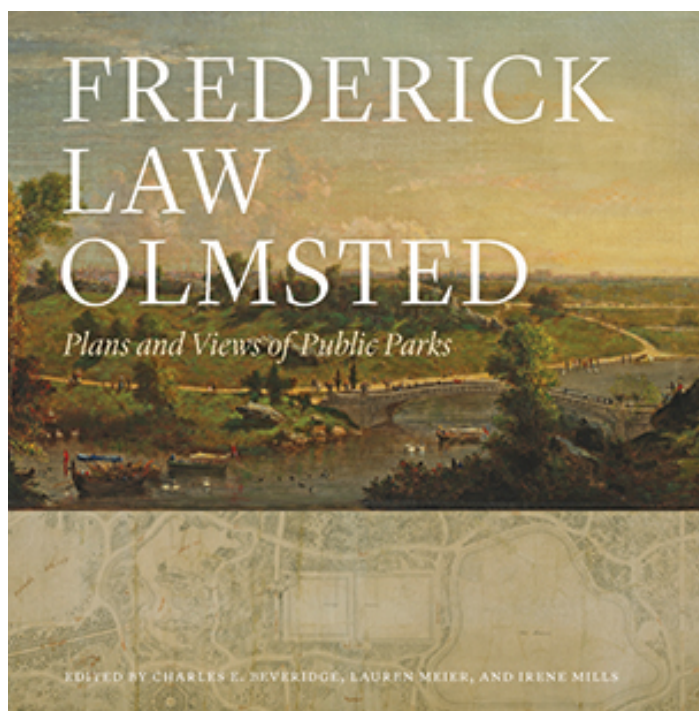


Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Public Parks

ed. by Charles E. Beveridge, Lauren Meier, and Irene Mills. (The papers of Frederick Law Olmsted). Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2015. 448 p. ill. ISBN 9781421410869 (cl.), \$74.95.

Reviewed July 2015 Pamela Casey, MLIS (Archives) 2015, McGill University, pamela.casey@mail.mcgill.ca



This excellently-researched, beautifully-presented volume provides a richly illustrated overview of Olmsted's significant public park and recreation ground projects. Featuring a wealth of historical images and archival textual documents, drawings, and plans, it is the first of two illustrative companion volumes (the second is still to come) in the twelve-volume Olmsted Papers Supplementary Series. The book's editors are historic preservationists who have participated in previous projects on Olmsted, writing for both professionals and academics, including architects, landscape professionals, city planners, historians, students, and a wider readership with interest in public

parks and their planning. The book features extensive archival material sourced from a variety of library and museum holdings as well as the archives of conservatories for Olmsted parks.

Along with providing visual documentation on park designs, the editors have sought to highlight Olmsted and his team's working methods by featuring a variety of design materials that highlight the ambitious range of his efforts, from swift sketches found in letters, to working drawings and paintings, planting maps, and lists of trees. The book's accompanying texts offer context on the projects, Olmsted's collaborators, and the design competition or selection process, and are often peppered with lines from his correspondence and personal papers.

These offer glimpses into Olmsted's larger goal of providing not only "soothing, out-of-door refreshment" to urban workers and dwellers, but to create outdoor spaces that can equally stimulate a "spirit of adventure" (p. 152).

The volume's best feature is the immense amount of historical photos. The editors could have chosen to feature current or more recent images, but the focus is instead on how the parks were used and enjoyed in the very period when these were created. This approach enriches the experience of seeing the designs, sketches, and plans, and serves to remind the reader of the urban experience in the nineteenth century, and how humanely radical and generous some of Olmsted's ideas were. The volume's biggest drawback is its occasional imbalances: with the wealth of material and detail available on major projects such as New York's Central Park or Boston's Franklin Park, readers may be disappointed in the skimpiness of accompanying material for smaller projects. The book includes an index and an extensive list of illustrations detailing archival sources.

Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Public Parks is a valuable addition to the larger Supplementary Series. While numerous illustrated books already exist on specific Olmsted projects or cities where his work features prominently, this volume provides a comprehensive visual overview of all his major public parks, allowing readers to place his projects in context to one another, and see some of the larger narratives across his life's work.