

CELEBRATING OLMSTED:

How it Began—Rescue from Obscurity

A lecture and slide presentation by

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Cosmos Club, Washington, DC, January 26, 2022



New York, Central Park, viewed from Central Park West. Photo by Jane Loeffler, 2020.

(1) As we kick off the celebration of “Olmsted 200,” I thank the Cosmos Club for giving me this forum to share a previously untold chapter of the Olmsted story. My presentation examines the circumstances surrounding Olmsted’s rescue from obscurity just fifty years ago when both he and his great landscape legacy were overlooked and undervalued.

I thank Dede Petri for her generous introduction and applaud her for her leadership of the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP).¹ I would not be writing again on this subject if not for her encouragement.



New York City: Central Park

Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. & Calvert Vaux

New York, Central Park (1) Photo by Jane Loeffler, Feb. 2020; (2) Photo by Bob Loeffler, Feb. 2005; (3) Photo by J.D. Eiseman, Dec. 1969.

(2) Back in 1970, *Frederick Law Olmsted* was not a household name. If you said “Olmsted” to someone, they were likely to repeat “homestead” back to you with a puzzled expression.

Today, by contrast, most of you do know the name *Frederick Law Olmsted*. And you probably know, too, that it was Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. who designed Central Park. It is his 200th birthday that we celebrate this year. Central Park (1858) was his first major landscape commission, but it was not until after the Civil War that his design career took off.²



Boston, MA, Jamaica Pond, Photo by Jane Loeffler, ND; (2) Louisville, KY, "Cherokee Park," Photo by Geoffrey James, 1993, Canadian Centre for Architecture; (3) Rochester, NY, Highland Park, Photo by M.A. Gaudioso, <https://www.highlandparkconservancy.org>

(3) Many associate Olmsted with Boston's famed *Emerald Necklace*.³ For me, growing up in nearby Brookline, Jamaica Pond was a favorite spot to visit with its magical willow island in the middle. I never guessed then that it was man-made.

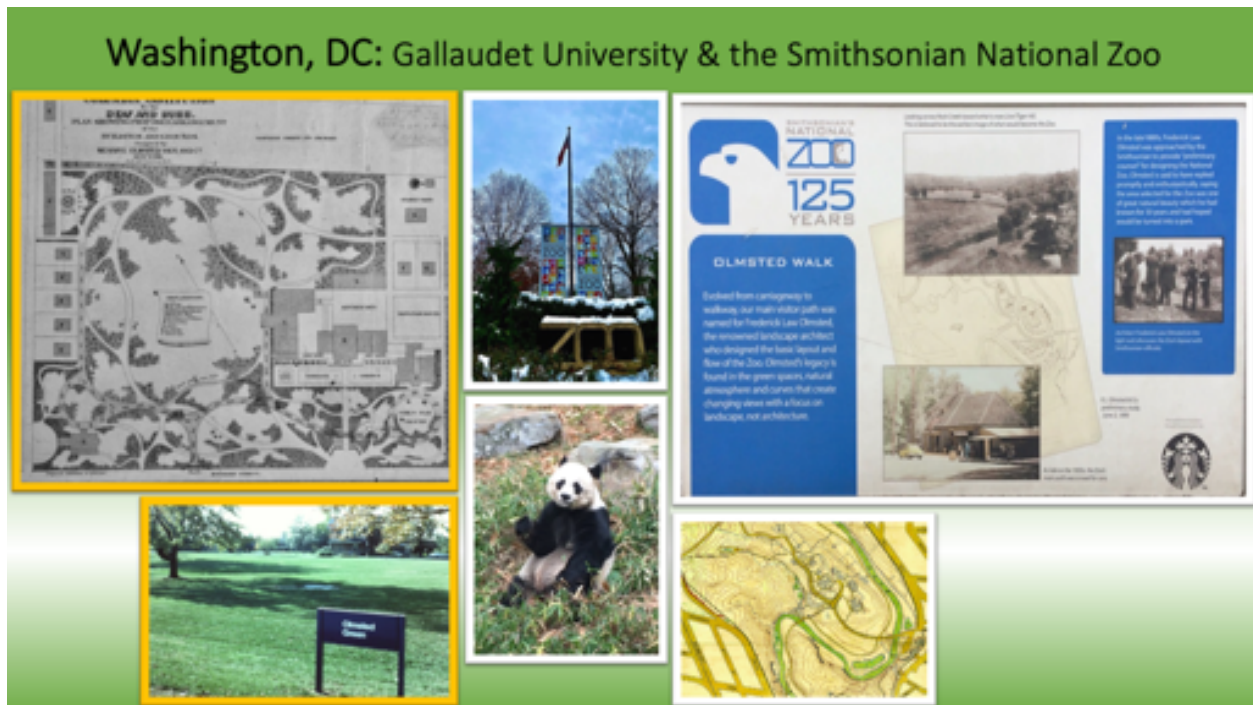
Olmsted also designed parks in Louisville (Cherokee Park) and Rochester (Highland Park) and across the country in cities including Atlanta, Chicago, Buffalo and Baltimore.

Asheville, NC: Biltmore Estate & Pisgah National Forest



Asheville, NC (1) Biltmore Estate, formal entrance court viewed from above, Photo by Charles Loeffler, April 2019; below left (2) Biltmore Estate, viewed from the house, Photo by Jane Loeffler, April 2019; top right (3) Pisgah National Forest, Photo by Bob Loeffler, April 2019; bottom right (4) Bob Loeffler at “Cradle of Forestry Overlook,” Photo by Jane Loeffler, April 2019.

(4) At Biltmore, the Vanderbilt estate in Asheville, NC, Olmsted created both formal and naturalistic gardens on worn-out farmland—and he had a hand, too, in founding the nation’s first large-scale managed forest on the over-cut woodlands adjacent to the estate. The school of forestry there in the Pisgah National Forest was the birthplace of the National Forest Service.



Washington, DC (1) Gallaudet Plan; and below (2) “Olmsted Green,” at Gallaudet University, Photo © Woodbridge Williams, 1978; (3) Entrance to Smithsonian National Zoo, Photo by Jane Loeffler, Jan. 2022, and (4) Panda, Photo by Jane Loeffler, Dec. 2019; right (5) “Olmsted Walk” sign from National Zoo: “...our main visitor path was named for Frederick Law Olmsted, the renowned landscape architect who designed the basic layout and flow of the Zoo. Olmsted’s legacy is found in the green spaces, natural atmosphere and curves that create changing views with a focus on landscape, not architecture.” Photos on the sign include the earliest image of what would become the Zoo, Olmsted discussing plans with Zoo officials, a preliminary study dated June, 2, 1890, and a photograph of the pedestrian pathway that was a road for carriages and then cars until the 1950s

(5) Olmsted had gone west to supervise the operations at a mining estate near Yosemite after the Civil War. A request from his friend Edward Gallaudet prompted him to return to Washington to design a college campus on 100 acres of farmland northeast of the U.S. Capitol. Known as Gallaudet University, it is now a leading research university for the deaf.

Like so many later commissions, it was and is notable for the curvilinear roads and walkways that surround a flat, wide, open green—reminiscent of the village commons Olmsted knew as a boy in the towns of New England.

A later plan for the Smithsonian National Zoo, also in Washington shows the same curvilinear roads (now walkways) conforming to the contours of a hilly site, rather than a flat one. Adjacent photos show the site prior to development and Olmsted (in the white suit) conferring with officials there in 1890.

Washington, DC: U.S. Capitol Grounds (1874)



Washington, DC, U.S. Capitol Grounds (1) Grounds of the U.S. Capitol, Photo © Woodbridge Williams, 1978; (2) Olmsted's plan for the U.S. Capitol Grounds (1874), Courtesy Architect of the Capitol.

(6) Graceful curves combine with strong radials to define Olmsted's (1874) plan for the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. With straight paths aligned with diagonals in the L'Enfant Plan, the surrounding roads extend the Capitol grounds in all directions.

