

**ANDREW JACKSON DOWNING MEMORIAL PARK
NEWBURGH, NEW YORK**

**BELETED HONOR FOR A PROPHET:
NEWBURGH'S DOWNING PARK**



for the **DOWNING PARK PLANNING COMMITTEE** and the **CITY OF NEWBURGH**

funded by the **NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS**

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prepared for
LANDSCAPES
Landscape Architecture, Planning, Historic Preservation
Westport, Connecticut

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**BELATED HONOR FOR A PROPHET:
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LANDSCAPES

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Funding was received for this project from the New York State Council on the Arts.

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February, 1991

**Downing Park Planning Committee
Board of Directors**

To our Reader,

Downing Park is a landscape we all share, a legacy given to Newburgh by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux as a memorial to Andrew Jackson Downing, a Newburgh favorite son. This report entitled **Belated Honor for a Prophet: Newburgh's Downing Park** was developed as a part of the **Downing Park Comprehensive Master Plan** that was completed in 1989. The origin of the park is revealed in the historic research uncovered by Dr. David Schuyler. This history is a foundation for the future. Patricia M. O'Donnell, historic landscape architect, worked with David Schuyler in assessing the relationship of the historic record to conditions in Downing Park today. Written in 1989, the publication of this historic research investigation adds another useful component to our efforts to fully understand and renew Downing Park.

The **Downing Park Planning Committee** is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the restoration of Downing Park. When this project was undertaken Don Petruncola was president of the organization and Jo Horan served as administrator. Our efforts over the past five years have increased the use and enjoyment of the park through concerts, festivals and park volunteer clean-up projects. Over time we became aware of the many problems facing the park, from the lack of enjoyable programs and frequent maintenance, and the condition of the trees, shrubs, lawns, walks, drives and buildings, to the obvious deterioration of the Polly. This publication is a part of our overall efforts to make progress in implementing the comprehensive plan for the park. We appreciate your interest and efforts in the past. We invite and encourage your participation in the efforts to achieve a complete renaissance for this common ground.

Sincerely yours,
Patricia Sofokles, President
Downing Park Planning Committee

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A. INTRODUCTION

Andrew Jackson Downing Memorial Park, in Newburgh, New York, was the final collaborative effort of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. It was also the first and perhaps only occasion during which their sons, John C. Olmsted and Downing Vaux, would join them in preparing a public landscape design. The linking together of these names is perhaps indicative enough of Downing Park's significance in the history of the planned landscape in nineteenth and twentieth-century America. But Downing Park is important in other ways as well. Although it is a comparatively small park in a small city, it represents in microcosm the difficulties of generating support for expensive public works projects, changing definitions of recreation and other use, as well as the impact of the financial crisis the nation's cities have faced and the resulting inability to maintain their infrastructure. The history of the creation and evolution of Downing Park thus is more than a biography of a landscape; it is an inextricable element of the community's collective heritage. Understanding how Downing Park came to be, and how it has changed over time, are the first steps in its rehabilitation.

B. OLMSTED/VAUX COLLABORATION AND NEWBURGH RESPONSE 1887-1889

To friends and family of Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), in the thirty years since his untimely death residents of Newburgh demonstrated little understanding of or appreciation for the town's most famous citizen. Downing's architectural designs still added distinction to the city's streets, and he had enriched his community in countless ways -- in contributing part of the cost of buying the block on which the Court House stood, surrounded by shaded walks and seats instead of adjacent structures, in promoting the establishment of a free public library, in the landscapes he shaped, and in other endeavors.

Downing rose from modest beginnings to become the preeminent arbiter of American taste in the middle of the nineteenth century, a standing recognized in his commission to design the grounds of the Smithsonian Institution and the President's House in Washington, D.C. A monument to Downing stood on the public grounds in the nation's capital; New York's Central Park was testament to his campaign for public parks; and numerous books had been dedicated to his memory. But citizens of Newburgh had done nothing to commemorate so distinguished a resident, who was known throughout the world as an author, pomologist, and father of the park movement in the United States. In 1887, however, Mayor Benjamin Odell urged the creation of a public recreational ground in the city, which eventually would be named in Downing's honor.¹

Odell's initial call for establishing a park, included in his March 14 message to the Common Council, was a terse enumeration of the advantages other cities had derived from a park. Foremost among them was financial consideration. "Statistics from other cities," Odell wrote, "show that the increased valuation of adjacent property fully repays the cost of acquiring, and maintaining, such improvements." A month later city clerk D. J. Coutant noted that Newburgh had no park save the grounds of Washington's Headquarters (the first building in the United States preserved for its historical significance), which, however beautiful, fell "far short of what our city requires, considering its present size and wealth, and its probable future growth." In the years since the state acquired the Hasbrouck House in 1850, streets had extended west from the Hudson River, and residents of the newly developed areas had no recreational grounds. A committee of the Common Council adopted Odell's recommendation that the city acquire park space in what was a geographically central location, a fifteen-acre tract west of Dubois Street between South and Third streets owned by William L. Smith. As the city already owned an adjacent ten-acre plot, the purchase would provide ample ground for what Odell and members of Council thought would be an appropriate park for a city of Newburgh's size and population. Council scheduled a referendum to support the issue of \$30,000 in bonds, the cost of the land, which in the balloting of May 24, 1887 carried by a vote of 526 to 153. Citizens of Newburgh had taken the first step in securing a public park.²

Soon after the vote, as the city began the process of acquiring the land, Caroline Downing Monell joined with several friends in urging that the park be named in memory of her late husband. The campaign, however, was hardly a local one. R. Ludlow Fowler published a piece in the *New York Evening Post* urging such designation, as did George William Curtis in *Harper's Weekly*. Curtis, who edited and wrote a biographical memoir in a posthumous edition of Downing's *Rural Essays* (1853), urged that a

public park or garden in Newburgh could not bear so fitly any other name than DOWNING'S, and we should hope to see it decorated also with a statue of the son of Newburgh whose renown among Americans is so unique, and whose reflected influence is seen in the great and marvellous [sic] progress which rural art in this country has made during the last half-century.³

Mrs. Monell and her friends also called on two men who owed a special debt to Downing, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, asking that they urge the city to name the park in honor of her late husband. Vaux, an English-born architect, had migrated to the United States in 1850 to become Downing's partner; Olmsted was a friend whose earliest essay on parks Downing had published in his monthly *The Horticulturist*. Olmsted and Vaux first achieved fame as landscape architects when they were co-designers of New York's Central Park (1858). Olmsted then served as architect-in-chief and superintendent, while Vaux designed the park's principal structures. Both men shared Downing's ideal of creating within the city "broad reaches of park and pleasure-grounds, with a real feeling of the breadth and beauty of green fields." In 1860 they had attempted, unsuccessfully, to solicit

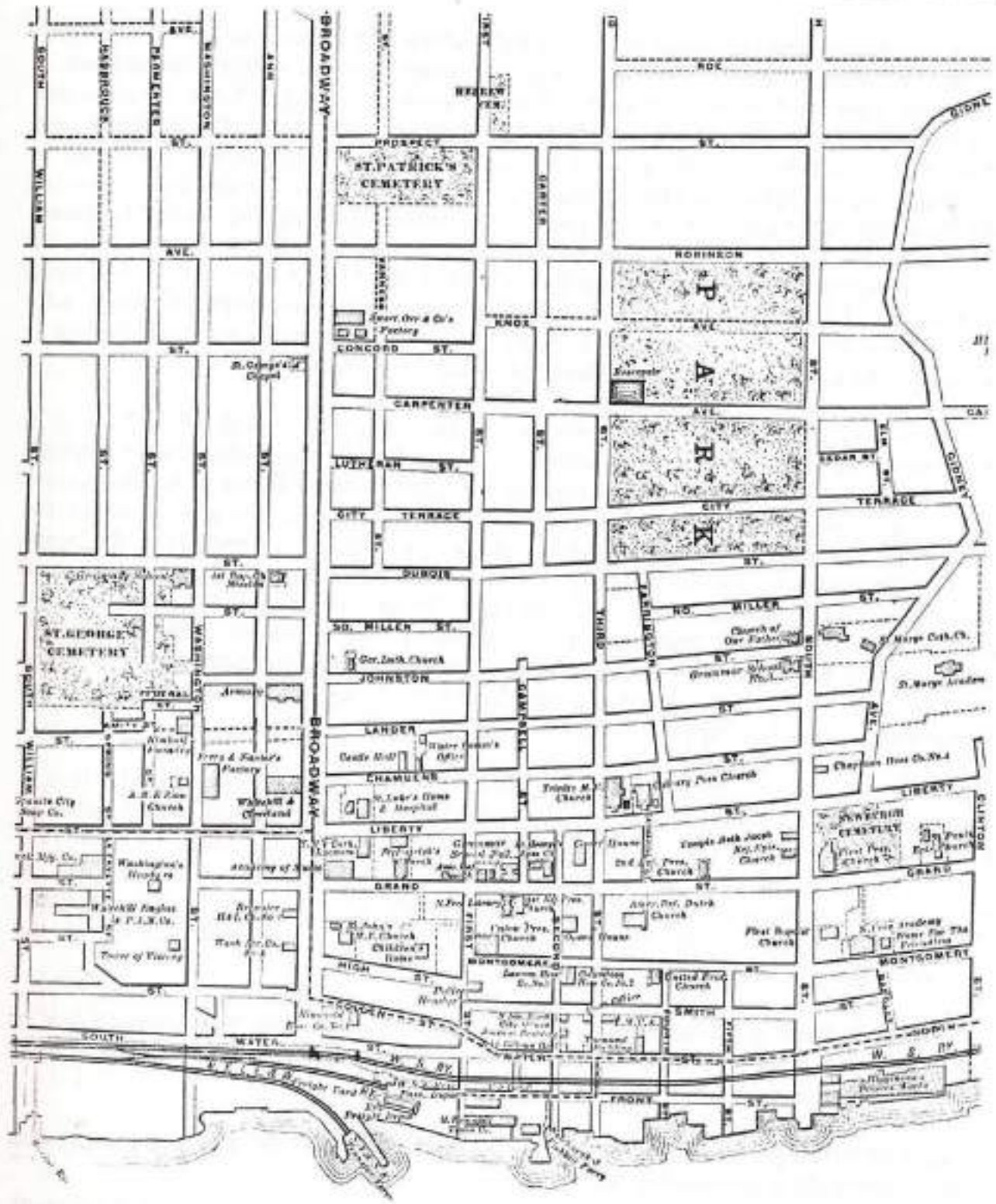


Illustration 1. Portion of City of Newburgh dating from c1900, shows park and surrounding city. HSNH

funds to erect a bust to Downing in Central Park, which they considered one of the "direct results" of his influence. Olmsted and Vaux also designed public recreational grounds in numerous other cities, including Prospect Park in Brooklyn, Chicago's South Parks, as well as grounds in Albany, New York, New Britain, Connecticut, Fall River, Massachusetts, and Newark, New Jersey, in addition to other institutional, civic, and private commissions. Although they had terminated their professional partnership fifteen years earlier, Olmsted and Vaux agreed to collaborate on a plan for the Newburgh park and offered to donate their services to the city if it were named in Downing's memory. That offer came from the two most successful park designers then practicing in the United States: Vaux had been landscape architect to the New York City Department of Public Parks; Olmsted, who quickly became the more renowned of the two, directed an extensive national practice in landscape design from his office in Brookline, Massachusetts.⁴

