THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Editors

Central Park turns 150 this year, and while it is south of our usual territory, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux each has roots and legacies in the Hudson Valley, and their work together in New York City is tied to that. Just as Olmsted and Vaux influenced generations of artists and landscape architects that followed, Washington Irving created a "school" of contemporaries and continues to influence writers today. Our article about America's first internationally successful author explores the Gothic inspiration—in architecture and literature—he gleaned from Sir Walter Scott. From the 1800s, we jump to twentieth-century architecture and parking lots, in an examination of urban life and renewal in the Village of Catskill. We continue up the river, but back in time and again toward the Gothic, ending with a discussion of an early and unattributed work by Herman Melville. (We also publish this short work in its entirety.)

Our regional forums bookend the valley as well—stretching from Boscobel to the historic sites of Troy. But before we end with our usual book reviews and exploration of new and noteworthy books, we feature a new section, titled "Regional Writing," which will be dedicated each issue to the publication of one poem from and/or about our region. Our spring selection is entitled "Winter: New York State."

Reed Sparling
Christopher Pryslopski

Correction:

The image that appeared on page 5 of our Autumn 2007 issue of the *Review* was incorrectly credited. It is from the collections of The New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey, a statewide, private, non-profit historical museum, library, and archives dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the rich and intricate political, social, cultural, and economic history of New Jersey to the broadest possible audiences. Learn more at *www.jerseyhistory.org.*

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Call for Essays

The Hudson River Valley Review is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long with endnotes, along with a computer disk with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. No materials will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. No responsibility is assumed for their loss. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

HRVR will accept materials submitted as an e-mail attachment (*hrvi@marist.edu*) once they have been announced and cleared beforehand.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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Regional History Forum

Regional Writing

Book Reviews

On the cover:
A portrait of Melville as a young man by Asa Twitchell.
Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Mass.

MORRIS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE, NEWARK, DELAWARE

Fig. 2: Transverse Road Number 2, with the tower on Vista Rock in the distance. Photograph by W. H. Guild. From W. H. Guild and Fred. B. Perkins, *The Central Park* (New York, 1864)

Central Park at 150: Celebrating Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward Plan

David Schuyler

Shortly after the lower part of Central Park first opened to visitors in the fall of 1859, journalist Horace Greeley toured New York's new recreational ground and concluded that the designers had "let it alone a good deal more than I thought they would." That remark must have rankled Frederick Law Olmsted, the park's co-designer and architect-in-chief. Fourteen years later, when writing a report to the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, Olmsted explained just how massive an undertaking the building of Central Park had been. He calculated that workers handled 4,825,000 cubic yards of stone and earth during construction, "or nearly ten millions of ordinary city one-horse cart-loads, which, in single file, would make a procession thirty thousand… miles in length"—that is, extending from New York to San Francisco, and back again, five times. So much material was moved during construction that it was equivalent to changing the grade of the 843-acre park by four feet. Only such heroic efforts could have transformed the site into a scene of seemingly natural beauty.[1]

Two images convey the condition of the park site prior to commencement of construction. The first, an 1854 lithograph by John Bornet, shows the area of the park in quite accurate detail. The most prominent landmark is the old rectangular Croton Receiving Reservoir, which had been built by the Croton Aqueduct commission and had begun operating in 1842. The reservoir stood in the center of the future park site between 79th and 86th streets. Other recognizable buildings on the Bornet lithograph include the castellated Arsenal, near Fifth Avenue at 64th Street, which had been erected as an armory by New York State in 1851, and Mount St. Vincent, a convent of the Sisters of Charity near 105th Street. A number of other structures are visible, including a tall smokestack and a cluster of small dwellings on the west side of the park, near 86th Street. The overall impression of Bornet's lithograph is of a treeless, scarred landscape, a place on the periphery of the city that had been given over to nuisance uses.[2]

The second image is the topographical map prepared in 1856 by Egbert L. Viele, who was the first chief engineer of Central Park, which documents conditions on the site prior to development. The scattering of rooftops on the west side of the park near 86th Street was Seneca Village, a community of 264 residents in 1855, living in an area extending from Seventh to Eighth Avenue and from 82nd to 88th street. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar have demonstrated that blacks represented roughly seventy percent of the population of Seneca Village, while Irish-Americans constituted approximately thirty percent. The village was undoubtedly the most stable African-American community in the city, as there were two churches and a school and more than half of the households owned their own homes. The Viele map also identifies the location of other settlements within the park site, including several clusters of Irish and German residents. As many as 1,600 people lived within the boundaries of what became the park. During the fall of 1857, laborers demolished or removed 300 dwellings as well as a number of factories to make way for improvements to the park.[3]