Per Olmsted's instructions, engineers reconstituted the existing clay subsoil, ploughing and tilling it and adding tons of manure and peat to create a suitable environment for plants and trees.⁴ For the comfort of visitors, Olmsted included a spring-cooled grotto, or summerhouse.⁵

Olmsted also designed the stately terraces that provide visual support and connection between the Capitol's West Front and the formal Mall below.

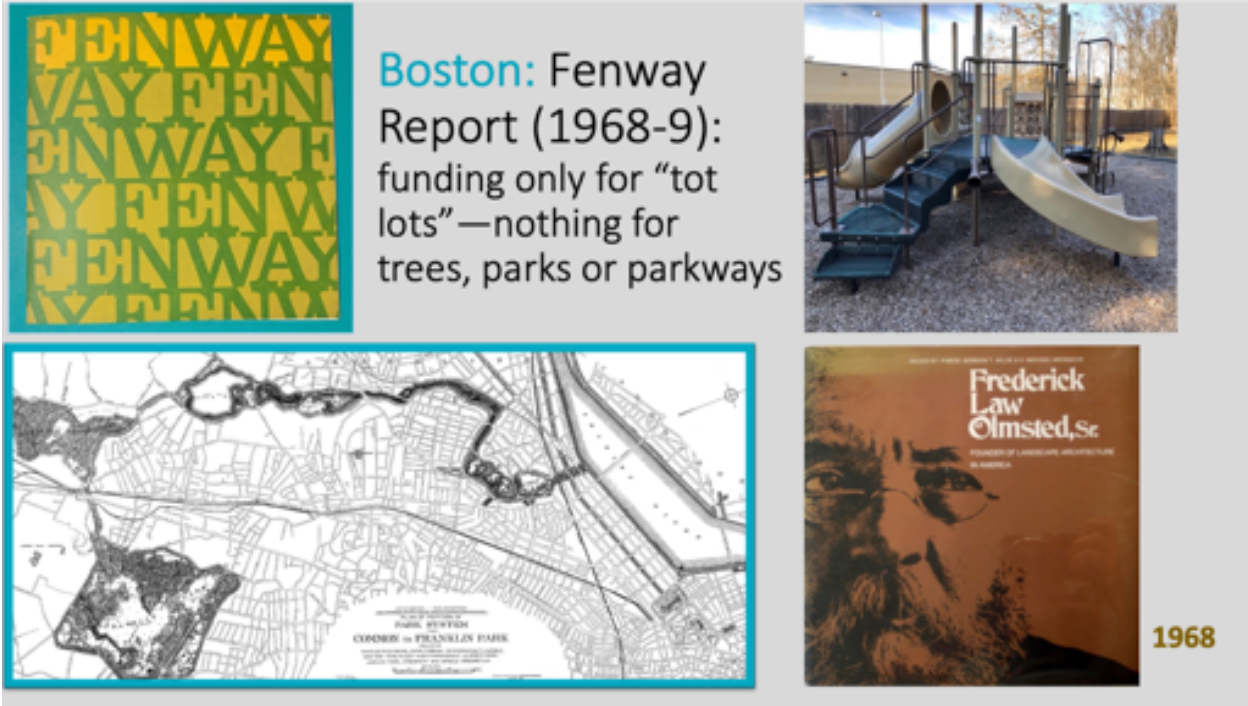
Envisioned as a democratic setting where all could mix and mingle and as a link between the Federal enclave and the neighborhoods that surround it, the Capitol grounds have lately become a *zone of contention* where security and public access are now paramount concerns.

For very different reasons and in different ways, many of Olmsted's other major works also became *zones of contention*—just much sooner.



New York, Central Park (1) The Mall, 1979, <https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/central-park-history>; (2) The Great Lawn before restoration, <https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/central-park-history>; Washington, DC, Rock Creek Park (3) Erosion, Photo by Jane Loeffler, Mar 2018; New York, Central Park (4) Graffiti, Photo by Jürgen Wagner/Timeline Images, Dec 31, 1972, <https://www.alamy.com/graffiti-with-the-inscription-crazy-cross-at-the-top-of-a-staircase-in-central-park-in-new-york-city-automated-translation-image350029502.html>.

(7) When Olmsted died in 1903, he left behind satisfied clients, a thriving business, and a stellar reputation as the go-to expert on the nascent fields of city planning and urban design. But it was not long before his public works were neglected, taken for granted or devalued. The more his parks were frequented by drug-users and criminals, the more they became inhospitable to everyone else.

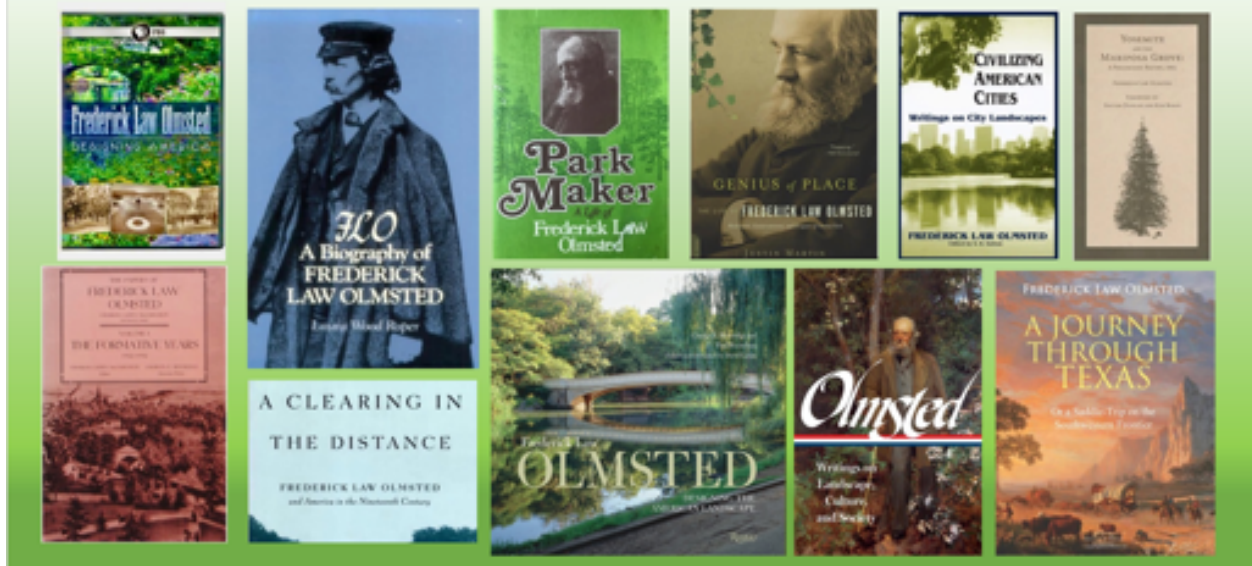


Boston, MA (1) Plan for Portion of Boston Park System, Olmsted Archives, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; (2) Fenway, Booklet (report) by Jane (Canter) Loeffler, published by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (1968-69); (3) Miscellaneous “tot lot,” <https://www.viennava.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/14/67>

(8) Back in 1969, when the Boston Redevelopment Authority published a report on its urban renewal plan for Boston’s Fenway, no funds were allocated to parks, parkways, or trees—only to “tot- lots.”⁶

I wrote that report, its cover is pictured here, and when I look at it now, I realize that we are fortunate that our parks weren’t entirely paved over back then—when hardscape was all that anyone would pay for.⁷

Highlights from the Olmsted Bookshelf since 1973



Covers of selected Olmsted books published since 1973.

(9) All of these books followed in a short span of time. That's extraordinary! How did it happen? As an historian, I want to know why sentiment shifted so dramatically regarding such critical urban infrastructure as parks, and how an important figure such as Olmsted had so quickly faded from public view?

But I am even more intrigued by another question: what happened to propel this forgotten figure from near oblivion to the prominence he enjoys today as a leading authority on everything that makes cities healthy and beautiful?

I suggest that Olmsted was so soon forgotten because politicians and city dwellers no longer valued his work or what he had tried to accomplish.

At the same time, a new aesthetic captivated the design profession, the straight lines and right angles favored by modernists, who rejected the organic spirit of Art Nouveau and what they perceived as excessive decoration. *How wrong they were!*

After all, Olmsted had no use for ornamental design.⁸ But modernists could have known nothing about him! None of his landscape work had yet been published. And few knew anything about the thinking behind it.