Olmsted's letter of assent to the proposed Newburgh project was printed in local newspapers, as were the writings of Fowler and Curtis. Despite these efforts from admirers in other places, Downing must have seemed a prophet without honor in his hometown. Mrs. Monell was distressed that "no one of the citizens has written a word about the subject." In a letter to Olmsted she attributed the apparent lack of interest to the "same political ambitions & jealousies and influences that exist in other places, as you too well know, and from which the most beautiful works of art and their artists, are not free." Mrs. Monell was right to feel dismayed. Almost two years later, on June 7, 1889 -- the fiftieth anniversary of her wedding to Downing -- the Common Council still had not taken up the offer of Olmsted and Vaux. "There are many mysteries in this world," she concluded, "and this proceeding [sic] is certainly one of them."⁵

During the summer of 1889 the city at last took the Olmsted and Vaux proposal seriously. Embarrassed at the delay, however, Council asked former Corporation Counsel James G. Graham to inquire whether or not the designers would still donate their services. On behalf of himself and Olmsted, Vaux reaffirmed their intent "to give our professional aid as landscape architects to the committee without charge if the city should name the reservation 'Downing Park.'" On July 16, 1889 Common Council accepted the Olmsted-Vaux offer, belatedly acknowledging:

Surely there is special fitness that Newburgh, which was his home, should give to her new Park the name of this honored citizen, whose life was so successfully devoted to this special form of work.

Mayor Odell then predicted that Downing Park would soon become "a pleasure resort with scarcely an equal in the country."⁶

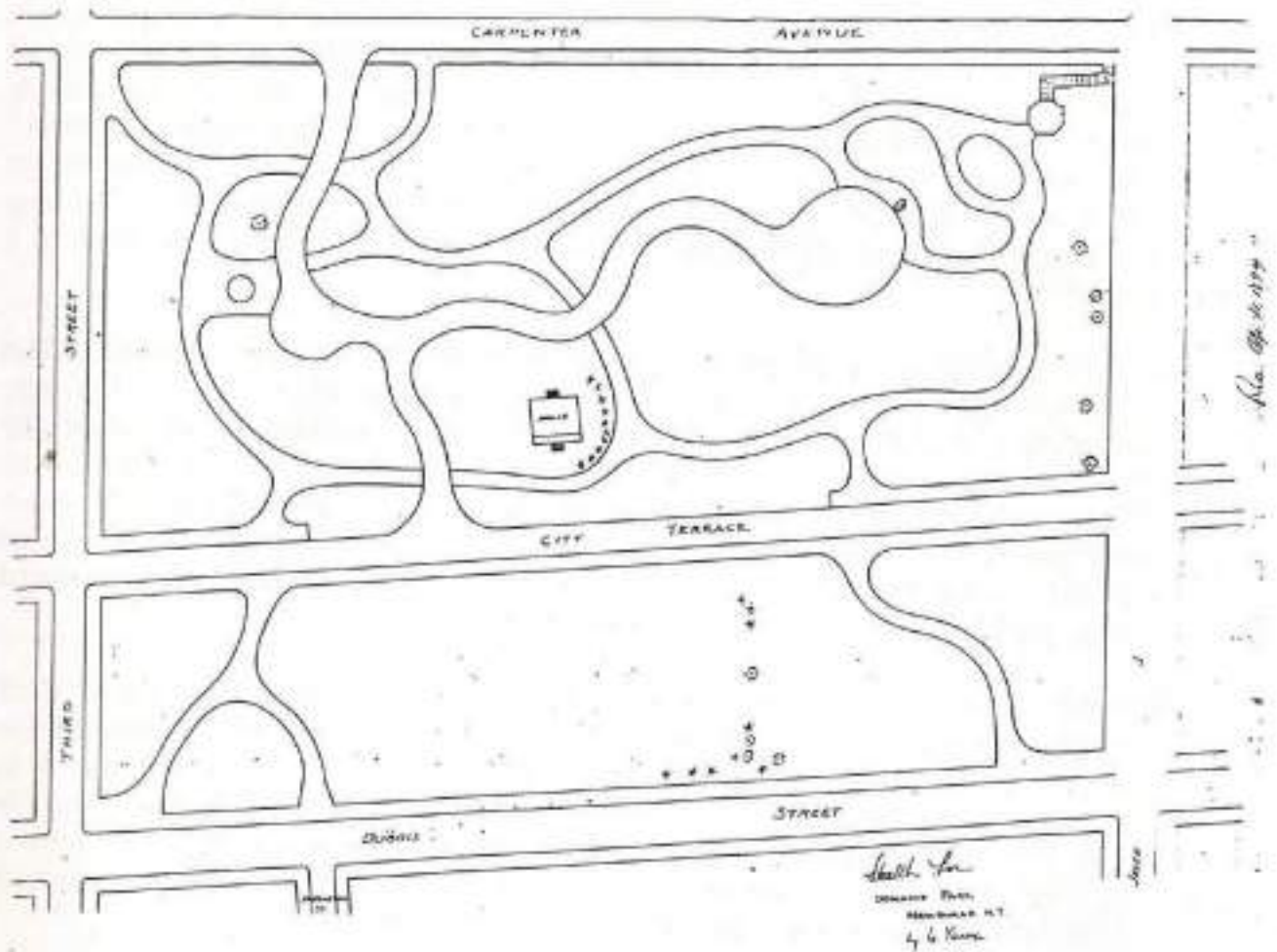


Illustration 2. Preliminary plan for the upper park sent from Calvert Vaux to the Olmsted office, shows the concept for the upper park with City Terrace drop-off area and the upper drive with turnaround. FLONHS

C. DOWNING PARK DESIGN AND INITIAL CONSTRUCTION

Following a preliminary survey by civil engineer Charles Caldwell, Olmsted and Vaux visited the Downing Park site in the late summer or autumn of 1889. Based on that visit and their discussions, each man apparently began conceptualizing a plan. However, careful reading of surviving documents suggests that Olmsted wrote the design report on behalf of himself and Vaux: a draft of the report in Olmsted's hand is identical to the text published in the Proceedings of the Common Council. In that preliminary report, Olmsted devoted most of his attention to the limitations of the proposed site. The twenty-five acre tract the city had set aside for the park was a rugged hillside. While the summit offered spectacular views of the Hudson River, Olmsted argued that the site was too steeply inclined for advantageous park development. "Ground of these qualities standing by itself," he wrote, "especially if its sloping surface terminates in rectangular lines upon abrupt banks, as it does in this case, cannot by any means be made into as graceful, interesting or useful a park as ground might be which combined the same qualities with others of a reverse character."

A park also needed a "sheltered, tranquil, meadow-like aspect" that Olmsted called pastoral scenery. This he identified as "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." This type of scenery was "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.'" Because pastoral scenery was spacious and tranquil, the antithesis of the dense building of the city, Olmsted considered it the most important requirement of an urban park.⁷

Fortunately, adjacent to the park site was an additional plot of land to the west of Carpenter Avenue that was "of precisely the character needed to provide the combination just suggested." This was a large tract previously acquired by the Water Board in expectation that a reservoir might eventually be located there. Olmsted questioned whether all or part of the land might be included within the park. Even if a reservoir proved necessary on that location, he pointed out that it would be possible "to give any required provision for the storage of water the character of a park lake."⁸

While officials of city government pondered these issues, Olmsted and Vaux went ahead with preliminary studies of the park site. Their method of collaboration was unusual. Downing Vaux later recalled that his father and Olmsted assumed responsibility for planning a different part of the park, Vaux taking the hilly eastern section, Olmsted the meadowlike area west of Carpenter Avenue he hoped would be added to the original site.