In addition to these two images, written accounts document the existence of hog pens, small factories, and other unsightly uses. Viele described the site as a "pestilential spot, where rank vegetation and miasmatic odors taint every breath of air," while Olmsted found it to be "filthy, squalid and disgusting," as it contained not trees and grass but wretched hovels and "heaps of cinders, brickbats, potsherds, and other rubbish." The southern part of the future park was "a very nasty place," Olmsted concluded, as the "low grounds were steeped in [the] overflow and mush of pig sties, slaughter houses and bone boiling works, and the stench was sickening." There is nothing in Bornet's lithograph or Viele's map, or, indeed, in other documentary sources, to suggest that the park site prior to development was a place of natural beauty or a landscape that might become one.[4]

Photographs of the park taken shortly after its opening capture the newness of the plantings. There were no stands of tall trees to provide shade, and what trees and shrubs embellished the ground were newly planted. A stereographic view looking north across the pond near 59th Street reveals the presence of rock that was an enormous obstacle during construction as well as tiny, recently planted shrubs and trees. Other photographs similarly depict a landscape in the process of formation that would mature slowly. Olmsted had no idea that he would become a landscape architect and park maker in 1850, when he took a walking tour of England and the Continent. Yet his first reaction to Eaton Park that summer was remarkably prescient of the professional career he would choose: "What artist, so noble, has often been my thought, as he, who with far reaching conception of beauty and designing power, sketches the outline, writes the colours, and directs

the shadows of a picture so great that Nature shall be employed upon it for generations, before the work he has arranged for her shall realize his intentions." Only a decade or more in the future, Olmsted predicted in 1858, when Central Park had become a mature landscape, would "the priceless value of the present picturesque outlines of the ground … be more distinctly perceived, and its adaptability for its purposes more fully recognized."[5]

Thus one measure of the new park's success as a work of urban planning is that it struck New Yorkers such as Greeley as a place that needed some drives and paths, some new plantings, but not that it was an artfully designed landscape built at enormous cost. The park's creators knew, however. Calvert Vaux, who shared equal responsibility with Olmsted in the design of Central Park and who described Greeley's reaction to the landscape in a letter to art critic Clarence Cook, added, "We concealed the processes from him. But there were processes and nearly all was intended and foreseen." Indeed, the park is humanly created, just as are the surrounding streets and skyscrapers. Its naturalistic landscape stands as one of the most creative responses to urbanization undertaken in nineteenth-century America.[6]

There is one other dimension to the establishment of Central Park: the long-term vision that was essential to its creation. In the mid-1850s, the built area of Manhattan was still almost twenty blocks distant from the park's southernmost point at 59th Street. Taking into account the extension of the northern boundary from 106th to 110th Street, which was approved by the park commissioners in 1858 but which was not completed until 1863, Central Park occupies 153 city blocks and 9,792 standard 25-by-100 foot Manhattan lots. This was land that had to be purchased (in many cases repurchased) by the city in the mid-1850s at a cost of approximately $5,029,000. To take that much land from future development and set it aside for public recreational use was a remarkable act of stewardship, one that implicitly recognized the inexorable nature of urban growth in New York. At the heart of the Greensward plan was Olmsted and Vaux's understanding of population growth in nineteenth-century New York, which decade after decade far outstripped any previous efforts to plan for the future. Although in 1859 Olmsted described the park as being in the city's "straggling suburbs," he and Vaux realized that "twenty years hence, the town will have enclosed the Central Park." Prophetically, they predicted, "No longer an open suburb, our ground will have around it a continuous high wall of brick, stone, and marble." Practically they shaped their design to meet the requirements of a time "when New York will be built up, when all the grading and filling will be done, and when the picturesquely-varied, rocky formations of the Island will have been converted into foundations