(See Slide (8) with Fabos book cover) Only in 1968, when the University of Massachusetts published a volume of Olmsted's plans did the public get its first glimpse at plans of his major works, including the plan for Boston's park system, shown here.⁹ The fold-out plan of Central Park was a favorite with those who eagerly examined the book when it came out.

Earth Day: first celebrated April 22, 1970



(1) **Earth Day Poster**, <https://pioneersread.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/how-did-that-start-earth-week/>; (2) *New York, Central Park, Earth Day celebration at Bethesda Terrace, Photo by Frederick Gutheim, 1973; First Earth Day Poster, by Robert Rauschenberg, April 22, 1970, rauschenbergfoundation.org.*

(10) Earth Day and a general shift in public consciousness, set the stage for Olmsted's comeback. Robert Rauschenberg designed the poster on the right (shown here) for the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970.

But it wasn't just the birth of eco-awareness that propelled Olmsted into prominence. That was accomplished largely by the *Olmsted Sesquicentennial*, a set of events master-minded by DC planner and historian Frederick Gutheim in 1971.

Sugarloaf Mountain: Frederick Gutheim



Gutheim, on his 80th birthday, with Dana White at GWU, 1988.

Dickerson, MD (1) Frederick Gutheim and his sheep at Mt. Ephraim, Photo by Bob Loeffler, Oct. 1985; (2) Cover of Gutheim's book, The Potomac, NY, Grosset & Dunlap, 1949; (3) Sugarloaf Mountain, Photo by Bob Loeffler, 1986; bottom left (4) Pond near "Stronghold," Gordon Strong's estate adjacent to Mt. Ephraim, Photo by Bob Loeffler, 1986; (5) Cover of Gutheim's book, Worthy of the Nation, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 2006; (6) Gutheim with historian Dana White at George Washington University where White presented Gutheim with album of testimonials from colleagues and friends on the occasion of his 80th birthday, March 3, 1988. Gutheim taught in the American Studies Program at GWU and founded the noted Historic Preservation Program there in 1975.

(11) A contradiction himself, Frederick Gutheim was an *urbanist* who lived at the foot of *Sugarloaf Mountain*. In 1941, he and his wife left fashionable Georgetown and moved to a six-acre farm in Dickerson, MD to raise sheep. He is best known as author of *The Potomac* (1949), a classic history in the Rivers of America Series), and *Worthy of the Nation* (1977, 2006), the history of Washington as a planned city. He also founded GWU's graduate program in historic preservation, recognized for launching the careers of many leading preservationists and planners.¹⁰

As much of Gutheim's diverse career is documented elsewhere, we can jump to 1971, when philanthropist Joan Kaplan Davidson phoned him in Washington to ask him to attend a meeting in New York "to consider plans for a celebration of Olmsted's sesquicentennial."¹¹ As a vice-president of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, she was considering a proposal linked to Olmsted's New York parks and called on Gutheim to sort out the pros and cons.

The Kaplan Fund was a family foundation established by Joan's father, Jacob Kaplan.¹² While its scope was large, the fund had focused its support on New York area projects,

including, most notably, Carnegie Hall and the New School for Social Research. Westbeth (1970) was the first of its major projects with which Joan Davidson was involved.

As Gutheim noted in his unpublished memoir, the proposed meeting “was almost entirely a New York event, focused on Brooklyn’s Prospect Park and other Olmsted creations in the city.”¹³ He asked Joan Davidson to invite anyone she thought might contribute to the discussion and arranged for the meeting to be held at the Harvard Club in New York (thanks to his brother’s membership). Some fifteen people attended, including Olmsted historian Albert Fein, and exhibition designer William Alex and architect Elliot Willensky, whose joint proposal for an exhibition had prompted the meeting.¹⁴

Now recognized for her pivotal role in funding the rescue and restoration of Central Park and other Olmsted landmarks over decades since, Joan Davidson may well have stepped into her remarkable role as park patron with that first meeting—with its most auspicious outcome.

In his notes, Gutheim wrote that he was the only one at the meeting who saw the proposed celebration as a *national* event, not a local one. And he was the only one, too, who saw that nearly **all** of Olmsted’s big city parks, not only those in New York, needed the sort of attention such an event might generate. “After the meeting,” he added, “I told Joan I would be interested in heading up the event.”¹⁵



Dickerson, MD: "Mt. Ephraim," Gutheim house and 6-acre sheep farm


Dickerson, MD (1) Frederick Gutheim and Jane Loeffler at Mt. Ephraim, Photo by Bob Loeffler, May 1973; (2) Rear of Gutheim house at Mt. Ephraim with sheep and shadow of photographer, Bob Loeffler, in foreground, 1988. Sugarloaf Mountain visible in the distance.

(12) Within days, Gutheim had augmented his humble proposal with an outline for a Washington-based organization with a preliminary budget of \$6,000. It was not at all what Joan Davidson had previously contemplated. If she had misgivings, she must also have found it worthwhile, because she took it under consideration—but not before reminding him that the Kaplan Fund was bound by law to maintain its New York focus.¹⁶ Undeterred, Gutheim believed she could persuade her Board to accept his proposal if she tried. And sure enough, they did!


He took the helm of the Sesquicentennial in the late summer of 1971. A newly minted urban planner, I joined him as his assistant in his Pennsylvania Avenue office.¹⁷ The Kaplan grants, though modest, paid for overhead. As Gutheim took no salary himself, they sustained our efforts for nearly a year—which proved to be enough time to see results.

When in D.C, in addition to his own tiny office, Gutheim held forth at the Cosmos Club, a locale particularly appropriate to Olmsted given its history of uniting science and art. It was also an auspicious locale for launching our efforts to refocus attention on a visionary who so presciently recognized what might be done to cope with the negative aspects of the rapidly changing American landscape.


Setting Priorities for the 1972 Sesquicentennial



**Paxton's Birkenhead Park, Liverpool, England,
1847, the first "public" park;
Olmsted'**



**Passive
recreation:
Seurat, *A
Sunday on
La Grande
Jatte*, 1886**



**Active
recreation:
Bicycling on the
Gallaudet
Campus**

**Asking
what are
parks?
and
who are
they for?**

(1) Liverpool, England, Birkenhead Park, Loeffler Slide Collection; (2) Georges Seurat, A Sunday on La Grande Jatte (1884) Art Institute of Chicago; (3) Washington, DC, Bicyclists on Gallaudet Campus, Gallaudet Archives.

(13) As we began our examination of the larger role of parks in cities, we were reminded that public parks were not always part of the urban fabric. Most were private before Birkenhead Park in Liverpool. When in England, Olmsted visited there, and it was the inspiration for Central Park—an inclusive public park that provided opportunities for both passive and active recreation. To Olmsted, the public park was nothing less than an expression of democratic principles and urban planning represented a pathway to solving social ills of urbanization.

Not innately powerful people, planners are generally unknown. Olmsted was an exception because he coupled his physical plans with a well-articulated vision of social, economic, and even psychological betterment. This gave him a public presence lacking in most of those who draft plans for cities and also for private individuals, schools, and businesses. And he wrote down all his thoughts. That is why his papers comprise one of the largest collections in the Library of Congress. They help us to know his intentions, what his plans meant.¹⁸

But while his papers, 400 boxes of them, had recently been moved from Olmsted's former Brookline office to the Library of Congress, all of his plans and drawings had been left behind in Brookline, where they were almost impossible to view, let alone to copy.

The first Sesquicentennial event in Washington was a colloquium of scholars convened at the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, of which Gutheim was past president. Its purpose was to assess the state of Olmsted studies and set priorities.¹⁹

Seventeen people attended the colloquium, and all agreed that the invaluable visual materials still stored in the Brookline vault constituted the top priority. The Brookline property, itself, was next in terms of needing urgent attention. Already rejected by Harvard and rated unlikely as an acquisition by the National Park Service, it needed a buyer as soon as possible. So time was already a factor, and we had just begun!

