



September 11, 2020

New York State Board for Historic Preservation
Attn: Daniel Mackay, Deputy Commissioner
New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
Division for Historic Preservation
Peebles Island State Park
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12189
Via email: Daniel.Mackay@parks.ny.gov

Re: Support for National Register Listing –Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. Farmhouse

Dear Commissioner Mackay:

2022 will mark the bicentennial of the birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, author, journalist, public official, city planner and father of American landscape architecture. In that year, Americans everywhere will be asked to participate in *Olmsted 200*, a coordinated national and regional celebration that will explore the life, leadership and enduring influence of this American visionary whose landscape projects have literally transformed American life and culture. As founding partners of *Olmsted 200*, we heartily support the timely listing of Olmsted’s Staten Island farmhouse on the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places as we approach this important landmark.

Situated overlooking Raritan Bay, the two-story farmhouse and two acres are all that remain of the original 125-acre ornamental farm and nursery that Olmsted managed, known as Tosomock Farm.

This place literally functioned as an “experimental” farm where Olmsted tried out design principles, assessed various crops and learned more about arboriculture. As Olmsted biographer Laura Wood Roper relates:

Fred transfigured his new home with a few simple improvements. He moved the barns and outhouses out of sight behind a knoll; he brought the drive in so that it approached the house by a graceful curve; he turfed the border of the pond, set water plants, and shielded the water from contamination; and by the time he had lived there three years, he had planted a variety of ornamental and forest trees – gingko, black walnut, mulberry, English and American elm, English beech, cedars of Lebanon, several varieties of linden, and a hedge of Osage orange....

On the farm, he grew vegetables and more than 5000 pear trees. And he began thinking in earnest about landscape architecture – a term Mr. Olmsted himself popularized. In so many ways, the experiments he undertook at the farm became the foundation of his work as a landscape architect, whether it was employing

curving paths as a prominent landscape design feature or taking his knowledge and understanding of natural systems to convert swamps and fetid marshes into beautiful green spaces that addressed sanitation.

Olmsted's life at the farm is also noteworthy because of the friends he made. It was at Tosomock Farm that Olmsted first met William Vanderbilt, father of George Vanderbilt who, over 30 years later, employed Olmsted – by then the most prominent landscape architect of the day – to design Biltmore and to establish another scientific experiment, this time a scientific forest.

At Tosomock Farm, Olmsted also began to display what became a life-long dedication to social reform. He vigorously planned and promoted a County Agricultural Society on Staten Island “to increase the profit of our labor – enhance the value of our lands – throw a garment of beauty around our homes, and, above all, and before all, materially promote Moral and Intellectual Improvement – instructing us in the language of Nature...”

As we have vividly seen over the last few months, Olmsted's landscape designs – rooted in his democratic vision of public parks and their capacity to bring people together and improve our well-being – have played a critical role in helping New Yorkers survive during the pandemic. Indeed, they have contributed to the quality of life in hundreds of communities across the United States, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Louisville, and Seattle.

In no uncertain terms, life in the Staten Island farmhouse played a transformative role in the development of a unique American innovator. Listing the Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. Farmhouse in the state and national historic registers is essential to ensuring that Olmsted's important work and values continue to inform and inspire historians, landscape architects, community leaders, and members of the public.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Founding Partners, Olmsted 200



Anne Neal Petri
President and CEO
National Association for Olmsted Parks
Managing Partner *Olmsted 200*



Catherine Nagel
Executive Director
City Parks Alliance



Wendy Miller, FASLA
President
American Society of Landscape Architects



Barbara Deutsch, FASLA
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Kristine Stratton
President and CEO
National Recreation and Park Association



Deborah Edwards
President
The Garden Club of America



Charles Birnbaum
President and CEO
The Cultural Landscape Foundation



Adrian Benepe
Senior Vice President
The Trust for Public Land



Jason Newman, Superintendent
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site,
John Fitzgerald Kennedy NHS, and Longfellow House – Washington's
Headquarters NHS
National Park Service