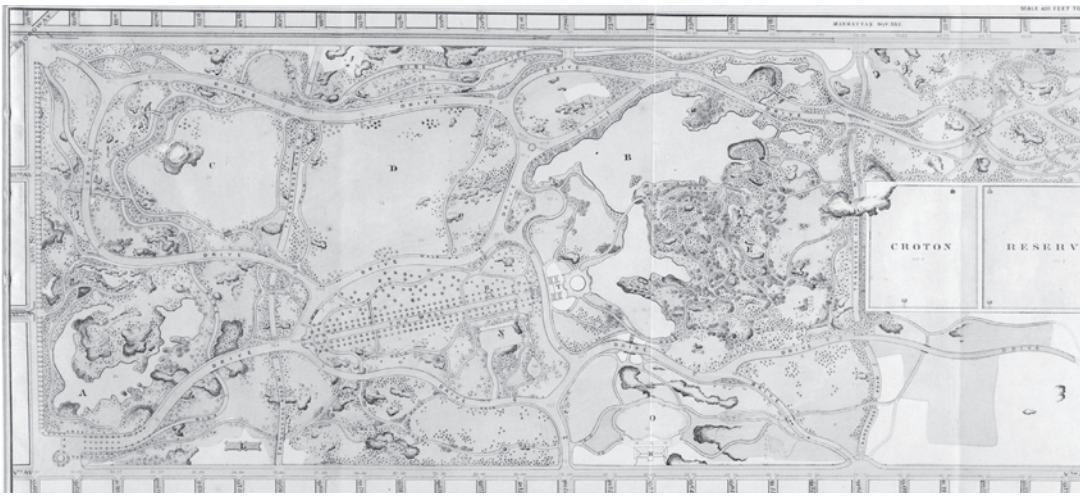
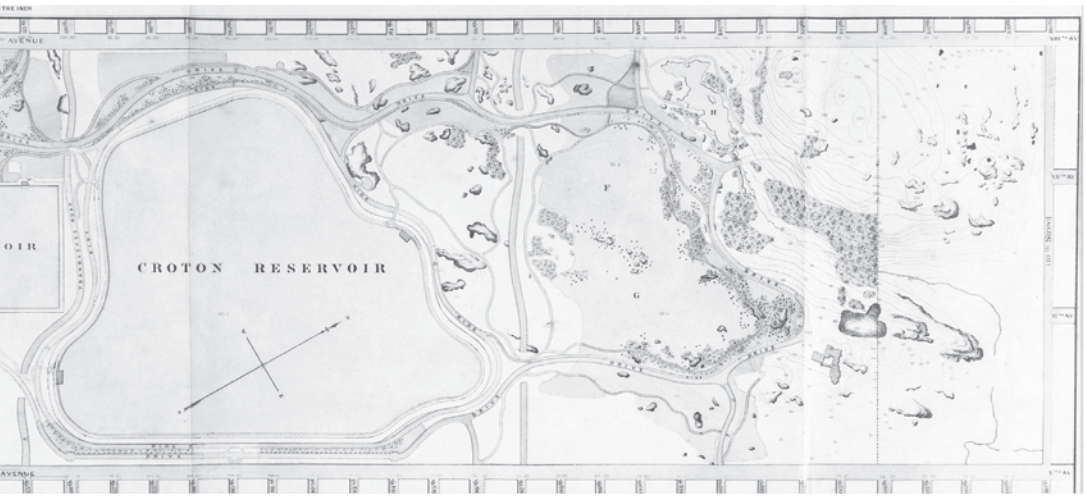


Fig 1: Central Park. Map of the Central Park Showing the progress of the Work up to January 1st 1863. From Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863)

for rows of monotonous straight streets, and piles of erect, angular buildings."[7]

Olmsted and Vaux's plan for Central Park, Greensward (fig. 1), was selected from among thirty-three entrants in a public competition for designs on April 28, 1858. Thus 2008 marks the 150th anniversary of the plan for the first great urban park in the United States. In recent years, historians have assessed the printed textual descriptions of the plans as well as the four large-scale drawings that have survived, and have debated whether the board of commissioners determined the winning entries based on politics or merit. There was a political dimension to the voting—the Olmsted-Vaux plan was clearly the choice of Republican members of the commission[8]—but Greensward also had several distinctive components that made it the most advantageous choice. The requirements of the competition specified that four or more streets cross the park, which was almost two and a half miles in length. Anticipating that these roads would become "crowded thoroughfares" that intruded upon the tranquility of the park, Olmsted and Vaux placed the crosstown streets below grade, which effectively prevented the park from being divided into five or more spaces and enabled the designers to create a unified landscape. They also suggested that a "little judicious planting" in areas adjacent to the transverse roads (fig. 2) and on the bridges carrying the drives and paths over them would "entirely conceal both the roads and the vehicles moving in them, from the view of those walking or driving in the park." The Olmsted and Vaux entry was the only plan that minimized the impact of the crossing streets on



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the landscape in this or any other way. The designers also provided for the separation of pedestrian paths and carriage drives at two points in the Greensward plan. When two commissioners called for the inclusion of a bridle path within the park, they added nineteen bridges to provide a complete separation of ways throughout the park (fig. 3). By January 1859 Olmsted reported that "all parts of the lower Park may be traversed on foot, without encountering a single carriage or horseman."[9]

The terms of the competition for designs required a hall for exhibitions and

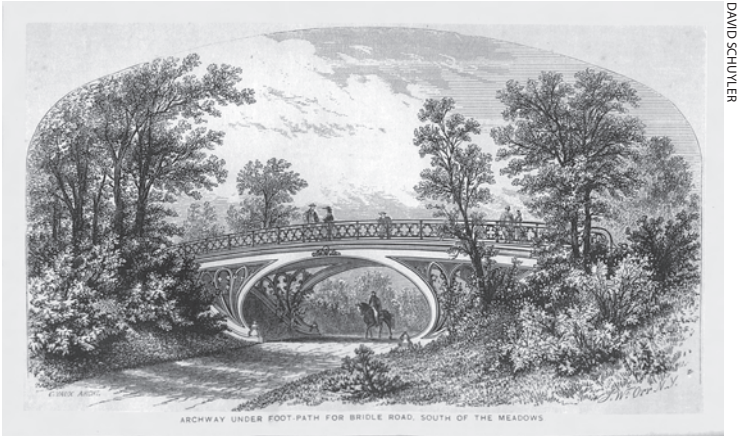

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Fig 3: Lithograph of Oval Bridge, a cast iron structure carrying a pedestrian path over the bridle path. This is one of more than twenty bridges that were constructed to provide a complete separation of all forms of traffic. From Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863)