Gutheim took to the phones to assemble a committee of notables to endorse these priorities and more. As it turned out, this was a process that often left me speechless. I was on the extension phone, for example, when he called Lewis Mumford at his home in Amenia, NY. Anyone who had studied planning history knew Mumford's work; he was a frequent footnote. Naturally, I assumed he was dead. Thankfully, I was wrong.

When Gutheim invited his old friend to join the Committee, Mumford asked if others had already signed on? Without hesitation, Gutheim said "yes," and proceeded to rattle off names of prominent people— although, in fact, none were yet on board. Mumford readily agreed. And it was easy after that. When others learned that he was in, they said 'yes,' even those who had doubts about Olmsted's importance.

Other old friends who signed on included landscape architects Lester Collins and Dan Kiley, architect Nat Owings, housing expert and Berkeley dean William Wheaton, planner and president of the University of Pennsylvania Martin Meyerson, *Landscape Magazine* editor J.B. Jackson, urbanist Jane Jacobs, and Benton MacKaye, father of the Appalachian Trail. The list grew to more than sixty people. No one was asked for a financial commitment, only the loan of a name.²⁰

The next order of practical business was to find a publisher for Laura Wood Roper's Olmsted biography, a massive opus, stalled for years for lack of a publisher. Gutheim called her out of the blue and asked her if she wanted a deal with Hopkins. Not knowing who he was, and thinking nothing would come of it, she agreed. Thus, she was shocked, when ten minutes later, a Hopkins editor phoned and requested her manuscript.²¹ She cut it down to size, as directed, and Hopkins published it in 1973.

In much the same fashion, Gutheim arranged support for the Olmsted Papers. By March, 1972, he had helped Charles McLaughlin of American University secure the NEH funding which he so desperately needed. He also connected him with Hopkins, which agreed to publish a projected six-volume series of the Olmsted Papers. (The first volume appeared in 1977, and twelfth and final volume in 2020).²²

Those two publication deals, alone, put Olmsted on the historical record.

Riverside, IL: Olmsted's planned suburb (1869)



Riverside, IL (1) View of train station, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; (2) Water view, Frederick Gutheim, 1971, Loeffler Slide Collection; (3) Common, Frederick Gutheim, 1971, Loeffler Slide Collection; (4) Plan of Riverside, Olmsted Society of Riverside, <https://www.olmstedsociety.org/resources/maps-of-riverside/>; (5) Gas street lamp, Frederick Gutheim, 1971, Loeffler Slide Collection.

(14) We met with a local group planning its own celebration in Riverside, the Chicago suburb Olmsted planned in 1868. Sited on the Des Plaines River, Riverside features curving roads that Olmsted specifically designed, he explained, to counteract the oppressive grid of Chicago, where most of the suburbanites worked.

Riverside became our case study of a community already cognizant of its past and very much aware of what needed to be done to protect the future of its parks, its central commons--even original street lights that Olmsted designed.

Brookline, MA: Olmsted home/office



Brookline, MA (1) Olmsted Home/Office (Fairsted), Photo by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2018; (2) "Fairsted," Photo by Robert Burley, 1992, CCA.

(15) At Olmsted's home/office in Brookline, we found drawings about to disintegrate and large glass-plate negatives ready to explode. The whole place was a fire-trap filled with priceless items.

The property, not far from the Brookline Reservoir, was owned by Olmsted firm partner Artemas Richardson, who was eager to sell. Richardson envisioned the property as a study center—but he wanted to remain living in the house after selling the rest of the property. No one wanted to take on a pricey property with no endowment, and certainly not with him in the house.

Gutheim urged him to stop stalling and be realistic; he began a lobbying effort of his own. Unlikely as it was, the National Park Service came to the rescue and turned it into the unusual historic site/study center it is today.



*(1) Gutheim presents **Corita poster** to George Hartzog, Director of the National Park Service, March 24, 1972, official NPS photograph; (2) Corita-decorated Dorchester gas tank, commissioned by Eli Goldston, president of Boston Gas in 1971, since replaced by replica; (3) Olmsted Sesquicentennial serigraph commissioned in 1971. Artist Corita Kent designed the posters and had them printed in California and shipped to Washington. She signed twenty out of 100. The Sesquicentennial sold the “posters” to raise operating funds. They were not really posters, but original silk-screened prints.*

(16) When Gutheim decided we needed a poster, he picked up his phone and called Corita Kent and asked her to design a poster for the Sesquicentennial. She quickly agreed. Another old friend, of course. Within a week we had 100 silk-screened prints, she signed twenty, and we sold them all.

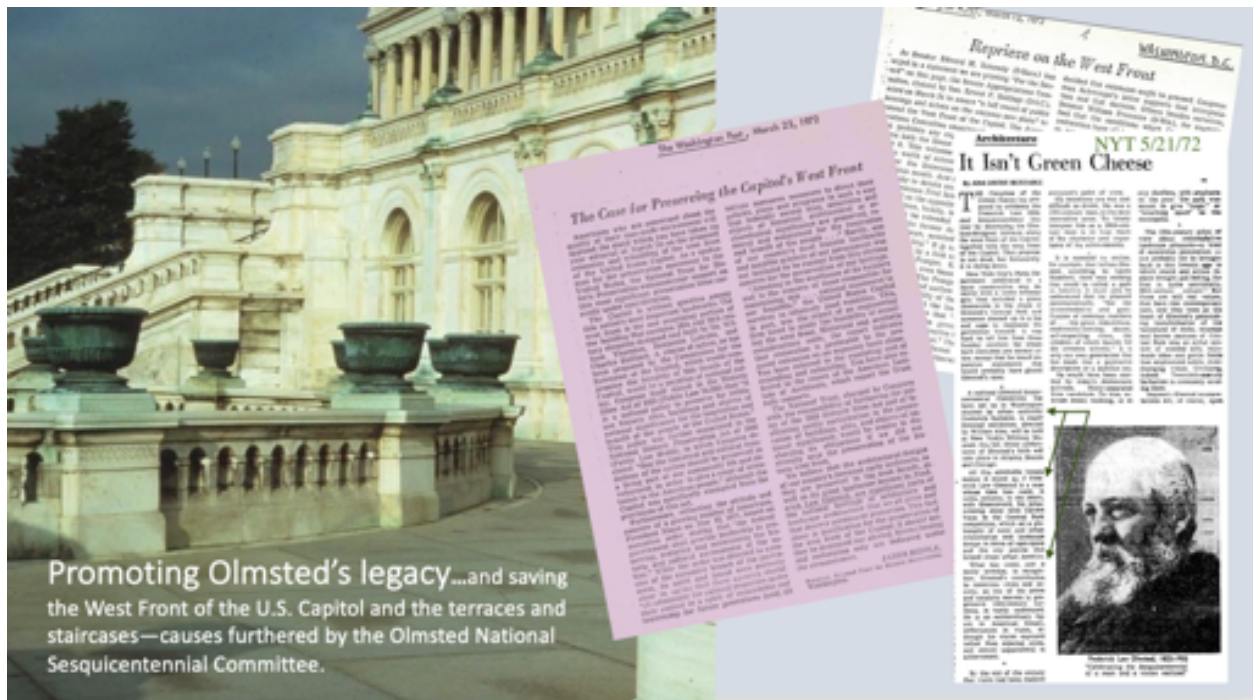
As part of his effort to raise Olmsted's profile at the Park Service, Gutheim managed to secure an appointment with NPS Director George Hartzog at which he presented him with one of Corita's posters. Although Gutheim was known to everyone as “Fritz,” Hartzog called him “Fred,” possibly confusing him with Olmsted, a frequent occurrence.²³