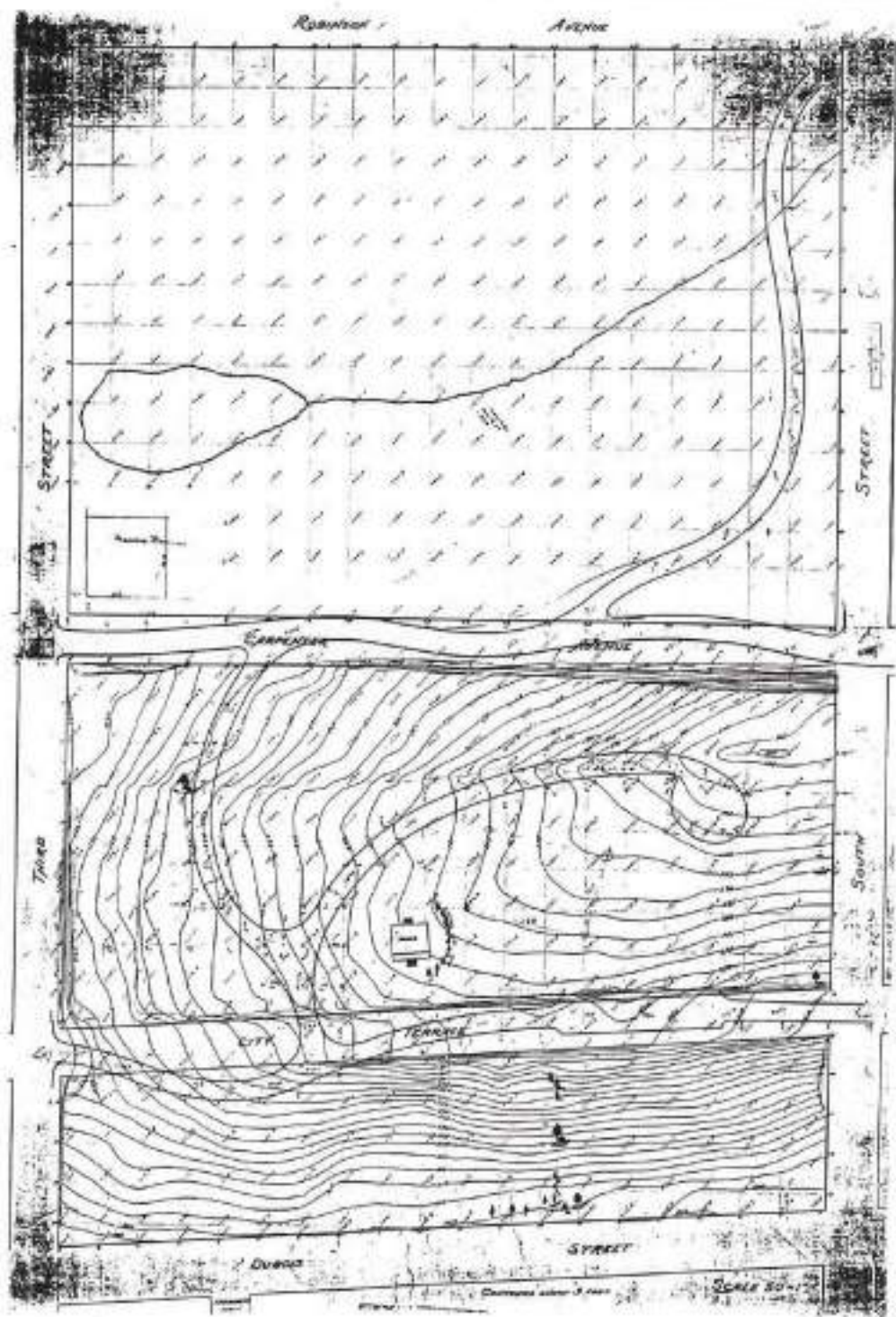


Illustration 3. Park drawing shows a refined plan for the upper park, with grided elevations drawn in black, blue and red ink. Untitled and undated. Lettering and drawing style is similar to others by Calvert Vaux and Samuel Parsons. Pond and stream outline in lower park were darkened for better visibility by LANDSCAPES. CoN

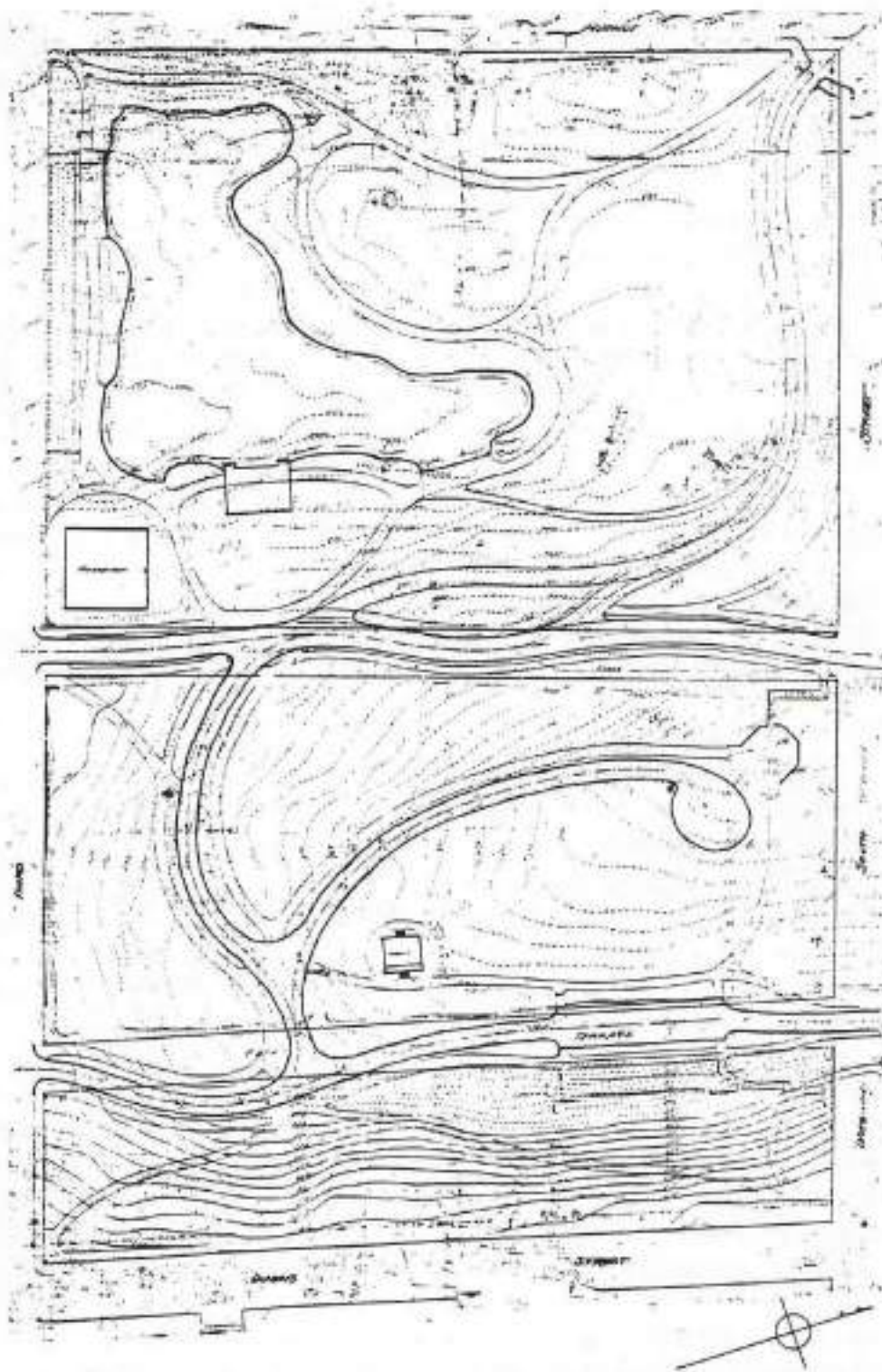


Illustration 4. Drawing of entire park showing all drives, walks, pond and structures, closely resembling final plans. Untitled and undated. Ink and pencil on paper, similar to #3. Note that both 3 and 4 show the South Street right-of-way. CoN

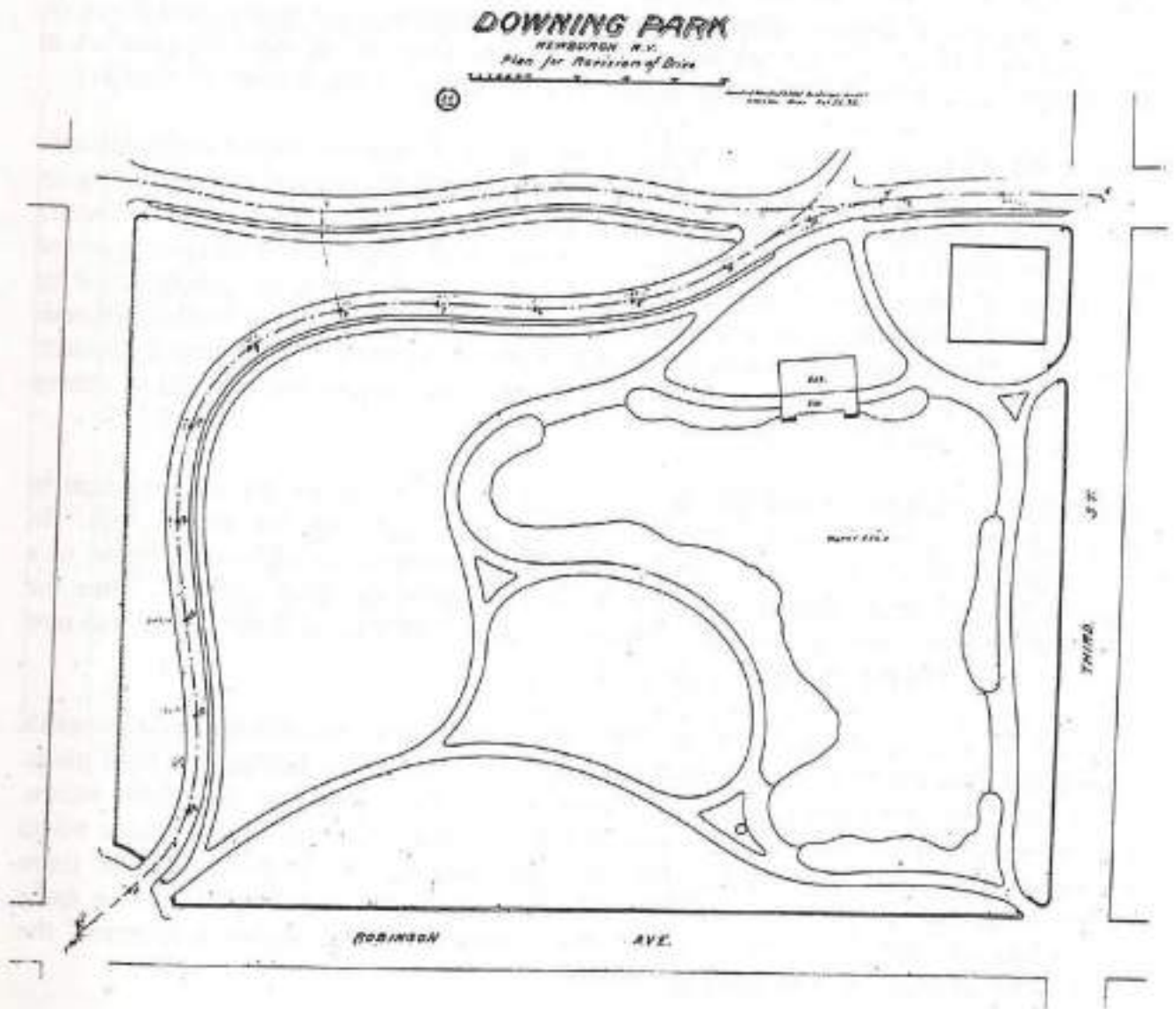


Illustration 5. Downing Park, Plan for Revision of the Drive, No. 20, showing the lower portion of Downing Park with Carpenter Avenue, the internal drive, walks and pond, Olmsted Olmsted & Eliot, October, 22, 1895. FLONHS

The two men and their sons compared each other's work, and then reexamined the ground together to complete the design for "one integrated whole."⁹ Nevertheless, it seems likely that Olmsted and his firm assumed principal responsibility for the final plan. Vaux and his son apparently prepared preliminary drawings for the upper park, and then sent them to Olmsted's Brookline office for completion. Moreover, Proceedings of Council indicate that Olmsted's firm drew up the detailed planting plans which were used as park development proceeded. The overall plans prepared in Olmsted's office must then have been sent to Vaux's firm, which had assumed responsibility for superintendence of construction. If so, the development of Downing Park paralleled the collaboration of Olmsted and Vaux on two other projects, the New York State Reservation at Niagara and Morningside Park in Manhattan (both 1887, the year they agreed to collaborate on the Newburgh park).¹⁰

Despite the efforts of Olmsted and Vaux to complete a preliminary report on boundaries and to begin studying working plans, despite their eagerness to proceed in constructing an appropriate memorial to Downing, the city continued to "hasten slowly," in Mayor Odell's words. Newburgh's bonded indebtedness was already high, and Council minutes reported that the park's development was stalled because "no means had been provided for its improvement." Only the financial distress and high unemployment caused by the economic panic of 1893 prodded the city into action. On January 11, 1894 Odell informed Council, "It would be well to have as much [public] work under way as possible, in order to relieve the largest number of needy people."

