



A GRAND TOUR OF OLMSTED PARKS AND PLANNED COMMUNITIES, 1922

Guest Editor: Esley Hamilton, NAOP Trustee

In the spring of 1922, Charles Henry Cheney (1884-1943) wrote to the Olmsted office in Brookline asking for suggestions about places he might visit on an upcoming trip across the country. We reprint here the remarkable response he received from Edward Clark Whiting (1881-1962), who had become an associate partner in Olmsted Brothers in 1921 and who remained there for the rest of his life. Whiting's suggestions, representing a consensus of office interests, include some of the most famous works created in the previous century by Frederick Law Olmsted, from Central Park to Biltmore. But many more places are included that in 1922 had only recently been completed or were still underway. Remarkably insightful, this part of the list now reads as an honor roll of treasured classics from that period in American urban history.

Charles Henry Cheney had just taken over the Palos Verdes project near Los Angeles, but he had been a leading figure in city planning in California for more than a decade as an advocate of zoning and design standards (See Fukuo Akimoto's article in *Planning Perspectives* 18, July 2003). An attractive hilly area overlooking the Pacific Ocean in the southwest corner of the metropolitan Los Angeles area, Palos Verdes had been the subject of a 1913 Olmsted plan that had been stopped by the war. The new plan, completed in 1923 after Cheney's visit to the Boston office, was also interrupted, but eventually Palos Verdes took its place among the outstanding residential developments of the era. (Note: The Mr. Olmsted referred to throughout the letter is Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.)

26th April, 1922

Mr. Charles H. Cheney,
c/o Palos Verdes Project,
805 Union Bank Bldg.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Sir:

In further reference to your letter of April 5th, we are glad to offer you the following suggestions as to places or projects which you may find it worth while and interesting to visit on your contemplated trip east.

Mountain Lake, Lake Wales, Florida. This is an inland development which Mr. Olmsted has planned and guided. It is a combination country club and residential development, supplemented with orange groves and the like for such people as may be interested. We suggest that you get in touch with Mr. F. S. Ruth, Mountain Lake Club, Lake Wales, Fla., who is manager of the project.

If you stop at New Orleans you will probably find Audubon Park worth looking at. It has been partially developed in accordance with plans prepared by our office.

If you have time you will probably find it interesting to stop at Charleston, South Carolina. It is an interesting old southern town on the coast, and some years ago we made more or less extensive plans for the waterfront and parks. We are not sure to what extent these improvements have been carried out.

The Biltmore estate and Biltmore Village near Asheville, North Carolina, you will also find interesting. These were designed and built under the direction of this firm.

Washington, D.C. you will also find worth some study and inspection. It is interesting as being rather unlike any other city in this country, and although it has fallen down sadly in a good many city planning respects it still has many features which are worth seeing. As you know, Mr. Olmsted has from time to time had a good deal to do with the plans and improvements in the District of Columbia.

At Baltimore, Maryland, Roland Park and Guilford are the most worth while developments we can refer you to. We suggest that you get in touch with Mr. E. H. Bouton,

President, Roland Park Co., Baltimore, Md., who has had general charge of these developments. We are now planning for a country club and residential development at Gibson Island about 30 miles from Baltimore. Mr. Bouton can probably give you information about this, or when we see you later at Boston we shall be glad to show you the plans.

At Philadelphia if you have time you may find it interesting to see League Island Park, Southern Boulevard, the Parkway, which was cut through a built-up section of the city, and Fairmount Park. We made plans for League Island Park, and had more or less to do with the Southern Boulevard. You might also find it worth while to see some small house developments made by the Girard estate. You might also find it profitable to get in touch with Mr. Woodward, 08 North American Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa., who is interested in suburban developments and has directed some rather interesting work of that sort.

The Essex County Park System with headquarters at 115 Clifton Ave., Newark, N. J. might be of interest to you purely as a park system. It comprises parks of various sizes, from large reservations to small playgrounds, and some of these have already been well developed. We would refer you to Mr. A. M. Reynolds, Engineer and Superintendent.

At New York you will of course see Forest Hills Gardens, and we would refer you there to Mr. John Demarest, the General Manager of the project. In addition to single family houses you will find there good examples of grouping and combining of houses, some block developments and some apartment house developments. Of course New York is probably one of the best places to investigate apartment house design, although we can not refer you to definite projects of special interest. As a good example of a large park we would advise you to see Prospect Park in Brooklyn. It is in better shape than Central Park, and is in many ways a more interesting and valuable example. You will also find it worth while to see Riverside Drive and its extensions north of the City. If you have time we would also suggest your seeing the Interstate Park development along the opposite side of the Hudson River, and possibly taking a trip up the Hudson River at least as far as West Point and studying some of the scenic highway developments

along the almost precipitous sides of the River. There is also a country club and residential development on the shore of Long Island Sound, we believe at Rye, done by the Bowman Hotel interests. You could probably find out about this either at the Commodore Hotel or the Biltmore Hotel in New York.

