design and detailing of park structures should be more thoroughly

addressed in the future. The construction of structures within parks should seek to blend structures into the landscape effectively by keeping them relatively small in scale, using natural materials such as rustic timber or stone and painting with earth and vegetation tone colors in the brown and green families. The resources of primary importance in the parks should always be the green landscapes. All structures in the parks should be built to serve park purposes rather than being important elements in the landscape in and of themselves.

Site Furnishings and Objects

There are relatively few furnishings within the parks today that remain from the historic period. In general, benches, lights, signs, drinking fountains, and the like should conform to the same considerations as the structures—simplicity, harmony, function. For example, the Olmsted firm proposed that park signs be simple and low with a dark brown background color and light cream letters, and only used where needed.

A plethora of furnishings was not intended. Clutter was to be avoided. Occasional benches placed at scenic areas and views along walks were for park user comfort and ease. Memorials, in general, were thought to be funereal in nature and to be avoided in the parks. Where necessary, they should be integrated with the park surround, as was effected in the development of the Christensen Fountain, which also functions as a retaining wall. Where statues were placed, the settings were often formalized to match the nature of the piece, such as the Hogan Fountain in Cherokee Park. Such formal objects were not placed within the pastoral landscape and should not be added to the parks in the future.

A contemporary vocabulary of furnishings can be developed that suits the conceptual framework of simplicity, harmony and function while reflecting historic solutions and serving contemporary needs.

Spatial Relationships

The spatial relationships of the parks and parkways were a carefully designed sequence. The Olmstedian principle of spatial extension created a sense of enlarged space by developing circulation loops, vistas, new perspectives, enclosing edges, framing elements, providing distant views, etc., as one moved through the landscape. Never viewing the same area twice from the same vantage point gave a sense of difference that made these public grounds seem larger than they, in fact, were. These spatial qualities apply to both the internal visual relationships and views to areas beyond, such as the broad vistas achieved from the Iroquois overlooks and the Shawnee river frontage.

In addition, the parks and parkways were designed to separate uses effectively, thereby avoiding conflict. These aspects required both segregation of incompatible active and passive uses by area and provision of access by means of a circulation system that allowed for ease of movement and separation of travel modes. The design of each of the parks as an orchestrated series of spatial sequences, as shown on the Spatial Organization Plans that are included in each of the park chapters.

Over time some of the designed spatial sequences and experiences of the parks remain, but many have been lost. *As master planning proceeds, an understanding of the historic spatial relationships needs to guide the process.* The historic relationships need to be reinstated where possible. Historic vistas should be opened again and managed more effectively. The actual spatial organization and the concept implied can be integrated effectively with contemporary uses.

Surroundings/Setting

The Olmstedian principle of providing a park or parkway setting that contrasted with the urban surround is a key to consideration of edges and adjacent areas. While the development of a dense urban fabric was anticipated, the edge relationships originally designed as welcoming entrances and screening edges have also been lost or degraded. Surrounding needs have changed over time, intruding more on the experience of these green places. The nature of urban life has also changed to a degree and the perception of personal safety in the public landscape is an important issue to consider. Today the concept of a park experience is still the enjoyment of scenic and natural features, modestly supported by harmonious, simple furnishings and built elements, and is not intruded upon by the surrounds. This experience should not be overly intruded upon by the surroundings so that a certain amount of vegetative screening to give a sense of separation, without creating a level of density that is fearful, is still desirable.

Treatment of adjacent areas, and in some cases large facilities within the parks such as large parking lots and buildings, should be addressed as elements of discord intruding on the park and parkway character. Choices of materials, detailing and construction techniques should be based on the belief that all park components are secondary and supportive of the park experience. The vocabulary of elements recommended for use in the parks and along the parkways should be harmonious so that the character of these resources is effectively separate and distinct from their sometimes discordant surroundings.

Based on the historic research, an understanding of the chronology of continuity and change within these landscapes and their existing conditions, an historic landscape analysis section under each park and the parkways compares the Olmsted design intent and early construction with conditions today offering some guidance for the future.

Interventions to Renew the Olmsted Parks & Parkways

The issues facing the Olmsted Parks and Parkways of Louisville are broad and far-reaching. The project team combines extensive experience in urban parks from both an ecological restoration basis and a historic preservation one. These fields come together effectively to address the myriad issues facing our public landscapes of the nineteenth century as they complete their first century of use and service to urban populations.

Historic Preservation Treatment

In this project a sequence of steps is followed in order to develop sound recommendations for the future of historic landscapes. The steps in the preservation planning process, that have been followed in this master planning project are:

1. Historic research for the site with historic context provided by comparable properties nationwide;
2. Detailed inventory of the existing conditions;
3. Analysis of the character-defining features of the landscape over time;
4. Exploration of treatment alternatives and selection of a preservation and rehabilitation as the most appropriate treatment followed by treatment implementation;
5. Landscape management of natural and built elements to address ongoing preservation;
6. Interpretation of landscape to the public.