Specifically, he suggested that the city apply to the state legislature for authorization to issue \$10,000 in bonds to be used "for grading and improving the public park." In Newburgh, as elsewhere, park construction was undertaken to "furnish employment to a large number of men." Almost seven years after acquiring the land, and only after the effects of the panic became evident, clerk Coutant informed Vaux that Newburgh was now "very anxious to begin" developing the park.¹¹

Still, the question of the reservoir lot was not resolved, and uncertainty over the park's boundaries and extent had prevented Olmsted and Vaux from drawing up final plans. Once again the increasing presence of unemployed in the community demanded action. On February 7, 1894 city engineer Caldwell informed Vaux that the Water Board would surrender that land to the Park Commission, "only reserving right to put a reservoir there if ever necessary." He also reported that some members of Council "wish to have quite a little lake adjoining 3d St. for a skating rink in winter & a ball ground in summer," the latter to be accomplished by draining the lake.¹²

By the time the city was ready to act, Olmsted and Vaux were not. Olmsted was drifting into insanity, while Vaux's wife, Mary McEntee, was dying. Uncertainty over the boundaries meant that the designers could prepare only preliminary plans: the task of finalizing those studies and of superintending construction fell to their sons, John C. Olmsted and Downing Vaux. They evidently worked quickly, as construction began on July 5, 1894. During that

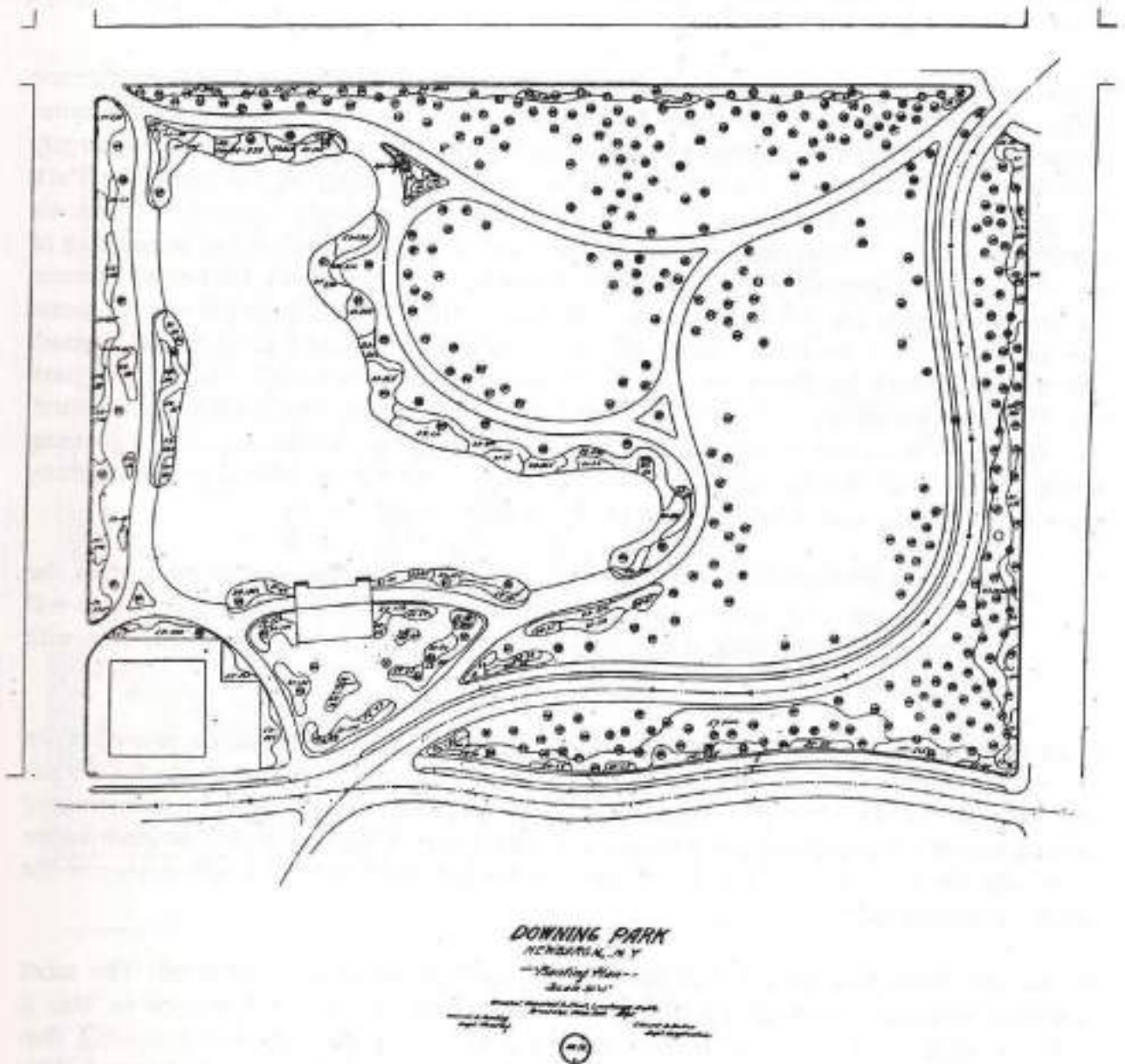


Illustration 6. Downing Park, Planting Plan, No. 23, for the lower park. Olmsted Olmsted & Eliot, 1895. FLONHS

first summer laborers graded and excavated the ground; they also constructed roads and footpaths, and planted trees on the park's borders. Little other planting could be completed, because the ground could not be prepared before the first frost, but workers repaired the Smith residence and added changes that would make it a public facility. During this truncated first year of operations, the city spent \$5,895.78 on the park, more than 80% of which was pay for laborers -- testament both to the panic of 1893 and to the crude nature of initial construction.¹³

In each of several succeeding years the city again issued \$10,000 in bonds to finance construction of the park, which at last began taking the shape Downing would have found praiseworthy. In 1895 construction was concentrated on expensive but hidden costs, largely underground drainage and a concrete dam to retain the waters of the lake. The Park Commissioners began operations on the western part, and oversaw planting of "some six hundred trees and several thousand shrubs, as required by the plans for the beautifying of the grounds," but they admitted that the park was far from complete. Carpenter Avenue was still a direct street across the park, a vestige of the city's gridiron plan, and several new structures were necessary to transform the land into a public recreational ground. "Considerable work has yet to be done," the Commissioners conceded, "before the park can be declared finished and open to the public." Nevertheless, they confidently asserted, Downing Park would eventually become "one of the attractions to this City and a blessing to the public." The closing remarks of the Commissioners' March 1896 report eloquently reiterated Downing's ideal of the park as the country within the city:

When nature shall have done its work in effacing the ravages of man, then the verdure of the grass, the foliage of the trees and the sweet odor of the flowers will blend to make this park a beautiful picture upon which the eye can rest with continued delight.

Once again the Commissioners attested to how expensive park construction proved to be by seeking authorization to fund operations through another \$10,000 bond issue. Officials and taxpayers alike were learning that park construction was not the preservation of existing scenery: it was expensive infrastructure development that attempted to incorporate in the city the landscape effects that would counter the sharp lines and right angles of the urban environment.¹⁴

During the third year of construction, planting and maintenance continued. The most expensive operation involved regrading the western slope of Carpenter Avenue so "that it might conform more fully to the natural falling off of the ground, thus removing that artificial appearance which detracts so much from the beauty of a landscape." This construction allowed the landscape architects to introduce a subtle curve to the avenue, giving it the appearance more of a park drive than of a city street (note redrawing of this drive in Illustration 3 and 4). Another roadway project was the completion of the drive extending from Carpenter Avenue north and west to Robinson Avenue. The Commission-

DOWNING PARK.

NEWBURGH, N. Y.

-Planting Plan-

PLAN
First number of the series represents the
sheet of the plan. Second number and the
number of sheets to be used, when printed,
of the set of a particular sheet of the set.

Scale

Vertical distance & feet, horizontal distance

Scale, 1" = 100'

Scale & Date

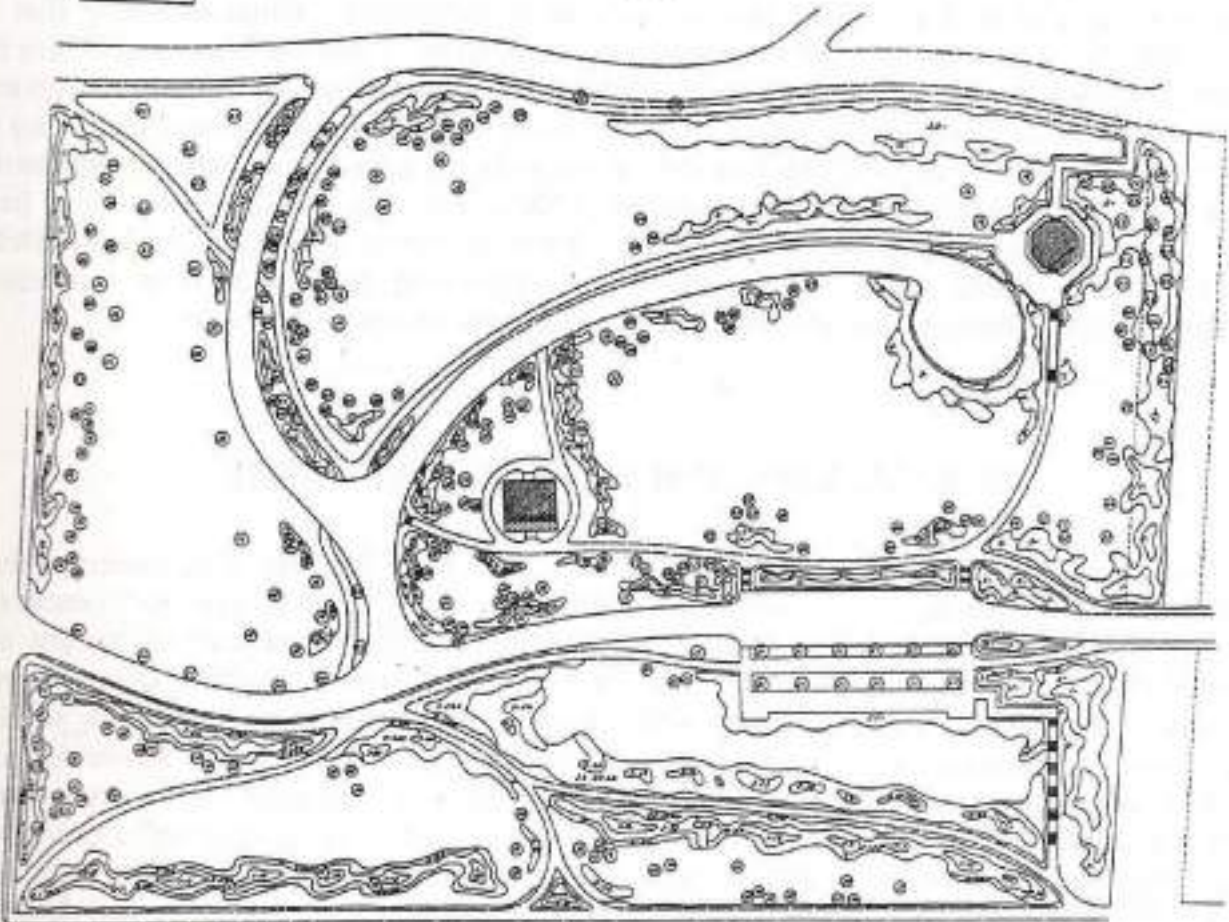


Illustration 7. Downing Park. Planting Plan, No. 18, shows the entire upper half of park. It illustrates the design followed in constructing the Terrace and circulation system. An accompanying plant list is shown in the Appendix. Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot, February 22, 1895, FLONHS