concerts, playgrounds, a prominent fountain, and a flower garden. Instead of constructing a new exhibition hall, Olmsted and Vaux recommended that the Arsenal near the southeast corner of the park serve that function and attempted to minimize the visual impact of the building by planting trees and shrubs around it. They made provision for the other requirements of the competition—the flower garden, the arboretum, and the site for a music hall—in what they called the "dress ground" along the eastern boundary of the park north of the Arsenal. By collecting these structures and formal elements adjacent to Fifth Avenue, Olmsted and Vaux ensured that the rest of the park would be much more naturalistic. In a landscape that required heroic effort and expense to construct, Olmsted and Vaux subordinated art to nature.[10]

Another distinctive feature of the Greensward plan was the conscious attempt to create a visual and psychological separation of park and city. The primary intent of the plan, Olmsted and Vaux explained, was to create an expanse of park scenery within the urban environment, a landscape that would meet the recreational needs of city residents. They realized that the park had to achieve "something more than mere exemption from urban conditions," that it should instead "secure an antithesis of objects of vision to those of the streets and houses." In Olmsted's conception, the park would be a pastoral landscape within the city and provide to residents "an aspect of spaciousness and tranquility, with variety and intricacy of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and monotonous street-division of the city." The park, Olmsted insisted, was the one place in the city designed to meet the recreational needs of all residents, a place that would "supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances." The park would be the country within the city, nature—improved by art—offering welcome relief from the "compulsory art of the city."[11]

The Greensward design thus attempted to create within the humanly built city an equally artificial but seemingly natural landscape. Olmsted and Vaux attempted to sequester the park from the city that eventually would surround it by planting a thick screen of tall trees along the park's boundaries to block the view of the cityscape. They also suggested mounding the earth and the use of plantings to screen the most conspicuous structure within the park—the high walls of the old Croton receiving reservoir—and thereby to avoid an awkward visual conflict between the designed and the engineered landscape. In Olmsted's conception of the park, nature would reign supreme.[12]

Olmsted and Vaux anticipated that the principal entrance to the park would be at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. From there they directed traffic in curvilinear lines around the pond to the pedestrian promenade, or Mall. A long, elm-shaded avenue, the Mall extended almost a quarter mile diagonally northward through the lower park, ending at the Terrace. "Although averse on general principles to a symmetrical arrangement of trees," Olmsted and Vaux explained that the Mall's diagonal direction would lead visitors into the interior of the park. Pedestrians strolling down the Mall would see in the distance the Ramble and the proposed tower on Vista Rock, the highest point in the lower park. By framing this view, the Mall would "withdraw attention" from the park's boundaries. Moreover, Olmsted and Vaux considered it essential that a metropolitan park contain a "grand promenade, level, spacious, and thoroughly shaded." In the Greensward plan they used the Mall to incorporate a space for concerts and an arbor, which they located near the northeastern end of the avenue, and the site for a prominent fountain at the Terrace.[13]

Olmsted and Vaux gave the Mall such attention because they considered it a central feature of the lower park, and they attributed to it a visual importance comparable to that of a mansion in a private estate. Olmsted and Vaux considered the people the owners of the park, and instead of an elegant building they made a tree-lined avenue the focal point for the lower park. Indeed, in the text accompanying the Greensward plan they wrote, "we conceive that all such architectural structures should be confessedly subservient to the main idea" of the design, the landscape itself. The avenue would function as an "open air hall of reception" and provide opportunities for what Olmsted described as gregarious recreation—for walks, or promenades, with rustic seats carefully placed to promote social intercourse. Despite the Mall's formal design, Olmsted and Vaux carefully arranged the surrounding landscape in a naturalistic manner, placing trees and shrubbery nearby so that the rows of elms would not be visible except when looking directly down the avenue.[14]

At the northern end of the Mall Olmsted and Vaux located the Terrace (today known as Bethesda Terrace). Designed by Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould, the Terrace was the largest architectural structure in the park. It carried the central drive over a pedestrian underpass, and massive stairways led from the drive to the plaza below. The great hall under the drive provided shelter during inclement weather as well as other amenities for park visitors. The designers used the Terrace as the location of a prominent fountain, which in 1872 became the site of *The Angel of the Waters,* a sculpture by Emma Stebbins. Just as the Old Testament angel transformed the pools at Bethesda into a cure for the sick in Jerusalem, so