Washington, DC:
U.S. Capitol Grounds/Terraces & Grotto

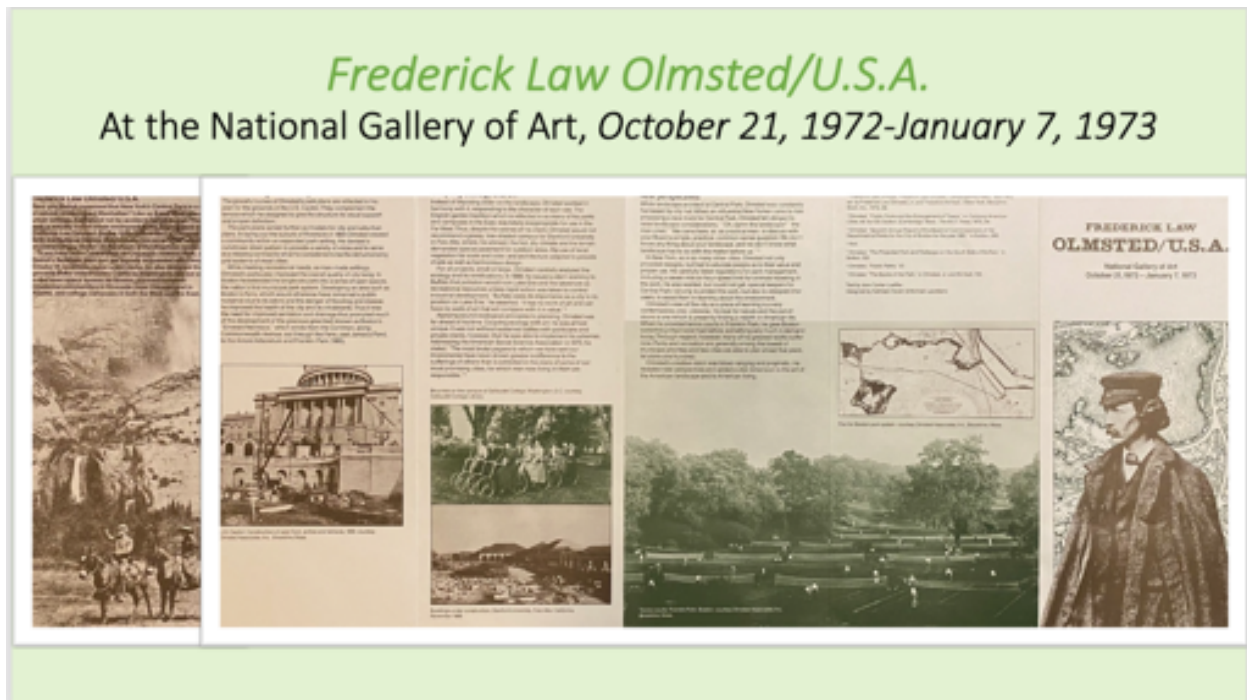
Washington, DC, U.S. Capitol (1) West Front steps toward the Mall; (2) curved masonry perimeter wall that forms edge of Capitol grounds at Constitution Avenue; (3) approach to Capitol grounds from the SW; (4) Grotto—all photos © Woodbridge Williams, 1978.

(17) Gutheim also commissioned photographer Woodbridge Williams to shoot hundreds of photos of the Capitol grounds, terraces, and surrounding area to use for lectures and other PR purposes. These are some of Williams' photographs, historical artifacts today.



Washington, DC, U.S. Capitol, West Front, Photos © Woodbridge Williams, 1978. Articles reproduced from The Washington Post and The New York Times.

(18) When the West Front of the Capitol was threatened with a massive renovation and expansion plan, Guthrie pulled out all stops to emphasize its ties to Olmsted and to rally support for its preservation. In the end, it won a reprieve.



Washington, DC, Frederick Law Olmsted/U.S.A. Exhibition brochure (excerpt showing front and one panel of back). Brochure text by Jane Loeffler. Design by Kathleen Haven & Michael Lauretano.

(19) William Alex had already arranged for the Whitney Museum to show version of his planned Olmsted exhibit in New York and the American Federation for the Arts had accepted it as a traveling exhibition, but he had no idea of how to bring that show to Washington, how to adapt it for a larger national audience, or where to it might be shown? As part of his plan, Gutheim had envisioned a major Olmsted exhibition in the nation's capital, but finding a venue was particularly difficult given the size and logistical needs of Alex's project.

Knowing that his friend Dan Kiley had worked with the Mellons, Gutheim questioned Kiley. Once Kiley replied: "Bunny Mellon is an Olmsted fan," that was all he needed to know.

Paul Mellon was President of the National Gallery, and his wife, known as Bunny, was an avid gardener. Gutheim knew if she was pro-Olmsted, the show would happen. And so it did. J. Carter Brown, NGA director, agreed to host the exhibition and make the necessary space available. As no one at the Gallery was familiar with the subject matter, Gutheim recommended that they hire me as a curator, and fortunately for me, they did.

The D.C. version of the exhibition included Olmsted's original plan for the Capitol grounds, excerpts from his Yosemite Report (1864), books, memorabilia, and maps, in addition to the plans and original drawings. For this special event, the Biltmore Estate also loaned its enormous John Singer Sargent portrait of Olmsted. (1895).



(1) Carleton Watkins, Yosemite, stereograph; (2) Portrait of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. by John Singer Sargent, loaned by Biltmore Estate; (3) Olmsted's Plan for Central Park.

(20) By opening night, everything was in place...including the Sargent portrait that had mysteriously gone missing while being transported from Asheville to Washington.

By exhibiting Olmsted's works (plans and drawings) as art, the Gallery put him in the same category as the photographer Carleton Watkins, who immortalized Yosemite with his famous photographs, and the artist Sargent, who immortalized Olmsted with this famous portrait. The Gallery took a risk in making this analogy, and ultimately it worked.



At the National Gallery of Art: (1) Plan of exhibition; (2) silk-screened custom napkin made for dinner opening night, commissioned by Mrs. Paul Mellon, showing Olmsted's tree moving machine, Prospect Park, in the collection of Jane Loeffler; (3) article from NYT, 10/17/72 by Ada Louise Huxtable; (4) photo of NGA exhibition showing plan for Riverside, IL. on right.

(21) The exhibit marked the first time that the Gallery used carpeting and live trees in its exhibit areas. The *Circlescan* audio-visual show was also a first; but caused many problems.

The so-called inventor of the "Circlescan" was Dr. Eugene Trachtman, whom everyone assumed to be a scientific genius of some sort. It turned out, however, he was an eye doctor. His invention was a camera that produced special slides which were placed in 18 Kodak carousel projectors mounted on ladders. This precarious array was surrounded by a circular screen hung from the ceiling. It had barely been tested when installed at the Gallery.

Slides frequently jammed, melted, faded, went out of focus or ran out of sync. The Gallery had never needed to assign staff to un-jam projectors or change burned out bulbs, so no one was prepared to do either. The result was a show that was difficult to manage.

When it worked, though, it was a big hit. Fortunately, for opening night, everything ran perfectly. The Mellons invited 1,000 guests to a black-tie reception in the exhibition and 238 guests to an opulent dinner in the galleries above.

Bunny Mellon brought boxwoods from her own Virginia greenhouses to decorate the dining tables and had napkins silk-screened with images of Olmsted's tree-moving machine. One is shown here.

The exhibition may have been a challenging learning experience for the Gallery, but it gave Olmsted celebrity status. If his work was not immediately viewed as art, it was taken seriously by many who had never heard of him before. And that was a major accomplishment!



1970: "DANGER KEEP OFF"
Central Park Bridge (top)
1997: Central Park, The Great
Lawn, restored (below)



1970—2005: Change for the better in Central Park



2005: "THE GATES" (Christo & Jeanne Claude) Central Park Bridge

New York, Central Park (1) "Keep Off" graffiti image, 1970, <https://ephemeralnewyork.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/centralparkbridge1970snyt.png>; (2) Central Park Great Lawn restored, 1997, <https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/central-park-history>; (3) Central Park bridge during "The Gates," Photo by Bob Loeffler, 2005.

(22) Since that time, public discourse on parks has shifted entirely. We no longer speak of open space as if it were simply a container for activity--we now talk about living parks and tree canopies and we link them to our own health and well-being.

Asheville Arboretum, NC; Atlanta, GA; Brookline & Boston, MA: Signs and statues identify newly designated Olmsted landmarks/historic sites



Signs and Statues. (1) Asheville, NC. Arboretum. Olmsted statue, dedicated on Earth Day, 2016. Photo by Bob Loeffler, 2019; (2) Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA; (3) Emerald Necklace, Olmsted Park, Boston, MA; (4) Olmsted Linear Park, City of Atlanta, GA.