ers also reported erection of a brick shelter on the highest point of land in the eastern part of the park, designed by Downing Vaux, with a tower that afforded visitors an "extensive view" of the Hudson. They could not, however, afford to build the boathouse which Olmsted and Vaux intended to site adjacent to the lake or the large terrace they hoped to place in the upper park.¹⁵

Despite their inability to construct these important elements of the Olmsted-Vaux design, the following year the Park Commissioners announced that the "necessary improvements as contemplated in the original plan are well nigh completed." While admitting that a comprehensive maintenance program would be essential to ensure the continued health of the park, they organized a ceremony to celebrate its construction and formally introduce the public to its beauties. On July 4, 1897, following the singing of patriotic songs and a moment of prayer, Benjamin Odell raised the flag over the park. Newburghers could justly be proud of their park, but for the designers the event was a hollow one: Vaux had drowned in Gowanus Bay in 1895, and Olmsted was an inmate in McLean Asylum. While neither man could enjoy those "simple yet interesting ceremonies," at last their long-intended tribute to Andrew Jackson Downing had become a reality.¹⁶

D. PARK USES AND CHANGES OVER TIME

Olmsted and Vaux had intended Downing Park to be a place for passive or contemplative recreation. Their design was predicated on the belief that the park must be "something more than a mere exemption from urban conditions" and should instead "secure an antithesis of objects of vision to those of the streets and houses." Indeed, Olmsted and Vaux believed that the tranquility of park scenery would promote an "unbending of the faculties," a process of "recuperation" from the incessant pace of urban life. Realizing that active, competitive sports would intrude upon the quiet contemplation of scenery as well as the familial and neighborly gatherings they characterized as "gregarious" recreation, Olmsted and Vaux hoped to exclude such uses from the park. As a result, their plan for Downing Park included only a small playground for children and the lake for skating, though undoubtedly it assumed that the meadow would on occasion be used for sports and games. The varied topography, expanses of lawn, grand shade trees and flowering plants of the park created the recuperative setting the designers intended.¹⁷

Shortly after Downing Park's opening, the Newburgh Bulletin noted that visitors were enjoying precisely the kinds of activities Olmsted and Vaux had intended. The park, it reported, was "a resting place where you can sit on comfortable benches and along the driveways and walks are scattered other comfortable benches for the weary." Additional facilities for park visitors soon enhanced the landscape. These included a bandstand (subsequently razed, probably in 1946), erected on the meadow north of the lake in 1905,

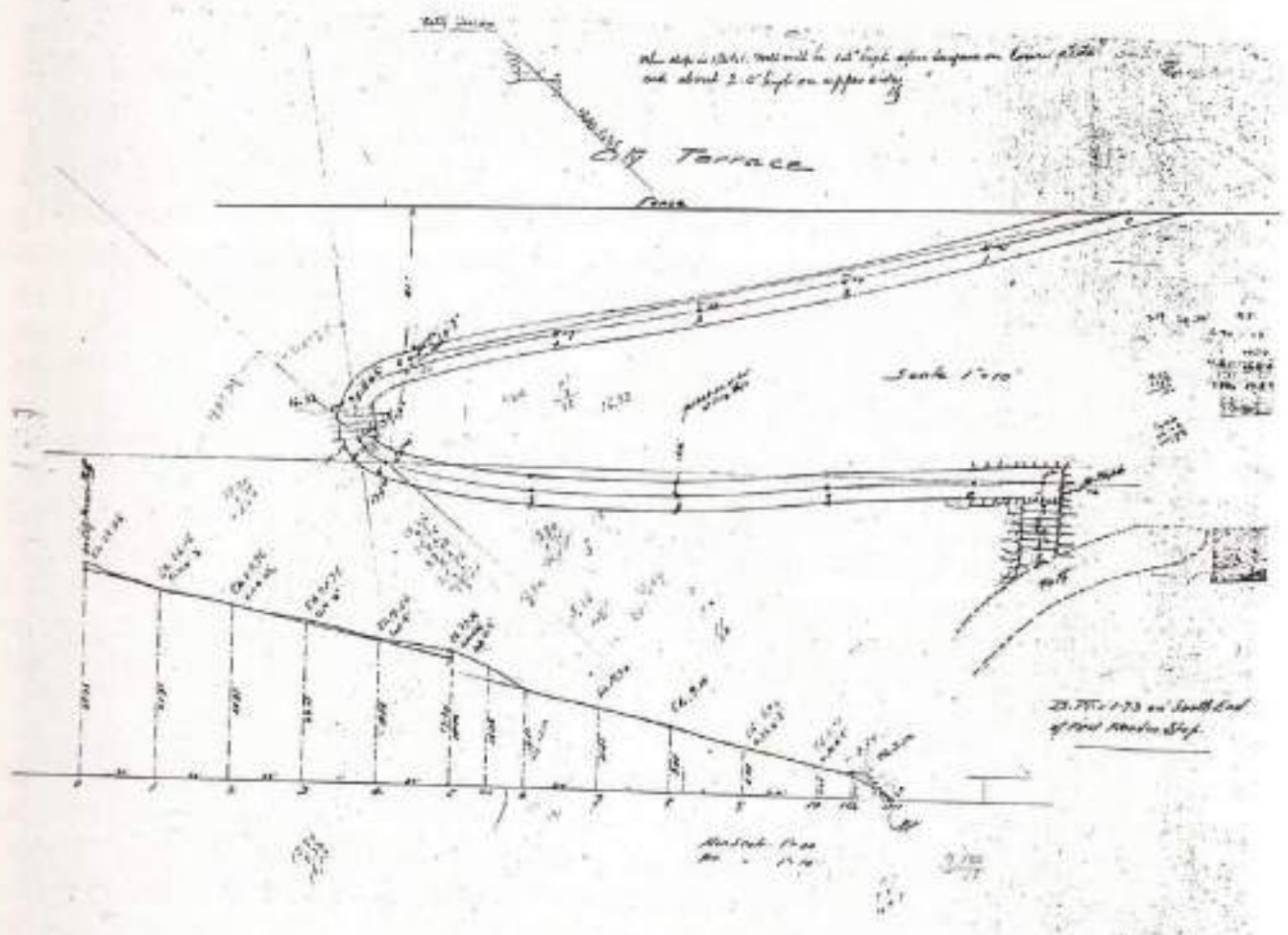


Illustration 8. Plan and section showing walk alignment and stairs through upper Downing Park to access City Terrace. Untitled and undated. CoN

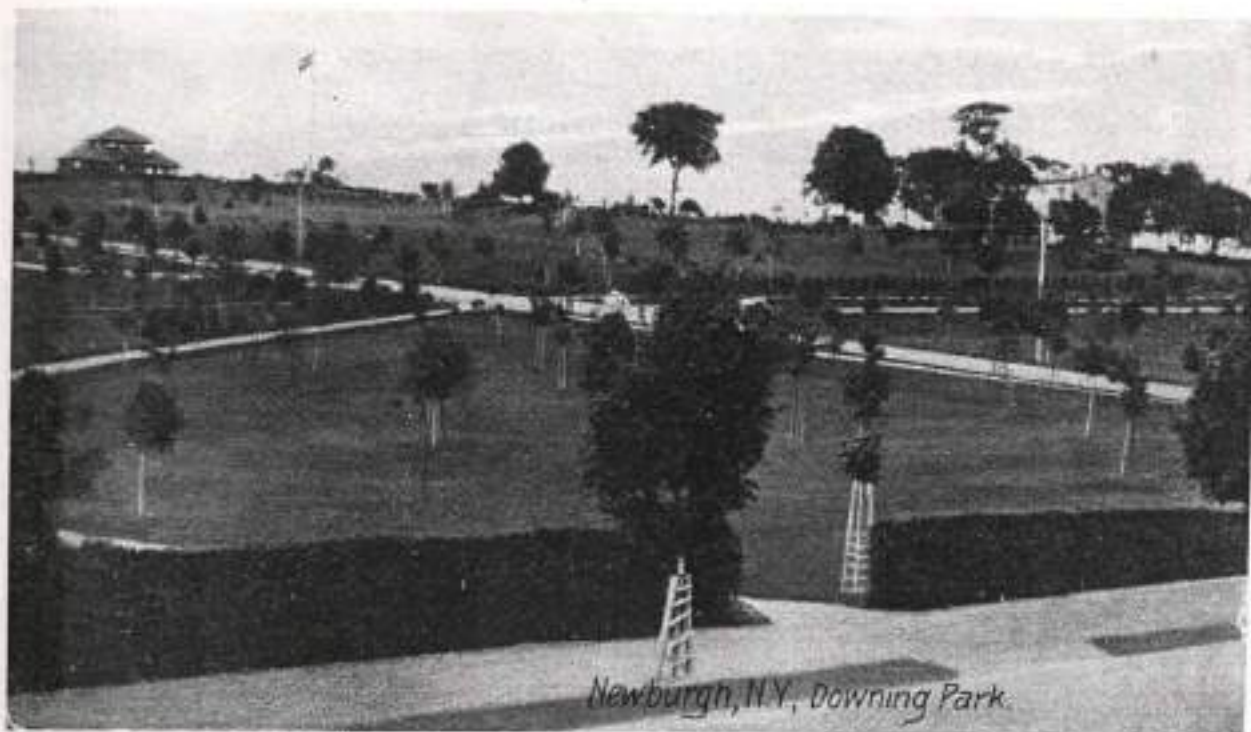
and the Pergola, built in 1908 on what appears to be the foundation of the Smith house. This early concrete structure is currently in poor condition due primarily to weathering and structural deterioration.