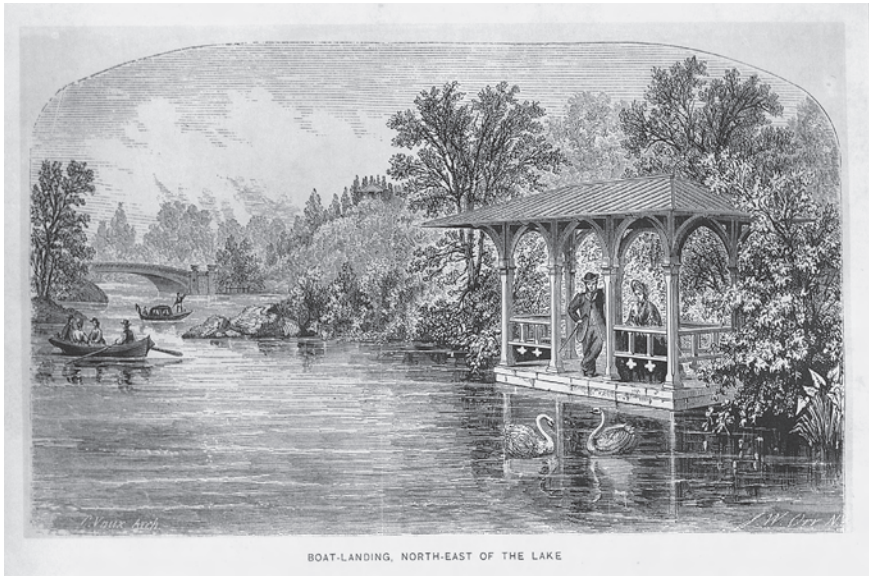

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Fig. 4: Lithograph of Lake and Boat Landing. From Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863)

the sculpture asserted that the pure water of the Croton system and the park's landscape were essential to the good health of New York's residents.[15]

Olmsted and Vaux made the Terrace and plaza a focal point in the lower park not only because of its location adjacent to the lake (fig. 4) but also because at the Terrace the hills to either side blocked all views of the city and the walls of the Croton receiving reservoir were "planted out." From this vantage, Olmsted explained, the "whole breadth of the Park will be brought into this landscape." A pedestrian reaching the plaza from the stairs would experience a foreground "enriched with architectural decorations and a fountain," a middle distance of the lake, the rocks and hillside on the opposite shore, where evergreens and broad-leaved shrubs were reflected in the water, and a distance made all the more remote by the conscious use of lighter colors and less distinct foliage.[16]

Across the lake from the Terrace was the Ramble, a rocky, hilly area. Although the Greensward plan located a carriage drive through the Ramble, as construction progressed it was eliminated—undoubtedly because the topography would have made the cost prohibitive—and the area was designed solely for pedestrians. Although Olmsted later asserted that "very rugged ground, abrupt eminences, and what is technically called picturesque in distinction from merely beautiful or simply pleasing scenery, is not the most desirable in a town park," he and Vaux designed the Ramble to take advantage of its natural features, the rocks

and ravines. They proposed removing some of the stone and adding soil to support a variety of broad-leaf shrubs and evergreens and other elements of picturesque scenery. Olmsted described his intent for this area and the northern arm of the lake in a letter to Central Park gardener Ignaz Pilat in 1863. The tropical scenery he experienced while crossing the Isthmus of Panama impressed upon him "a sense of the superabundant creative power, infinite resources, and liberality of Nature—the childish playfulness and profuse careless utterance of Nature." Olmsted informed Pilat that he had been "rather blindly and instinctively" attempting to achieve the effect of tropical scenery in picturesque areas of the park. Throughout the Ramble he located secluded walks and rustic seats, as well as an artificial watercourse, the Ambergill, which flowed out of a rock and meandered through the landscape until it cascaded into the lake. When the plants had matured, one visitor described the Ramble as "the most attractive and satisfactory part of the park." Here was a scene of rural beauty "very unlike what one would expect to find in a great city," for in the Ramble the "art of concealing Art was never better illustrated." [17]

Throughout the rest of the lower park, Olmsted and Vaux emphasized pastoral scenery, (fig. 5) which Olmsted described in 1866 as consisting of "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, and the predominant associations are in the highest degree tranquilizing

Fig 5: Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

and grateful, as expressed by the Hebrew poet: 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.'" Although this passage from the twenty-third Psalm was written more than two millennia before the establishment of Central Park, Olmsted found it particularly appropriate to describe the kind of scenery he considered essential in an urban park: pastoral scenery was so welcome to city residents because it was the antithesis of the streets and buildings that framed their everyday life. The "beauty of the park," Olmsted explained in 1870, "should be the beauty of the fields, the meadow, the prairie, of the green pastures, and the still waters." He believed that this type of park scenery would be tranquilizing and restorative, that it would produce in visitors an "*unbending* of the faculties," a process of recuperation from the stresses and strains of urban life. Clarence Cook, who surely represented the thoughts of Olmsted and Vaux in writing his *Description of the New York Central Park*, similarly insisted that the park was "a place of rest and recreation for mind and body," where "nature soothes and tranquillizes the mind" and calls the body to healthful exercise.[18]