(23) Scores of outstanding books followed the first—even though the days are gone when you can broker a publishing deal with a single phone call!

Signs and statues now help the public associate Olmsted with his landscape legacy. The Olmsted statue shown here was dedicated on Earth Day, 2016 at the Asheville Arboretum. I am the scale figure to give you a sense of the statue's colossal size.

When communities rally around threatened parks and properties now, they have the advantage of name recognition, which is clout. But of course, there is still much work to do.



Washington, DC:
Smithsonian National Zoological Park

Washington, DC. Smithsonian National Zoological Park. (1) Bench on Olmsted Walk. Photo by Jane Loeffler, 2020; (2) Lion. Photo by Bob Loeffler, 2011; (3) Lily pond. Photo by Jane Loeffler, 2021.

(24) The Smithsonian Zoo, officially a “zoological park,” was not always recognized as an Olmsted site. Although his preliminary plan dates to 1890, it took over 100 years for his name to appear there on a marker-- when the Zoo dedicated its main pathway as *Olmsted Walk*. It is certainly a park, not simply a collection of animals.

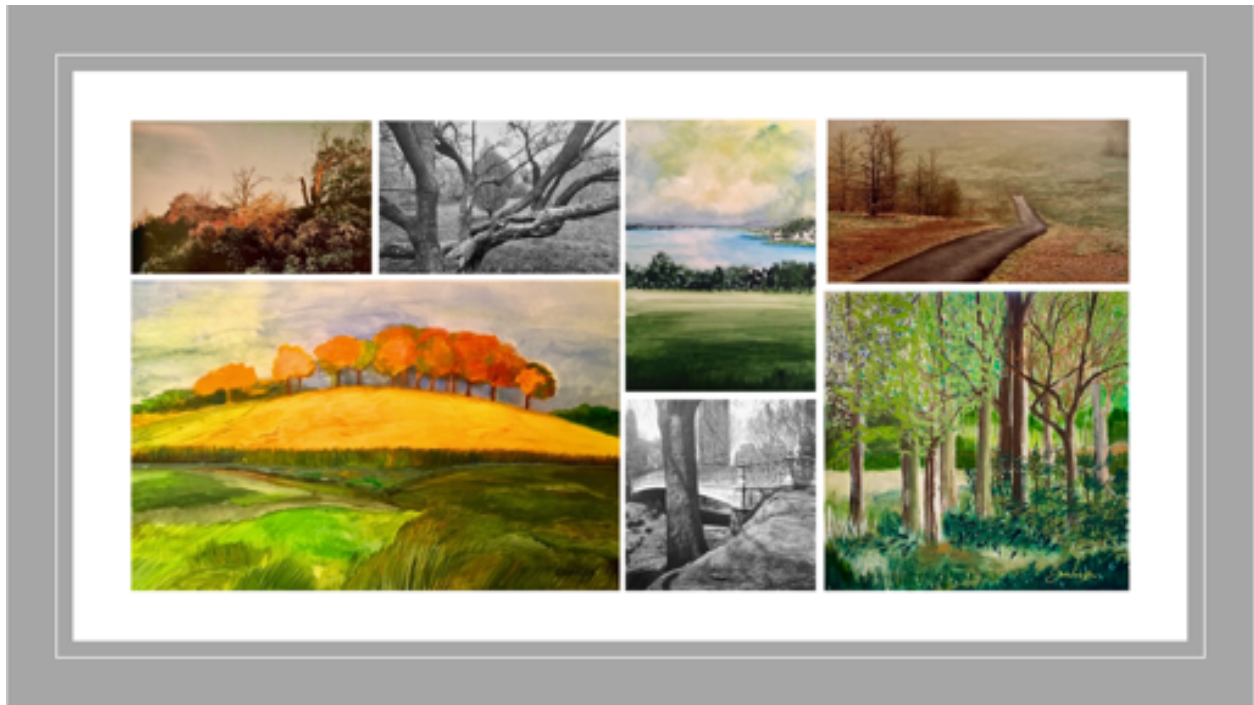


Asheville, NC. (1) Biltmore trees. Photo by Jane Loeffler; Below (2) Hingham, MA. World's End trees on a hill. Photo by Jane Loeffler; Right top (3) Washington Monument viewed from the Capitol Terrace © Woodbridge Williams, 1978; Right bottom (4) "Biltmore," The George W. Vanderbilt Estate, Asheville, NC," Lee Friedlander, CCA, 1994

(25) Was Olmsted an artist? I'll leave that for another talk. Still, I want you to consider how Olmsted used specific design techniques to create similar effects in very different places.

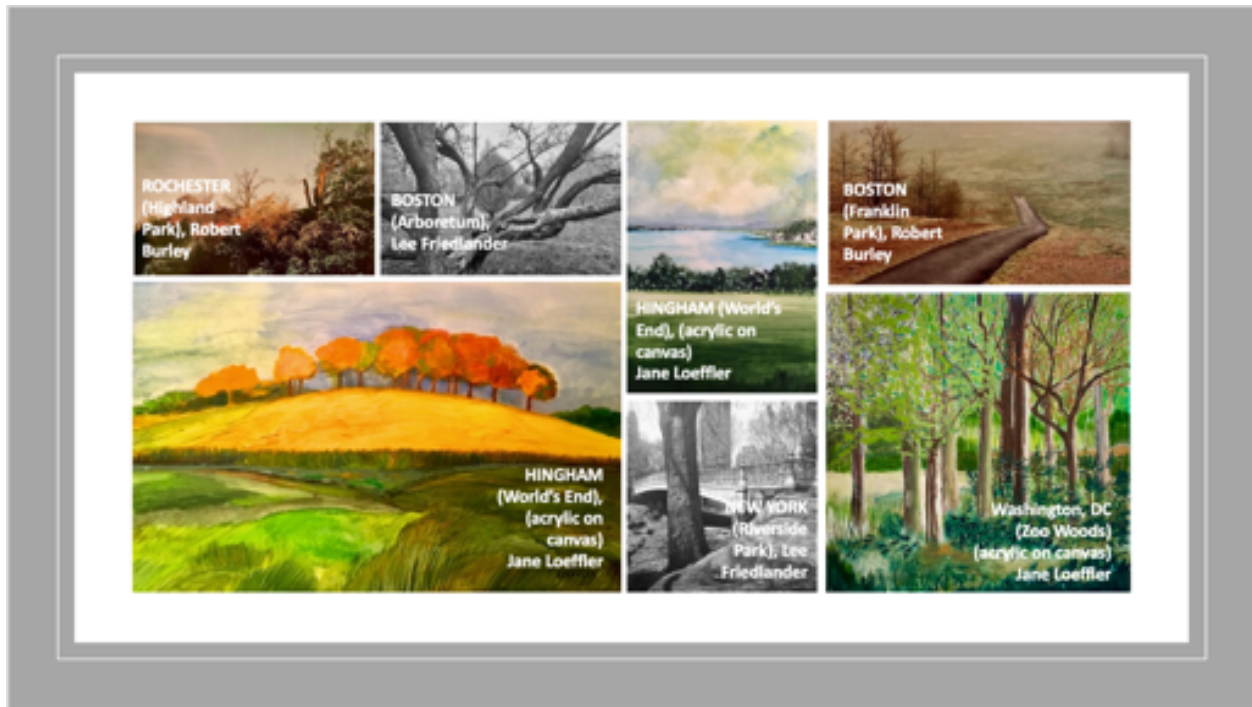
The placement of trees on the crest of a hill at Biltmore and on the crest of a hill at World's End, for example, or a view captured from a raised terrace at the Capitol, and another seen from a similar vantage point at Biltmore---It is striking how landscapes fashioned in such *different* places reflect such *similar* sensibilities!

I don't think it is simply that photographers captured those sensibilities. I see them as inherent in the *designed* landscapes themselves.



Artists and photographers interpreting Olmsted.