In 1934 another structure, the Lake Shelter House with its bluestone terrace, was built on the approximate site Olmsted and Vaux had intended for the boathouse. Several generations of Newburghers would resort to the Shelter House, particularly during the winter, when skating on the "Polly" was a favorite pastime.

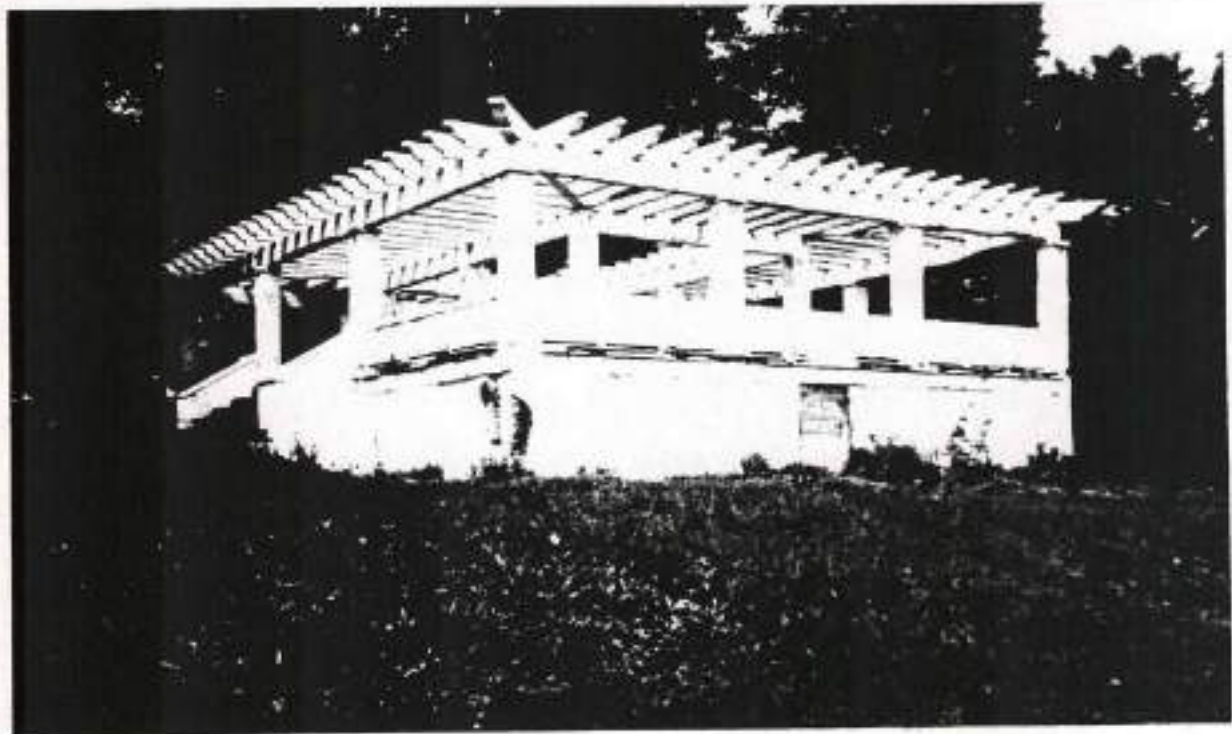
Shortly after World War II the Park Commissioners added yet another facility for visitors, the Amphitheater (1946). Developed in a competition, the Olmsted Brothers drew up plans but declined to submit them. Their plans located the facility toward the edge of the meadow, although the constructed facility is located centrally within this intended open space. Although evening concerts at the Amphitheater proved to be popular in succeeding years, its location in the meadow was unfortunate because it intruded upon the largest expanse of lawn in the park. At approximately the same time the Park Commissioners added the boulder retaining wall around the overlook.¹⁸

The degree to which Downing Park came to symbolize Newburgh's pride is indicated by the civic monuments within its borders. The first of these, the Fireman's Memorial, was erected by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Fireman's Association in 1909. Located at the eastern end of the park, facing Dubois Street, it consists of a granite plinth and a bronze statue of a fireman. The chaste, neoclassical monument to the soldiers who fought in the Great War, which is located near Robinson Avenue, was erected in May 1934 by the Newburgh Chapter, Defenders of the Union. More recently, the Veterans Memorial was placed in a less desirable location near the corner of Third Street and Carpenter Avenue. Additionally, the bust of Dante, sculpted by Paolo Abate (or Abbate), which was placed in the park on the lawn near the Pergola by Italian residents of the city on October 12, 1921 (it has since been moved to a site in front of the Newburgh Free Library).¹⁹ Although these monuments do not serve the purposes Olmsted and Vaux envisioned for the park, they testify to the important place the park occupied in Newburgh's civic consciousness.

While much of Downing Park's original vegetation and topography remain, numerous changes to the park's landscape have occurred in the twentieth century. Some changes, such as the narrowing of the northern arm of the lake and the construction of a rustic cedar pedestrian bridge over it (1922), significantly altered the original design of the park. The numerous beds of flowering plants near the Pergola also compromised the original plan in one sense -- Olmsted thought such floral displays were inappropriate in public parks -- but also perpetuated the contemplative, tranquil uses of the park he and Vaux had intended. Indeed, the annual displays of tulips were extraordinarily popular, and many long-time residents date the park's deterioration to the city's abandonment of these beds.²⁰



Illustrations 9, 10. Historic Postcard Views, 9. View from Third Street with newly planted trees in Downing Park, 10. View of the Fireman's Memorial and landscape surrounds. MILLER



Illustrations 11, 12. Contemporary Photographs 11. View of current park bench matches those in historic views. 12. View of Pergola in disrepair with wisteria vines removed.
LANDSCAPES

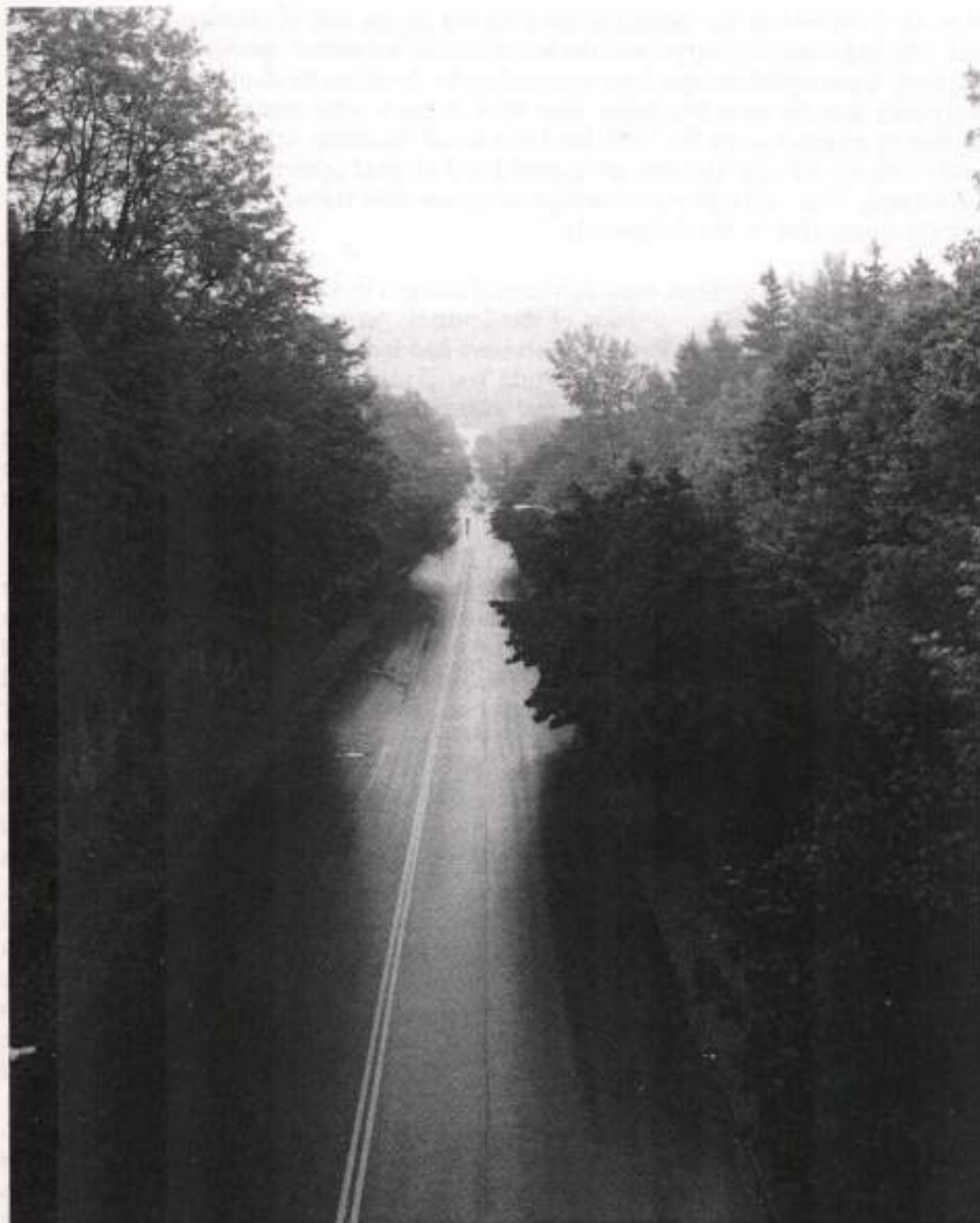


Illustration 13. View of South Street cut from Carpenter Avenue bridge. LANDSCAPES

Still other changes to the landscape were caused by the loss of plantings over time, the lack of a replacement program and the less desirable "volunteer" species that have invaded the park. Incremental changes have occurred as the flowering shrub plantings have reached their peak and declined and major trees have reached peak maturity. No evidence of a replanting program since the 1890s has been found. Similarly, when the park's drives and paths were paved new elements were added and original pedestrian path segments were abandoned. These changes in the circulation system alter the way the park is experienced from that intended by the designers.²¹

But undoubtedly the greatest, most detrimental changes to Downing Park were demolition of the Observatory and construction of the South Street arterial. Located at the highest point in the park, Downing Vaux's Observatory had long been a major destination point for visitors. Unfortunately, in the post-World War II years vandals broke the windows, and as a result the city had boarded up the windows and padlocked the entrance. As its condition deteriorated the city razed the Observatory, which left a major void in one of the most scenic areas of the park. "The only remaining attraction of the upper level" of the park, the Newburgh News editorialized, "is the 'circle' still without flagpole, where cars park and turn around."²²

At the time the observatory was razed, the News expressed regret at the loss of a familiar landmark, adding, perhaps ominously, "Newburgh is making progress along many lines these days, but it is assuredly going back[ward] in its structural care of the park we are all proud of."²³ The demise of the Observatory was prelude to a much greater intrusion. Until 1961 South Street terminated at Dubois Street and then resumed its course westward near Robinson Avenue. Undoubtedly this was because of the topography, which was prohibitively steep -- especially for the horsedrawn vehicles common at the time the park was built. The advent of the automobile, new construction technologies, and the demand for better vehicular access to the city made possible and, to many, desirable, the arterial dug through the northern part of Downing Park. The project undertaken by the New York State Department of Transportation necessitated massive cutting and removal of material, the construction of extensive retaining walls, grading of steep slopes down to these walls and construction of a new bridge carrying Carpenter Avenue across the cut. The park lands sloping down to the retaining walls on both sides of the new South Street cut were abandoned behind chain link fences. The demolition of the stone stairs and related paths that provided access to the upper park from Dubois Street eliminated this portion of the park's circulation. It also created a dead end at City Terrace, one of the points Olmsted and Vaux had designated as an especially appropriate destination for park visitors.