Given the rockiness of the ground and its undulating topography, creating pastoral scenery in the lower park was difficult and expensive, but Olmsted and Vaux considered it so important that they blasted tons of rock and filled the ground with soil brought into the park. The result was impressive. From the Merchant's Gate entrance at Eighth Avenue and 59th Street, the visitor approached two large expanses of turf. One, the playground, was an area of fourteen acres; the other, described as the Central Plateau, was a swampy, rocky, thirty-three acre area that they transformed, by blasting and filling, into a broad, sweeping lawn of gently undulating surface known today as the Sheep Meadow (fig. 6). Although the Central Plateau would occasionally be used for military displays and militia exercises, Olmsted intended that it function as "a great country green or open common." Together, these two large expanses of lawn, which sprawled visually over the southernmost transverse road, created the impression of a sweeping landscape that terminated at Vista Rock, the highest point in the Ramble. "Here is a suggestion of freedom and repose," Olmsted and Vaux later wrote, "which must in itself be refreshing and tranquilizing to the visitor coming from the confinement and bustle of the crowded streets."[19]

Along the western side of the park Olmsted and Vaux located a winter drive, a mile and a half long, that was thickly planted with evergreens as well as a few deciduous trees. Throughout the area they created glades in order to achieve the scenic effect of a "richly wooded country, in which the single trees and copses have had plenty of space for developing their distinctive characteristics to advantage." The winter drive ensured that the park's landscape would remain interesting even

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Fig 6: The Sheep Meadow, 1983

when the deciduous trees were bare.[20]

In the upper park, the area north of the reservoirs, the character of the landscape was much different from that of the lower park. In the northwest corner, the topography was "bold and sweeping," while elsewhere the ground provided opportunities to create the largest expanses of grass in the park. As breadth of scenery was "in most decided contrast to the confined and formal lines of the city," the designers explained that symmetrical plantings, architectural elements, and roads should not interfere with the landscape effects. In addition to the northern meadow, Olmsted and Vaux located in the upper park a rugged ravine with cascading watercourse, as well as the arboretum (one of the required elements in the competition for design), which they placed at the northeast corner of the park along Fifth Avenue. The arboretum was eliminated as the plan was implemented and the site became a conservatory garden and a small lake, the Harlem Meer.[21]

Building Central Park was a heroic undertaking. During the peak times of construction as many as 3,800 men were employed. Between 1858 and 1870, Olmsted calculated, workers used 260 tons of gunpowder to remove rocky outcroppings or to create the tunnels of the transverse roads. Olmsted established a nursery on the park; over the course of the first decade of construction, workers used more than 46,000 cubic yards of manure and compost in preparing ground for planting

some 270,000 trees and shrubs. In addition to rude construction, workers built miles of drives, walks, and bridle paths, as well as more than twenty bridges and underpasses to achieve the separation of ways. They also erected several buildings and dozens of structures—including a Music Stand, rustic shelters, arbors, and boat landings—to serve the public. The cost of construction was staggering. The state legislation establishing the park had authorized spending a maximum of $1,500,000 for construction, but that amount proved hopelessly inadequate. By 1859, costs totaled $1,765,000—at which time only a part of the lower park had been completed and opened to the public. In 1861, the state legislature authorized the expenditure of an additional $2,500,000, bringing the total amount allocated for building the park to $4,000,000. By 1866, that figure had been exceeded by 50 percent: it cost significantly more to build the park than it had to assemble the land for it. By 1870, Olmsted estimated that constructing the park had cost New York City approximately $8,900,000.[22]

Building Central Park was especially expensive and controversial because is took place within the tumultuous political culture of New York in the 1850s. As New York City's Democratic Party grew in power, the state legislature, dominated by upstate Republicans, attempted to restrict the ability of the city to govern itself. A new city charter, enacted by the state legislature in 1857, cut Democratic Mayor Fernando Wood's term in half, forcing him to run for reelection in the midst of an economic recession. (As the charter writers undoubtedly hoped, Wood lost the election.) The charter, a patently antidemocratic document, also replaced the Municipal Police, whose members had been appointed by the mayor, with a Metropolitan Police force controlled by five state-appointed commissioners. The two police organizations, representing different cultures as well as executives, clashed on the steps of City Hall and a riot ensued. The new charter created several state-appointed commissions, including one to regulate the harbor and another to build Central Park.[23]

The new Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, which was supposed to be a non-partisan body, appointed Olmsted Superintendent of Labor in September 1857, in large part because he was seen as acceptable—that is, because he was perceived to be non-political by Democratic as well as Republican board members.[24] A month after his appointment, as the effects of an economic panic in New York deepened, the city government withheld funding for the park, forcing the park commissioners to lay off the workforce. As the recession worsened, thousands of jobless workers descended upon the park, including one mob carrying a banner inscribed "Bread or Blood." Olmsted later recalled that to reach his office one morning he had to make his way through a crowd of 5,000 protesters.