(26) As you would expect, Olmsted's work has inspired and continues to inspire many artists—another subject for a separate talk. Photographers, painters, and probably sculptors, too. Some works inspired by Olmsted include these photographs by Robert Burley and Lee Friedlander; the paintings are mine.²⁴



*Artists and photographers interpreting Olmsted. Upper images, left to right: 1. **Rochester** ("Highland Park, Rochester, NY") (excerpt), Robert Burley, photographer, CCA, 1991; 2. **Boston** ("Arboretum, Boston, MA") (excerpt), Lee Friedlander, photographer, CCA, 1988; 3. **Hingham** ("World's End Looking East towards Hull"), (acrylic, 24"x36") Jane Loeffler, artist, 2017; 4. **Boston** ("The Country Park, Franklin Park"), Robert Burley, photographer, CCA, 1994. Lower images, left to right: 5. **Hingham** ("World's End Viewed from Hull") (acrylic, 36" x 24") Jane Loeffler, artist, 2015; 6. **New York** ("Riverside Park") Lee Friedlander, photographer, CCA, 1991; 7. **Washington, DC** ("Zoo Woods, Green Glow") (acrylic, 24"x24") Jane Loeffler, artist,*

(27) I want to conclude by observing that history does not just occur--people make it happen. It is up to those of us who study history to try to identify who did what and when because it is the only way to pinpoint the catalytic moments when ideas coalesce into action.

In helping to put Olmsted on the nation's mental map, Gutheim was a significant catalyst. So, indeed, was Joan Davidson, who had the vision to invest in parks when they were no one's priority and who had the good sense to support not just a single exhibition in New York City but rather a broad-based, nationally-focused Sesquicentennial that set the stage for Olmsted's rescue from obscurity.

The plethora of signs and markers with Olmsted's name on them now—from Boston to Asheville and beyond, attest to his lasting place in our landscape, and it is hoped, the lasting value of his landscape legacy, too. Both are cause for celebration.



New York, Central Park during exhibition of "The Gates," (Christo & Jeanne Claude), Photo by Bob Loeffler, Feb. 2005.

(29) That Gutheim, himself, faded into obscurity after the Sesquicentennial is no surprise. He worked that way. He moved on to other projects until his health failed in the late '80's. (He died in 1993.)

But by then, the NAOP was up and running and Olmsted was, indeed, a household name.

THANK YOU!



*Celebrating Olmsted:
How it Began—Rescue from Obscurity*

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<https://janeloeffler.com/recent-writing>

"Inside Olmsted's Rockery," No. Easton, MA. Photo by J. Loeffler, 2001.

No. Easton, MA. Inside Olmsted's Rockery, Photo by Jane Loeffler, 2001.

NOTES

¹ See more on "Olmsted 200" at <https://olmsted200.org/>

² Olmsted's son and stepson took over his practice entirely by 1895 when his own health failed. Olmsted, Jr., known as "Rick," added to the confusion by dropping the "Jr." after his father died in 1903. I mention these dates to emphasize that anything designed after 1895 would be the work of Olmsted's sons and their colleagues.

³ The Olmsted designed parks in the Boston system include Back Bay Fens (1879); Muddy River (1881); Olmsted Park (1881); Jamaica Park (1892); Franklin Park (1885); and the Arnold Arboretum (1872) for which Charles Sprague Sargent collaborated on the design.

⁴ Laura Wood Roper, *FLO, A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; paperback edition, 1983), p. 377.

⁵ As Olmsted's the plan for the Capitol grounds is strikingly symmetrical, I always wondered why there was only one grotto on the north edge—until recently, when I read that he planned for two, but the one to the south was never built. He intended to have two. See also: Jane C. Loeffler, "The U.S. Capitol Grounds: Frederick Law Olmsted's Legacy in the Nation's Capital," *The Capitol Dome* (Spring 2006, vol. 43, no. 2): 2-10; and "Working in Olmsted's Shadow, Guidance for Developing a Scope of Services for the Update of the Master Plan for the U.S. Capitol and Grounds, National Research Council/National Academies Press, 2003.

⁶ Jane Canter Loeffler, "THE FENWAY," Report on Urban Renewal Program for Boston's Fenway, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Public Information Office, Summer, 1969. See this excerpt (below) because it cites the federal priority for structured play areas over landscaped parks and the fact that Boston's "linear green belt" (not yet known as the "Emerald Necklace") was getting no attention at that time.

Other public improvements are being made in the Back Bay Fens. In co-operation with the Parks and Recreation Department, the BRA recently built a new totlot and reconstructed another in the Fens at a cost of \$35,000. The totlots are structured play areas for small children - they feature climbing blocks, slides, sand boxes and swings. Seating and lights for the paths have also been provided.

The Fens is a link in Boston's linear green belt stretching from the Common and Public Garden out to the Arnold

Arboretum in Jamaica Plain and Franklin Park in Dorchester. The BRA has emphasized the need to consider the park as a part of this system. For this reason, funds for maintenance, rehabilitation, and general improvements, as well as totlots, were requested as part of project plans. Federal priorities unfortunately permitted only the grants for the play areas. Additional funds are needed to permit the preservation and restoration of this valuable regional resource.

⁷ Wellesley College sacrificed its landscape at that time and began paving over its meadows to provide parking lots for more and more cars. Not recognizing the open spaces as essential to the identity of the campus and unable to meet the expenses of properly maintaining its landscape, the College found itself in dire straits 1995 when an article appeared in its alumnae magazine creating an outcry among alumnae. It led to creation of a visiting committee, a new master plan, a new landscape architect, and a total restoration of the campus landscape—now recognized as one of the College's greatest assets.

Olmsted, Jr. admired the campus and made some general observations on its intrinsic beauty and natural advantages, but he never prepared plans or designs on commission for the College, which apparently balked at his fees.

See: Jane Canter Loeffler, "Wellesley's Vanishing Landscape," *Wellesley Magazine* (vol. 79, 1995): 20-25. See also: *Report of the Visiting Committee on the Future of the Campus Landscape to the President of Wellesley College*, 1996.

⁸ Laura Roper explains this point in some detail, particularly in her discussion of Olmsted's design of the Capitol grounds. She points out, for example, how he "sought variety and liveliness" by varying the shrubbery, manipulated light and dark, and grouping elements into subtle arrangements. "Bloom was a minor consideration," she writes, "he preferred the simple to the showy."

Mrs. Roper goes on to note that: "The reason that Olmsted did not resort to the formal style of gardening in a situation so well adapted to it must be inferred: it was alien to his taste and habit; and it had no public acceptance in America at that time." Roper, *op. cit.* p. 376-77. (Thus, it can be further inferred, the showy beds of annuals that now dot the grounds would not have pleased Olmsted.)

⁹ Julius Gy Fabos, Gordon T. Milde, and V. Michael Weinmayr, *Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., Founder of Landscape Architecture in America*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1968.

¹⁰ Jane Loeffler, "Frederick Gutheim: Capital Catalyst," *Washington History* (Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring/Summer, 1998): 24-45; "Gutheim the Great," *Historic Preservation* (Vol. 42, 1990): 36.

¹¹ Gutheim memoir titled: "**10-2c Gutheim memoirs of 1971,**" p. 1. (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

Frederick Gutheim compiled pages of individually typed memoirs dealing with various aspects and episodes of his life in an effort to write his own autobiography. That effort was unsuccessful. The episodic memoirs, while providing great insight into specific activities and events, could not be stitched together into any sort of whole by him, nor by Emory University historian Dana White, whom Gutheim had hoped would write a biography of him, nor eventually by me, whom he turned to in the hopes that I might do the same.

My taped interviews with Gutheim became the basis for a lengthy unpublished profile. That, in turn, became the basis for the *Washington History* piece cited above. I wrote that in order to put him on the historical record and to direct future scholars to the location of his papers, which he had perversely donated to the University of Wyoming, almost insuring that his work would be lost to posterity.

As Gutheim's literary executor, I was charged with sending his collected papers to Wyoming. Somehow, I had the presence of mind to hold back copies of the typed memoirs and other items when I sent the bulk of his collection out to Laramie. In 2016, I donated these items, along with all my own records of the Olmsted Sesquicentennial, to the Avery Architectural and Fine Art Library at Columbia University, creating the collection there known as the *Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997*.