As Downing Park's physical condition deteriorated, so did much of the infrastructure of the City of Newburgh. The Park's Department, created as the park was set aside, was eliminated in city budget cuts in the 1960's. While the effects of suburbanization were eroding the city's tax base, the increasing number of poor and minority residents necessitated major new expenditures for social services. Governmental leaders devoted



Illustration 14. Historic postcard. View from Carpenter Avenue Terrace of Dogwood Walk, Dubois Street, Hudson River and Highlands. MILLER

most of Newburgh's resources to providing police and fire protection as well as the human welfare programs upon which so many residents depended. However necessary were these decisions, the lack of adequate staffing and funding for park maintenance accelerated the decay of Downing Park.

The loss of important elements of the original design, the introduction of intrusive elements, and the absence of a comprehensive maintenance program have detracted from Downing Park's value as a work of art and as a public recreational ground. What parts of the original built elements and landscape that remain relatively intact today testify to the durable construction of the park. Nevertheless, the replacement of lost elements and features will require considerable effort to regain the former condition of the park as the crown jewel of Newburgh.

E. A NEW BEGINNING

The writing of this historic research summary was prompted by a project to develop a comprehensive plan for the renewal of Andrew Jackson Downing Memorial Park. The Downing Park Planning Committee, a citizen not-for-profit group, began to undertake events and volunteer initiatives to clean-up the park and bring people into the landscape. This grass roots beginning has progressed to the realization of the need for comprehensive planning. Just as citizens had lobbied the City of Newburgh to create a public park in the 1880s and 1890s, caring citizens were again the source of the advancement of the park. The historical record, coupled with the Comprehensive Master Plan, establish the direction for the park's future. With the support of both public and private sectors over the next decade, Downing Park should again become a credit to its designers, the individual it honors, and the community it serves.

NOTES

1. The most comprehensive study of Downing's life and work remains George Bishop Tatum, "Andrew Jackson Downing: Arbiter of American Taste, 1815-1852" (Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1950). In the spring of 1987 the Center for Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks and the Athenaeum of Philadelphia organized a symposium at which a number of scholars presented papers discussing the range of Downing's career. The resulting collection of essays was published in 1989 as Prophet With Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing, ed. George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougall (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks -- Trustees for Harvard University, 1989). The title of this essay is obviously inspired by, although intentionally different from, that of the symposium.

See also Arthur Channing Downs, Jr., "Downing's Newburgh Villa," Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology 4, nos. 3-4 (1972): 1-114; and idem., The Architecture and Life of the Honorable Thornton MacNess Nevin (1806-1895), 2d ed. (1971; Goshen, N. Y.: Orange County Community of Museums and Galleries, 1972), p. 40, which points out Downing's involvement in the acquisition of the Court House lot and speculates that he might have prepared plans for landscaping the site. David Schuyler's The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth Century America (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 59-76, analyzes Downing's crusade to establish public parks and his role in landscaping the public grounds at Washington.

2. Benjamin B. Odell, Message to the Common Council, in Newburgh, Common Council, Proceedings, Mar. 14, 1887, p. 25 (hereafter cited as Proceedings); D. J. Coutant, in ibid., April 19, 1887, p. 168; ibid., April 19, 1887, pp. 156-58, 168-69; June 7, 1887, pp. 201-2, 222, 230; August 2, 1887, pp. 291-95.

3. Calvert Vaux to Frederick Law Olmsted, June 29, [1887], Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (unless otherwise noted, all correspondence cited is in this collection); Caroline E. Monell to Olmsted, July 14, 1887; [George W. Curtis], "The Park at Newburgh," Harper's Weekly, June 2, 1887, p. 467. Caroline E. Monell identifies the authors of the Fowler and Curtis essays in her letter to Olmsted of July 14, 1887.

4. Downing, "The New-York Park," The Horticulturist, And Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste 6, no. 8 (Aug. 1851): 347; Olmsted and Vaux, "Circular Proposing the Erection of a Memorial to Andrew Jackson Downing," Apr. 5, 1860, in Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler, eds., The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol. III, Creating Central

Park, 1857-1861 (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 251-52. The indebtedness Olmsted and Vaux felt toward Downing was enormous. Vaux had dedicated Villas and Cottages (1857), his architectural pattern book, to Mrs. Downing and the memory of her husband, while Olmsted paid similar homage to Downing in the dedication to the second volume of his Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England (1852). At the request of Caroline Downing Monell, in 1867 Olmsted began writing a new edition of Downing's Cottage Residences (1842), and some fifteen years later struggled to prepare, but again never completed, an updated version of his Treatise on Landscape Gardening (1841). Olmsted also acknowledged his indebtedness to Downing in 1882, when he informed the Architect of the Capitol in Washington that the remnants of Downing's design for the public grounds deserved "special and reverent attention, as representing the only essay, strictly speaking, yet made by our government in landscape gardening." Given those previous attempts to commemorate Downing's life, the offer by Olmsted and Vaux to donate their services as designers should Newburgh name the park in Downing's honor was all the more generous (Olmsted to John J. Monell, 1868; Olmsted, appendix to the Annual Report of the Architect of the Capitol for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882 . . ., reprinted in House of Representatives, Documentary History of the Construction and Development of the United States Capitol Building and Grounds, 58th Cong., 2d sess., rpt. 646 [Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1904], p. 1187).

5. Caroline E. Monell to Olmsted, July 14, 1887, June 7, 1889, June 10, 1889.

6. James D. Graham to George W. Curtis, May 29, 1889, Olmsted Associates Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; J. D. Coutant to Olmsted, June 10, [1889]; Proceedings, July 16, 1889, pp. 276-80; Olmsted to Vaux, June 9, 1889. In his telegraph to Newburgh attorney Russel Headley, who had inquired about his willingness to design the park, Olmsted wrote: "Offer regarding Downing Park renewed with pleasure." A week later Olmsted informed Graham, "Offer to provide plan is to be construed liberally but we could not save necessity of a resident Superintendent fitted to carry out plan."

7. Proceedings, Oct. 1, 1889, pp. 383-84; Olmsted and Vaux to Benjamin Odell, Dec. 7, 1889, printed in *ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1890, pp. 458-50; Olmsted, Vaux & Co., "Report of the Landscape Architects" (Jan. 24, 1866), in Brooklyn Park Commission, Annual Reports, 1861-1873 (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Park Commission, 1873), pp. 100-1. See also Charles E. Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted's Theory of Landscape Design," Nineteenth Century 3, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 8-43.

8. Olmsted and Vaux to B. Odell, Dec. 7, 1889.

9. Downing Vaux, memorandum regarding Downing Park, June 19, 1922, Olmsted Associates Records. See also John C. Olmsted to Downing Vaux, Aug. 6, 1909, and Downing Vaux to F. L. Olmsted, Jr., Jan. 10, 1924, both in the Olmsted Associates Records.

10. Proceedings, Mar. 12, 1895. For information on the other 1887 collaborations see Charles E. Beveridge, "Planning the Niagara Reservation," in The Distinctive Charms of Niagara Scenery: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Niagara Reservation (Niagara Falls, N. Y.: Buscaglia-Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, 1985), pp. 16-25.
11. Proceedings, Mar. 20, 1888, p. 51, Jan. 11, 1894, p. 784; D.J. Coutant to Vaux, May 25, 1894, Olmsted Associates Records.
12. C. Caldwell to Vaux, Feb. 7, 1894; Vaux & Co. to Messrs. Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot, Feb. 12, 1894, Olmsted Associates Records. The reservoir lot finally became park property on May 5, 1896 ("Park Department Began in 1887 When Downing Park Was Bought," Newburgh News, Sept. 5, 1935).
13. Proceedings, Mar. 12, 1895, pp. 18-22; Olmsted, Jr. to D. Vaux, Aug. 6, 1909, Olmsted Associates Records.
14. Proceedings, Feb. 24, 1896, p. 723, Mar. 3, 1896, pp. 27-29. Predictably, the cost of purchasing the land and constructing Downing Park provoked the ire of at least some taxpayers: the Bulletin reported that the "average Newburgher has been rather inclined to growl over the Park and complain that too much money was paid for it" ("Downing Park. Strangers Say the View is One of the Finest Along the Hudson," Newburgh Bulletin, Dec. 26, 1897).
15. Proceedings, Apr. 6, 1897, pp. 160-61. The Park Commissioners awarded a contract for erecting the observatory to Thomas Shaw & Sons on Aug. 25, 1896 ("Park Department Began in 1887 . . .").
16. Proceedings, Apr. 5, 1898, pp. 87-98.
17. Olmsted & Vaux to Henry G. Stebbins, Jan. 1872; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," in Beveridge and Schuyler, eds., Creating Central Park, pp. 212-13; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *ibid.*, p. 196. See also Schuyler, New Urban Landscape, pp. 83-94, 116-125. The degree to which early Park Commissioners shared Olmsted and Vaux's conception of park purposes is indicated by their attempt in 1908 to purchase additional land west of Downing Park--an area bounded by Robinson Avenue and Third, Prospect, and South streets--for use as the "play section for the main park." The measure was narrowly defeated in a referendum ("Park Department Began in 1887 . . .").
18. The pergola was designed by Frank E. Estabrook and built by George Sykes, the Lake Shelter House by Gordon Marvel. The siting of the Amphitheater on the meadow was also unfortunate because Olmsted and Vaux had intended to erect a large terrace for such gatherings in the upper park, a location nearer to the houses of most park visitors.