We shall not bother to mention the various things which might be of interest around Boston, as we shall expect to have a chance to discuss these with you when you are here.

Hartford, Connecticut has several very interesting and rather well-developed parks, which were done under our direction. Mr. G. A. Parker is the Superintendent.

Dayton, Ohio. This is a wide-awake city, and there has been a good deal done with the help and stimulation of Mr. John H. Patterson of the National Cash Register Co. along the lines of suburban development. We have made plans for a good many projects of Mr. Patterson's and we suggest that you get in touch with him if you stop at Dayton.

It will be worth your while to stop at Chicago. You will find a number of interesting examples of waterfront development, some completed and some in the process of execution. If you are interested in small parks and playgrounds, we would refer you particularly to those under the direction of the South Park Commission. Most of these were designed by our office.

Cleveland, Ohio, is a progressive rapidly growing city, and we understand there are several rather interesting suburban and country club developments there. None of them, however, have been planned by our office.

At Kansas City you might be interested to get in touch with Mr. J. C. Nichols. He has been the guiding spirit in some very good suburban housing developments, and we believe you will find him an interesting man to meet. Kansas City also has a rather interesting park system.

One of the good examples of hotel development with which we have been associated is the Broadmoor Hotel at Colorado Springs. They have a large amount of property connected with the hotel, a golf course, and lake for fishing which adjoins the terrace of the hotel, and all the modern and up-to-date accommodations that a hotel located outside of the city should provide.

We hope that the above suggestions will prove of some

help to you in planning your trip. If we think of any other places which we believe it would be worth your while to see we shall write you.

As we wrote you the other day, Mr. Olmsted is at present in England and we do not know the exact date of his return, though we expect him back by the middle of May. If he is here when you arrive we know he will be very glad to go around with you and Mr. Cory and the other members of your party, and to talk over with you the matters connected with the Palos Verdes project. If he is not here, Mr. Dawson or some other member of the firm will do the best he can to assist you.

*Very truly yours,
Edward Clark Whiting*

NOTES

Mountain Lake is located in central Florida's ridge country. **Frederick S. Ruth** (1884-1932) of Baltimore founded this resort community in 1915, partly on land he had inherited. FLO Jr. situated over a hundred residential sites around a golf course, designed by Seth Raynor. Olmsted Brothers designed many of the individual residential properties and, beginning in 1923, the firm laid out the highest point on the property for publisher Edward W. Bok. Today the Historic Bok Sanctuary is a National Historic Landmark, and one of the residences is open for tours.

Audubon Park in New Orleans was acquired in 1871 but remained largely unlandscaped for years. John Charles Olmsted produced a plan in 1897, but construction was delayed until 1916. The part of the park facing Loyola and Tulane Universities still retains some of the plan's character, in spite of recent incursions.

The **Charleston** city government formed a special committee on the development of the waterfront in 1896, and between then and 1911 Olmsted Brothers produced numerous plans, but none seems to have been implemented.

Biltmore was created between 1888 and 1895 for George Washington Vanderbilt by architect Richard Morris Hunt and FLO. Most of the 125,000 acres are now Pisgah National Forest, while the core is owned by descendants and is a National

Historic Landmark. Work on the village outside the main gate continued to 1910. All Saints Episcopal Church, the focus of the village, includes a memorial window to Olmsted.

In **Washington, D.C.**, the McMillan Commission, which included FLO Jr., recommended in 1902 that the monumental core of the city be totally overhauled along the lines of Pierre L'Enfant's original 1791 plan. The McMillan Plan guided subsequent development for decades. Olmsted wrote the McMillan Plan's recommendations for a regional park system, including Rock Creek Park.

Roland Park was begun in 1891 with Plat 1, designed by George Kessler of Kansas City. FLO Jr. designed Plat 2 in 1901 and subsequent plats. Roland Park's picturesque site, curving roads and central golf course (founded in 1898), inspired similar developments around the nation. **Edward H. Bouton** (1860-1941), general manager for the Company, was responsible for creating a commuter railway in 1893 and building a English Tudor proto-shopping center complex in 1896. His name is commemorated in Bouton Green, the park that forms the entrance to **Guilford**, which the Roland Park Company and Olmsted Brothers developed between 1911 and 1925 about a mile east of Roland Park, near Johns Hopkins University's Homewood campus.

League Island Park was designed by Olmsted Brothers in 1912 along with the southward extension of Broad Street known as **Southern Parkway**. Work was completed in 1921. The park was later renamed F.D.R. Park. Postwar intrusions including a stadium, a golf course and Interstate 95 compromised the original Olmsted design, but parts remain.

The Parkway, named Benjamin Franklin Parkway in 1937, was first proposed in 1892 but built to the 1917 designs of Jacques Gréber (1882-1962). The Parkway links Philadelphia's monumental City Hall with Fairmount Park by a wide tree-lined boulevard cut diagonally through the city's grid plan. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, designed to terminate the long vista, opened in 1928, and other cultural institutions line the route.