This is a summary of its contents:

The papers in this collection were gathered by architectural historian Jane C. Loeffler to be used in an unrealized biography on Frederick Gutheim. The bulk of the papers were given to Loeffler by Gutheim. The structure of the files is Loeffler's, except for the first four files in the collection ("Editorial and Publishing Files") which were removed from a file box maintained directly by Gutheim. The bulk of the collection documents Gutheim's professional activities and research. Included are materials on the Pennsylvania Avenue renewal project, Montgomery County preservation efforts, Frederick Law Olmsted Sesquicentennial activities, and research on Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto. Additionally, the collection includes unpublished drafts of Gutheim's memoirs.

I selected Columbia because I had previously created (2014) the *Jane C. Loeffler Collection of Research Papers on American Embassies, 1920s-2010s* at the Avery, which had solicited that acquisition to augment its holdings in the history of mid-century modernism and public policy.

In my personal archives, which I retain, I have designated Gutheim's memoirs such that "**10-2c Gutheim memoirs of 1971, p. 1**" refers to the page I have cited here. When I donated these typed pages to the Avery, that was the heading on the document, as well. However, it could have changed since and could well be listed differently in the Finding Aid. The first sentence of this document reads: "Like most people I was rather shaky in spelling Olmsted..." There are very few pages of memoirs in this collection; it should not be difficult to find any of these items, if needed.

¹² Jacob Kaplan created the fund in 1945 to support the arts, all aspects of the natural and the built environment, and human rights. Joan Davidson, Jacob Kaplan's oldest daughter, took over from her father as president of the Kaplan Fund in 1977. At the time of the Sesquicentennial (1971-72), she was officially one of several vice-presidents there.

¹³ "**10-2c Gutheim memoirs of 1971,**" p. 1. (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

¹⁴ While preparing an exhibit on Boston's parks for the Museum of Fine Arts, Alex had first encountered Olmsted. He wanted to explore the New York City's parks next. Willensky, recently named director of an environmental education center on Staten Island, wanted to expand the learning dimensions of the museum experience.

¹⁵ "**10-2c Gutheim memoirs of 1971,**" p. 1. (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2..

¹⁷ Gutheim found me working at the Office of Environmental Education, where I was reviewing grant proposals. He had submitted a request for information there on behalf of the Klumb Foundation and it came to my attention. As he had been a footnote in my college thesis, I was familiar with his work, but did not expect him to be a real person. I replied to his inquiry and he replied with a job offer (May 25, 1971).

¹⁸ Those plans, and the drawings that accompanied them are not in the Library of Congress with the papers, but rather they remain in his former office in Brookline, MA, now a National Historic Site and study center administered by the National Park Service.

¹⁹ Gutheim memoir titled: “**5/71 (23 pg) Olmsted Sesq. early files, 1971 (LOEFFLER) pdf**” (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

Participants included Olmsted historians Charles McLaughlin, Dana White, and Albert Fein, and authors Laura Roper, Elizabeth Stevenson, and Julius Fabos. Representatives from the Library of Congress included Alan Fern and John Broderick, and from the Commission on Fine Arts, Sibley Jennings. (Memoir includes full list of participants.)

Gutheim explained to all that “The Frederick Law Olmsted Association, Inc.” (precursor to the National Association for Olmsted Parks) was being formally incorporated in New York with the support of the J. M. Kaplan Fund. It was to be the umbrella organization for the Sesquicentennial. Highlights of the meeting included:

1. *Prof. Charles McLaughlin’s plea on behalf of Olmsted’s plans, photographs and drawings that remained in jeopardy in the Brookline vault (while 400 boxes of papers had recently arrived at the Library of Congress in Washington);*
2. *Prof. Albert Fein’s endorsement of the idea of using the Olmsted house in Brookline as a research/study center.*
3. *Gutheim’s mention that Harvard had already refused the property and the National Park Service had given it a low priority as an acquisition, despite its evident importance.*
4. *On behalf of the Library of Congress, Dr. Alan Fern said there was no hope of bringing the visual materials to the LOC. He further distinguished between reproduction and preservation issues.*
5. *Author Laura Roper argued for the preservation of the content over that of the house, itself, if a choice needed to be made.*
6. *Everyone agreed that the situation with the visual materials was an emergency calling for urgent measures.*

²⁰ Gutheim memoir file: “**10/71 COMMITTEE 10/71 Olmsted Committee Oct. 1971 copy.pdf**” (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

²¹ Laura Wood Roper handwritten letter to Jane Loeffler, 8-2-1987, from Cotuit, MA, in Gutheim file: “**10-2d Laura Wood Roper on her first contact with Fritz Gutheim**” (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

²² See: <https://www.olmsted.org/research/olmsted-papers-project/term/summary>

²³ Gutheim file: **G 3/72Olmsted Sesq.12, Hartzog photo copy.pdf**. Gutheim and Loeffler met with Hartzog on March 24, 1972, when this photograph was taken by Fred R. Bell, official photographer for the U.S. Department of the Interior. It was labeled 72-114-3: Olmsted Sesquicentennial Poster, L-R: Mrs. Loeffler, NPS Director Hartzog, Frederick Gutheim. It is accompanied in the files by a letter from Hartzog to Gutheim dated April 19, 1972, when he sent the photo. (*Frederick Gutheim papers, 1939 – 1997. Avery Library, Columbia University*)

²⁴ Photographs in this presentation include some from the 1997 exhibition shown at Wellesley College titled *KNOWING OLMSTED*. These photographs are all identified, as such, in photo captions. See: Jane C. Loeffler, *Knowing Olmsted*, exhibition hand-out, Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College (1997).

Excerpt from *Knowing Olmsted*, by Jane Loeffler:

If Frederick Law Olmsted set out to photograph the parks and parkways that he designed more than 100 years ago, what would he choose to photograph today?

Most likely his portfolio would include picnickers, frisbee players, bicyclists, joggers, and dog walkers (and dogs). In photographs featuring public events and private moments, he would explore the common impulse to enjoy the out-of-doors and escape from the bustle of the surrounding city. Yes, there would be solitary trees, gently curving roads, sweeping lawns, and paved and pebbled paths, but Olmsted's photographs would definitely include people. For him landscape was an expression of the subtle relationship between people and nature, and his landscaped parkland was intended not only as a place of beauty, but also as a meeting ground where the seeds of community might be sown....

Like Thoreau, he dreaded the devastating impact of industrialization, but unlike the Walden recluse, he wanted to find ways to counteract it....

On his travels through the South, as later on the California frontier, Olmsted was distressed by the absence of good roads, decent buildings, schools, churches, and other enterprises that fostered what he called "communitiveness." It is no surprise that he linked park building to the evolution of "civilized communities."

The photographic project that produced the photos in the exhibition, and accompanying book, was titled: "Viewing Olmsted." See: Phyllis Lambert, editor, "Viewing Olmsted, Photographs by Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander, and Geoffrey James," Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, 1996. This is an excerpt describing the CCA commission from:

[https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/11/nature-reorganized/20/olmsted-burley-friedlander-james:](https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/11/nature-reorganized/20/olmsted-burley-friedlander-james)

Through a commission from the CCA initiated in 1988, three contemporary photographers spent seven years interpreting the work of Olmsted. By giving them the opportunity to visit the sites many times in different seasons, or in the same season several years later, the Olmsted commission sought to create an intense concentration on place.

*The 74 representative sites in the project were selected by Olmsted scholar Cynthia Zaitzevsky, who provided documentation to the photographers on each location. The photographers brought sharply different approaches to the commission. **Robert Burley** created chromogenic colour prints, using a 4 × 5 view camera. **Lee Friedlander** worked in black and white, using a Leica, a 2¼ square Hasselblad, and a panoramic camera. **Geoffrey James** also worked in black and white, using an 8 × 10 view camera and a panoramic camera. The photographers' personal visions and their ideas about Olmsted were equally distinct, evolving gradually over the course of the commission.*

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