Olmsted described how a candidate for reelection as a local magistrate addressed the crowd from a wagon: "He urged that those before him had a right to live; he assumed that they could only live through wages to be paid by the city; and to obtain these he advised that they should demand employment of me. If I should be backward in yielding it—here he held up a rope and pointed to a tree, and the crowd cheered." To placate the unemployed, who marched on City Hall insisting on their right to work, in early November the city government authorized the park commission to hire 1,000 laborers. As there was not yet an approved design of the park at this time, the laborers worked at clearing the park and building a wall around it.[25]

As Superintendent of Labor, Olmsted had to organize this workforce. His task was compounded by two realities. First, virtually every member of the park commission, while denouncing patronage, expected he would be able to provide jobs to friends and faithful party workers. Second, New York's working class in the late 1850s was feeling dual pressures from industrialization, which increased work discipline, and a surplus of labor (the result of record levels of immigration), which depressed job opportunities and wages. Workers were fractious and attempted to protect their interest through rallies and strikes. Olmsted and the park commission determined to hire laborers as public employees and to regulate the work they performed closely, which conflicted with the expectations of many of the city's laborers. In this, Olmsted was adopting management practices developed by the engineers who built canals, railroads, and other major public and private works in the United States. Olmsted organized the workers into teams of thirty to forty men, each with a foreman who was responsible for taking roll and preparing daily reports on the work accomplished. Eight general foremen supervised the foremen to ensure that all laborers were complying with park policies and Olmsted's expectations of efficient work. Olmsted clearly was proud of his management of the park's construction: in January 1858 he informed his father that he had "got the park into a capital discipline, a perfect system, working like a machine, 1000 men now at work." Two years later, looking back on the initial months of construction, Olmsted explained to his friend Charles Loring Brace that in the weeks following the hiring of the 1,000 laborers in November 1857, he had the men "*economically* employed" and added that he "rigidly discharged any man who failed to work industriously & to behave in a quiet & orderly manner." Although Olmsted conceded that there were several work stoppages because of strikes, he insisted that during the early years of construction "there has been the most perfect order, peace & good feeling preserved, notwithstanding the fact that the laborers are mainly from the poorest of what is generally considered the most dangerous class

of the great city's population."[26]

The cultural conflict that separated Olmsted's point of view from that of the park's workers extended to the political elite as well, with the result that Central Park often was under intense scrutiny by city and state government, all the more so as costs began to exceed the anticipated expenditure. In 1860, when the park commission sought approval for additional funds to complete construction, the state legislature appointed a Swiss engineer, Julius Kellersberger, to investigate the park's construction and management. Kellersberger had access to park commission records and made an independent and detailed inspection of the park's operations. Olmsted and the park commissioners must have been gratified, and relieved, when the report was completed and published. Kellersberger assured the legislature, and the public, that at Central Park the "works are carried on under efficient and proper supervision, and under a strict discipline; the best order and system prevails in the different offices as well as on the grounds, and in that respect there is no other public work in the United States to be compared with the Central Park." He concluded by noting that the park contributed "as much honor to the taste, refinement, and wealth of the metropolis, as credit to its designer and executor."[27]

Managing Central Park—educating the public in the proper use of the new park, overseeing maintenance and ongoing improvements, and ensuring the public's safety—was, in Olmsted's estimation, equally important to design and superintendence of construction. Prior to construction of the park, a number of newspapers expressed what Olmsted termed the "fallacy of cowardly conservatism." This was the belief that democracy was, ultimately, a decivilizing process that would establish the lowest common denominator in American political, social, and intellectual life. Any recreational or cultural institution open to the public would effectively be defined by the behavior of the rudest, least reputable members of society, with the result that the middle and upper classes would not frequent such places. The *New York Herald* gave voice to this opinion in 1857, when it argued against the expenditure of large sums of money to build Central Park. Contrasting two well known New Yorkers with a composite it called Sam the Five Pointer—a resident of the Five Points area of lower Manhattan, the city's most notorious slum—the *Herald* predicted that Sam would engage in the kind of loutish behavior that would make the park unappealing to all others: "He will run races with his new horse in the carriage way. He will knock any better dressed man down who remonstrates with him. He will talk and sing, and fill his share of the bench, and flirt with the nursery girls in his own coarse way. Now, we ask what chance have William B. Astor and Edward Everett against this fellow-citizen of

theirs? Can they and he enjoy the same place?" The *Herald* couldn't envision the workings of social democracy, and instead predicted that "the great Central Park, which has cost so much money and is to cost so much more, will be nothing but a huge beer-garden for the lowest denizens of the city." Olmsted must have resented the story from the *Herald* immensely: thirteen years later, he quoted it to demonstrate as unwarranted the fear of the park as a democratic institution.[28]

Olmsted realized that public safety and policing of the park were the "most vulnerable point in the undertaking," and in February 1858 he assumed responsibility for training and administering a force of keepers to maintain order. Olmsted envisioned that the principal responsibility of the keepers, like that of the metropolitan police who patrolled London's West End parks, would be to educate the public in the park's proper use. He shaped the keepers into a highly effective force, and their impact on park visitors was admirable. One writer told of encountering in the park one of the city's most notorious saloonkeepers; he had come there one Sunday to visit former customers, who found the park more attractive than the bar. Olmsted noted that the park exercised "a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence over the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance." The fears of social conservatives notwithstanding, the park was a safe, well-ordered landscape.[29]