The Girard Estate is a development of 481 semi-detached residences built between 1906 and 1916 to designs by architects James and John Windrim. It occupies the South Philadelphia grounds of "Gentilhommiere," the country estate of businessman and philanthropist Stephen Girard, who bequeathed most of his fortune to the city in 1831. The development's green setting and distinctive architecture contrast with the typical Philadelphia rowhouses.

Dr. George Woodward succeeded his father-in-law Henry Houston after 1904 as developer of Chestnut Hill and adjacent fashionable neighborhoods beyond Germantown in northwest Philadelphia. Woodward's housing development company built over 300 houses and still manages many today. Their "twin" and quadruple houses with picturesque native stone construction attracted much interest. The Olmsteds worked with Woodward on his 1906 Saint Martin's development and other subdivisions and also on parks he donated, including 16-acre Pastorius Park (1915) and 1,400-acre Wisahickon Valley Park.

The Essex County Park System was established in 1895 as the first in the country managed by a county government. Today's system has 17 parks including Branch Brook and Weequahic and five less intensely developed reservations including South Mountain. A concept for a park near the Branch Brook was developed in 1867 by Olmsted, Vaux & Company. In 1895, legislation passed allowing for the creation of a county park system. John Bogart and Nathan F. Barrett, Landscape Architects and Engineers developed plans for Branch Brook Park, 1895-1898. Olmsted Brothers took over planning and design in 1898.

Forest Hills Gardens in Queens was viewed as an outstanding achievement almost from the time of its inception in 1909. Its history has recently been recounted by Susan L. Klaus in *A Modern Arcadia: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens* (2002).

Central Park (designed in 1858) and Prospect Park (1867) are among the earliest, most fully realized and most influential designs of FLO and Vaux. **Riverside Drive** runs from 72nd to 181st Streets at the top of Riverside Park overlooking the Hudson. It was built in two phases: 1875-1882 and 1903-1917.

Palisades Interstate Park is a stretch of more than 12 miles of sheer stone cliffs on the west bank of the Hudson. Theodore Roosevelt and Foster Voorhees, then governors of New York and New Jersey, created the Palisades Interstate Commission in 1900, and it now owns more than 100,000 acres in the two states.

John McEntee Bowman (1875-1931) expanded New York's Biltmore Hotel into a prestigious chain. His Westchester Biltmore Country Club in Rye, New York, opened in 1922 with a luxury resort hotel by Warren & Wetmore (architects of the New York Biltmore and Grand Central Station), two golf courses by Walter Travis and a residential development.

Hartford, Connecticut, was FLO's birthplace in 1822. Bushnell Park, acquired in 1854, was initially developed by Jacob Weidenmann, but Olmsted handled the landscaping when Richard M. Upjohn built the new state capitol in the park 1872-1880. After 1895, the Olmsteds designed most of the city's parks, including Elizabeth, Goodwin, Keney, Pope and Riverside.

Dayton, Ohio, has more than a hundred Olmsted projects, including public parks and parkways, the Dayton Fair Grounds, country clubs, private estates and industries. The association began in 1896 when **John Henry Patterson** (1844-1922) hired John Charles Olmsted to landscape the grounds of the **National Cash Register Company**. Patterson was improving residential conditions in South Park by the 1880s, and JCO started work in the Oakwood area in 1896, followed by new subdivisions including Schantz Park (1913-1915), Delco Dell (1914) and Moraine Park and Industrial Village (1915-1920).

The South Park Commission, formed in 1869, hired Olmsted and Vaux in 1871 to plan the linked system of Jackson Park, Washington Park and the Midway Plaisance on a bleak, sandy site. Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot redesigned Jackson Park after the 1893 World's Fair. Olmsted Brothers designed ten neighborhood parks in 1904 to incorporate playgrounds, children's wading ponds, running tracks and "outdoor gymnasiums." Edward H. Bennett of D. H. Burnham & Company designed innovative "field houses" for the parks, community centers inspired by Chicago's famous settlement houses.

J. C. Nichols (Jesse Clyde Nichols, 1880-1950) announced plans to create "a high class district on scientific lines" in 1908: the influential Country Club District. Country Club Plaza, perhaps the first planned suburban shopping center, was announced in 1922. The **Kansas City** park and parkway system was launched in 1893 by German-born landscape architect George Kessler (1862-1923). By 1915 he had realized one of the most comprehensive systems in the country.

The Broadmoor Hotel at Colorado Springs was created by transplanted Philadelphian Spencer Penrose, who bought a small hotel and casino in 1916 and turned the area into a resort. He hired Olmsted Brothers to do the planning, Warren & Wetmore to design the Renaissance-inspired hotel and Donald Ross to design the golf course. Opened in 1918, expanded many times, and still fashionable, the Broadmoor now has 3,000 acres.