Based on all the complexity of relevant factors—research findings, existing conditions, Conservancy goals, etc.—treatments to preserve the character-defining elements of these historic landscapes are indicated. These elements include topography, vegetation, circulation, spatial relationships, structures, site furnishings, objects, natural systems and setting. When addressing historic landscapes there are a series of steps that lead to a determination of what intervention to undertake. Treatment is an intervention carried out to achieve preservation goals. In selecting a treatment for all or part of a park or parkway preservation terms are defined in the draft *Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Landscapes*, prepared by the USDOJ, National Park Service, Preservation Assistance Division and other preservation literature. Overall, the primary treatment for the Louisville Parks and Parkways is rehabilitation:

Rehabilitation brings the historic landscape to a fully useful condition, retaining historic character, while incorporating additions and alterations for contemporary and future uses. Extant historic elements are identified and retained in a rehabilitation process.

As a general approach, “preservation” will also be applied to safeguard historic landscape features:

Preservation retains and maintains the materials, features and spaces which characterize the property directing these activities to retention of historic features and fabric. Replacement of lost elements in kind and repair of deterioration are undertaken to conserve and stabilize the resources. This treatment includes ongoing and cyclic maintenance activities which include, for example, mowing, pruning, removal of invasive plants, masonry cleaning and repainting, etc. if these activities are directed to preservation of original plantings, spatial organization and historic character. Preservation treatments may be undertaken as immediate or short-term measures to slow deterioration or as permanent treatments.

Restoration differs from preservation and rehabilitation since it can address the rebuilding of a missing historic feature or the removal of a later addition. Reconstruction is new construction that depicts the form, features and details of a vanished feature or structure with exactitude. Substantial documentation is required and speculation must be limited in order to undertake both restoration and reconstruction. These treatments may apply in specific cases, such as the treatment of a monument or a bridge, when severe deterioration or loss points to these approaches and the historic value of the feature warrants an intensive level intervention. Lack of explicit and highly detailed information about any elements would not allow for restoration or reconstruction to be undertaken. While these approaches may apply to minor elements or small areas within the Louisville Parks and Parkways, restoration and reconstruction are not the selected approaches to these historic landscapes.

The overriding preservation treatments for Louisville—including stabilization, conservation and repair in kind, and rehabilitation—will address the retention of historic character and fabric while contemporary needs are served in a compatible manner.

Ecological Restoration

The use of a different terminology in the natural resource field complicates our understanding of terminology from the field of historic preservation. A current definition of ecological restoration is drawn from the Society for Ecological Restoration newsletter, summer 1993, as follows. Ecological restoration is the process of reestablishing to the extent possible the structure, function, and integrity of indigenous ecosystems and the sustaining habitats that they provide.

Further elaboration on this topic is provided in an article entitled “Those Re-Words,” by William R. Jordan, III, published in *Land and Water*, 1992, which contributed to the following discussion. In this master plan, restoration is used as an umbrella term to describe the interventions undertaken to return a disturbed landscape to a sound ecological balance. There are several other terms commonly used in the field including reclamation, rehabilitation, creation and recovery. Although the use of these terms is not universal within the field, each one applies to bringing back lost ecological functions or reinstating failed processes.

The restoration of indigenous communities and ecosystem function would be as do-able as this description sounds if we knew how natural systems work and if we had all the component pieces. For example, the concept of a restoration presumes that we can replace missing pieces and or remove added pieces. We can remove invasive exotics, but we cannot necessarily remove all new elements. How do we remove the vast stores of nitrogen that were raining down on the landscape from auto emissions, seriously modifying one of the most basic processes, the nitrogen cycle? Nor is it necessarily easier to add the lost pieces in many cases. Where do we get the huge flocks of passenger pigeons whose annual migrations were fueled by armies of caterpillar larvae? We simply do not know enough about these systems yet nor are we yet able to modify our lifestyles and land use to recreate those conditions that would be necessary to truly “restore” prior conditions, extinctions aside.

With complex living systems we are always dealing with a range of activities, some of which seek to restore something, others which rehabilitate some aspect and others which simply safeguard what remains. It is the cumulative result that is intended to move towards a healthier reality. It is also assumed that this is a process where all the participants learn by doing. A commitment to sustaining indigenous systems, will over time lead to the discovery of new approaches and techniques that are not foreseen today. We don't know all the details of accomplishing our larger objectives yet, we know where we want to go and the first steps toward these objectives, to ensure that over time the majority of our actions will be more restorative and less destructive. We have set ourselves on a critical-path. The direction is established by our goal that this generation will make as great a contribution to these public spaces as did the generation that created the Louisville Olmsted Parks and Parkways.

Conclusion

Recommendations for historic preservation and ecological restoration are incorporated in the planning process, alongside the information and issues pertaining to infrastructure, user needs, management objectives and maintenance capabilities as a part of the overall master planning considerations. Rather than focusing on terms, the reasons for the recommendations are set forth. The role and capabilities of both the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy and Metro Parks, now and in the future, are also addressed.

The selection of the interventions to improve the quality and function of the historic landscapes of Louisville is an important decision that considers the parks and parkways holistically, as cultural and natural resources, with existing conditions, user needs and maintenance and management capabilities. In this project we are combining terms from historic preservation and ecological restoration to address the envisioned renewal of the Olmsted Parks and Parkways. The master plan results from the synthesis of all these bodies of information to provide for the framing of a vision that will bring the Louisville Olmsted Parks and Parkways into their second century of service and enjoyment.