("Downing Park," Bulletin, Dec. 26, 1897; "Park Department Began in 1887 . . .").

19. "Park Department Began in 1887 . . ." Information on the Dante statue is drawn from the Evening News, October 12, 1981.

20. Ibid.

21. These statements are based on comparison of the park's present condition with information included in the original planting lists and the surviving designs for its circulation system.

22. "As the Editor Sees It," editorial from the Evening News, undated copy in the Local History Room, Newburgh Free Library.

23. Ibid.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

| | |
|------------|--|
| FLONHS | US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts, National Park Service, design plans, planting plans and planting lists. |
| CoN | City of Newburgh, Office of the City Engineer, plans and surveys. |
| HSNH | Historical Society of Newburgh and the Highlands, historic postcard views and Cover Photograph of Observatory. |
| AP | Inside Cover, Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-52), daguerreotype, c1851, copied from <u>Prophet With Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing</u> , ed. George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougall, original in The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. |
| MILLER | Private collection of historic postcards. Mary Jane Miller, New Windsor, New York. |
| LANDSCAPES | LANDSCAPES, Westport, CT, contemporary photographs. |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was developed by David Schuyler, a noted historian and Newburgh native. His expertise is evident throughout and we thank him for these efforts, to bring us this historic report. He performed this work as a contribution to our work toward the renaissance of Downing Park. We extend our heartfelt thanks for his historic report.

The Downing Park Planning Committee is especially grateful to its members, Board of Directors and Officers. The dedication and perseverance of these individuals brings us closer to our overall goals to restore and fully use this public treasure, Andrew Jackson Downing Memorial Park. In the public sector many elected and appointed officials from the City of Newburgh and the County of Orange have entered into a collaboration with us that forms the foundation of a strong partnership to implement each of our planning documents. We are grateful to each of these busy individuals for their efforts on behalf of Downing Park. The contributions of interested citizens, who have joined the Downing Park Planning Committee are very much appreciated. Several local groups and schools have collaborated with us on park events and we appreciate these contributions. It is our hope that these and many others individuals will join our efforts on behalf of Andrew Jackson Downing Park in the years to come.

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**APPENDIX: PLANTING LISTS
TO ACCOMPANY PLANTING PLANS #18 AND #23**

Planting List

accompany Plan No. 16

1. 19 beds, 170 plants.

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Cornus florida</i> , Flowering Dogwood | 40 |
| <i>Ptelea trifoliata</i> | 15 |
| <i>Cercis Canadensis</i> , Judas Tree | 12 |
| <i>Koeleria paniculata</i> | 8 |
| <i>Acer Pennsylvanicum</i> , Striped Maple | 20 |
| <i>Sassafras officinale</i> | 10 |
| <i>Rhus typhina</i> , Stag-horn Sumac | 50 |
| <i>Cornus alternifolia</i> , Cornel | 10 |
| <i>Amelanchier canadensis</i> , June berry | 13 |
| <i>Crataegus oxyantha</i> , Hawthorn | 6 |

2. 24 beds, 1057 plants.

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> , Althea | 150 |
| <i>Amaranthus fruticosa</i> , False Indigo | 115 |
| <i>Cornus sanguinea</i> , Red Dogwood | 50 |
| <i>Eleagnus longipes</i> | 40 |
| <i>Eucalyptus Europaeus</i> | 20 |
| <i>Erythrina grandiflora</i> | 30 |
| <i>Forsythia viridissima</i> , Golden Bell | 100 |
| <i>Halesia tetrapetala</i> , Silver Tree | 25 |
| <i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i> , Seed Buckthorn | 45 |
| <i>Rhus glabra</i> , Smooth Sumac | 130 |
| <i>Sambucus pubens</i> , Elder | 150 |
| <i>Viburnum Opulus</i> , Cranberry Tree | 100 |
| <i>Cornus Mas</i> , Cornelian Cherry | 50 |

3. 19 beds, 923 plants.

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Weigelia rosea</i> | 60 |
| <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i> , Privet | 150 |
| <i>Berberis vulgaris</i> , Common Barberry | 125 |
| <i>Aralia pentaphylla</i> | 45 |
| <i>Cornus sibirica</i> | 20 |
| <i>Galeanthus floridus</i> , Sweet Shrub | 45 |
| <i>Spiraea opulifolia</i> , Ninebark | 70 |
| <i>Viburnum plicatum</i> , Japan Snowball | 10 |
| <i>Gydonia Japonica</i> , Japan Quince | 125 |
| <i>Forsythia suspensa</i> , Golden Bell | 85 |
| <i>Clatara elinitolia</i> , Sweet Pepper bush | 100 |
| <i>Myrica caritara</i> , Bayberry | 85 |
| <i>Rhododaphne Karrioides</i> | 20 |
| <i>Rhus copallina</i> , Smart Sumac | 125 |
| <i>Rosa rugosa</i> , Romanas Rose | 25 |

4. 12 beds, 927 plants.

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Symphoricarpos vulgaris</i> , Indian berry | 200 |
| <i>racemosus</i> , Snow berry | 150 |
| <i>Spiraea Thunbergii</i> | 125 |
| <i>Comptonia asplenifolia</i> , Sweet Fern | 80 |
| <i>Deutzia gracilis</i> | 70 |
| <i>Evanymus Americanus</i> , Strawberry bush | 100 |
| <i>Gaylussacia resinosa</i> | 77 |
| <i>Hydrangea arborescens</i> | 150 |

5. 8 beds, 1720 plants.

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Lonicera Halleana</i> , Hall Honeysuckle | 700 |
| <i>Lonicera brachypoda</i> , Japan | 500 |
| <i>Azalea quinata</i> | 120 |

6. 5 beds, 33 plants.

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Anemnus carthartica</i> , Buckthorn | 7 |
| <i>Aralia spinosa</i> | 4 |
| <i>Maclura aurantiaca</i> , Osage Orange | 5 |
| <i>Rosa multiflora</i> | 14 |
| <i>Aralia pentaphylla</i> | 5 |

7. 3 beds, 1209 plants.

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Rosa rugosa</i> , Romanas Rose | 200 |
| <i>Rosa mianetti</i> | 83 |
| <i>Rosa canina</i> , Dog Rose | 200 |
| <i>Berberis vulgaris</i> , Common Barberry | 270 |
| <i>Berberis Thunbergii</i> | 250 |
| <i>Rubus odoratus</i> , Flowering Raspberry | 200 |

8. 1 bed, 40 plants.

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Lycium vulgare</i> , Matrimony Vine | 20 |
| <i>Galactrus Scandens</i> , Bitter sweet | 20 |
| <i>Rosa wichuriana</i> | 70 |
| <i>Menispermum canadense</i> , Moon seed | 30 |

9. 10 beds, 1045 plants.

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Kerria Japonica</i> | 175 |
| <i>Hypericum densiflorum</i> , St. Johnswort | 175 |
| <i>Myrica caritara</i> , Bayberry | 56 |
| <i>Lonicera Albatii</i> | 25 |
| <i>Gydonia Japonica</i> , Japan Quince | 185 |
| <i>Rhus aromatica</i> | 39 |
| <i>Symphoricarpos vulgaris</i> | 80 |
| <i>Salis tristis</i> , Dwarf Gray Willow | 180 |
| <i>Xanthoxhiza apiifolia</i> , Yellow root | 250 |

10. 6 beds, 139 plants.

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Cornus florida</i> , Flowering Dogwood | 8 |
| <i>Philadelphus coronarius</i> , Mock Orange | 48 |
| <i>Cornus alternifolia</i> , Cornel | 13 |
| <i>Maclura aurantiaca</i> , Osage Orange | 3 |
| <i>Sambucus canadensis</i> , Elder | 10 |
| <i>Sydera Benzoin</i> , Spice Bush | 8 |
| <i>Lonicera Tartarica</i> , Tartarian Honeysuckle | 23 |
| <i>Spiraea opulifolia</i> , Ninebark | 20 |

12. *Hydrangea paniculata*

| | |
|--|----|
| 12. <i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> | 15 |
| 13. <i>Weigelia rosea</i> | 16 |
| 14. <i>Forsythia viridissima</i> , Golden Bell | 14 |
| 15. <i>Kerria Japonica</i> | 13 |
| 16. <i>Acer saccharinum</i> , Sugar Maple | 30 |
| 17. <i>Amelanchier canadensis</i> | 3 |
| 18. <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> , Beech | 3 |
| 19. <i>Fraxinus Americana</i> , American Ash | 15 |
| 20. <i>Quercus rubra</i> , Red Oak | 20 |
| 21. <i>Maclura aurantiaca</i> , Osage Orange | 21 |
| 22. <i>Betula populifolia</i> , White Birch | 30 |
| 23. 4 beds, 6600 plants | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Berberis Thunbergii</i> | 500 |
| <i>Rhus glabra</i> , Smooth Sumac | 100 |
| <i>Rhus copallina</i> , Smart Sumac | 200 |
| <i>Caeanthus Americanus</i> , New Jersey Tea | 400 |
| <i>Comptonia asplenifolia</i> , Sweet Fern | 600 |
| <i>Diervilla trifida</i> , Bush Honeysuckle | 350 |
| <i>Gaylussacia resinosa</i> , Black Huckleberry | 250 |
| <i>Potentilla fruticosa</i> , Shrubby Cinquefoil | 750 |
| <i>Symphoricarpos racemosus</i> | 450 |
| <i>Rubus odoratus</i> , Flowering Raspberry | 300 |
| <i>Spiraea tomentosa</i> , Hardhack | 600 |
| <i>Vaccinium Pennsylvanicum</i> , Smart Huckleberry | 600 |
| <i>Viburnum acerifolium</i> , Maple-leaved Viburnum | 200 |
| <i>Hypericum densiflorum</i> | 500 |
| <i>Andromeda coccinifolia</i> , Leather leaf | 300 |
| <i>Rubus canadensis</i> | 500 |
| <i>Azalea nudiflora</i> | 300 |
| <i>Symphoricarpos vulgaris</i> , Indian Current | 500 |
| 24. <i>Gydonia Japonica</i> , Japan Quince | 22 |
| 25. <i>Crataegus Crus-galli</i> , Cockspur thorn | 9 |
| 26. <i>Syringa vulgaris</i> , Lilac | 41 |
| 27. <i>Spiraea folk-flourten</i> | 12 |
| 28. <i>Philadelphus coronarius</i> , Mock Orange | 17 |
| 29. <i>grandiflorus</i> | 12 |
| 30. <i>Lonicera Tartarica</i> , Tartarian Honeysuckle | 15 |

Source: PLONIS