The keepers were essential to Olmsted's vision of the park as a democratic social space. In August 1858 he described the park as "a democratic development of the highest significance & on the strength of which … much of the progress of art & esthetic culture in this country is dependent." Two years later he urged Unitarian minister Henry W. Bellows to write an article about Central Park. Experience since the park's opening in the fall of 1859 refuted "certain political and social fallacies commonly entertained," Olmsted wrote Bellows, and justified "the highest hopes which have been entertained of its moral influence." Bellows did write the article Olmsted suggested, which was published in the April 1861 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. Describing Central Park as "a royal work, undertaken and achieved by the Democracy," Bellows, like Olmsted, found in the park's success a source of optimism for the future of the nation's democratic institutions. Central Park was, he asserted, "the most striking evidence of the sovereignty of the people yet afforded in the history of free institutions,—the best answer yet given to the doubts and fears which have frowned on the theory of self-government,—the first grand proof that the people do not mean to give up the advantages and victories of aristocratic governments, in maintaining a popular one." Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the park, Bellows concluded, was in promoting the development of "new and almost incredible tastes, aptitudes, capacities, and powers in the

people themselves."[30]

Olmsted placed such importance on the park as a democratic institution because he saw it as the one place in a city stratified by class, race, and ethnicity that welcomed all residents. In 1859, when describing his vision of the park, he insisted that it would be the primary source of recreation to residents "of all classes." The park was "intended to furnish healthful recreation for the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the vicious and the virtuous." These words anticipate Olmsted's 1870 statement of the park as the one place in the modern city that embraced all of its residents. Speaking at the Lowell Institute and urging citizens of Boston to establish a large park in their community, he remarked that Central Park and Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, were the only places in those respective cities where "you will find a body of Christians coming together, and with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile."[31]

Olmsted resigned from his position on the park in the spring of 1861, when he became general secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, a private organization that aided Union soldiers during the American Civil War. He then spent two years in California managing a gold mining operation before returning to New York City in late 1865. Although he and Vaux were appointed consulting landscape architects for Central Park, they had no responsibility for construction, maintenance, and use of the park. The board of commissioners paid little, if any, attention to Olmsted and Vaux's views on a number of important decisions regarding the park, including a series of monumental gateways proposed by architect Richard Morris Hunt, or his plans to erect a museum for the New-York Historical Society in the park, all which they opposed as threats to the integrity of the landscape. Even when the commissioners instructed them to prepare plans for a zoological garden, which Olmsted and Vaux located at Manhattan Square, across Eighth Avenue from the park, comptroller Andrew H. Green prevented the designers from presenting their plan to the full board. Only for a brief period after the fall of the Tweed "ring" in late 1871 did Olmsted again have authority over the park, but even then politics and the city's straitened financial condition severely restricted what he was able to accomplish.[32]

Although Olmsted regretted that politics compromised his and Vaux's design for the park, he nevertheless took great pride in what they had been able to

accomplish. He described the park as the key to the "increased value of life in this city" and attributed to it the exponential residential and institutional growth on its periphery. The park stimulated the construction of rows of townhouses in the blocks just to its south in the 1850s. In succeeding years, new development along Fifth and Eighth avenues fulfilled Olmsted and Vaux's prediction, in the text accompanying the Greensward plan, that in twenty years the park would be surrounded by tall buildings. As this development took place, the higher valuations of land and buildings in the blocks surrounding the park generated more tax revenue than the cost of amortizing land acquisition and construction.[33]

Central Park was a creative response to New York City's dramatic growth in the years after 1845. Olmsted and Vaux designed its curvilinear paths and naturalistic landscape to stand in striking contrast to the straight lines and sharp angles of the expanding city. Through boundary plantings, the transverse roads, and the complete separation of traffic they implemented in the park, Olmsted and Vaux minimized the degree to which the city would intrude upon the humanly created landscape. But the park was, and remains, an urban institution, conceived not as a withdrawal from or repudiation of the complexities of metropolitan life but as part of what Olmsted later characterized as the complex physical fabric and the "general municipal economy of a great City."[34]

Central Park has served New York remarkably well for 150 years—so well, in fact, that it seems always to have been there, a natural landscape wisely preserved from development as the built area of the city swept northward on Manhattan Island. Although the park is completely a humanly created landscape, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine what life would be like in New York without Central Park. The great American regionalist Lewis Mumford grew up on Manhattan's Upper West Side in the early twentieth century. The neighborhood of his youth was framed by Central Park to the east and Riverside Park to the west, two of Olmsted and Vaux's landmark parks, open spaces that provided welcome relief from the densely-built streets. Years later Mumford recalled, "I hate to think how depressing the total effect [of my childhood landscape] would have been had not Central Park and Riverside Park been there to gladden my eyes and beckon my legs to a ramble."[35]

The 150th anniversary of Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward Plan for Central Park is indeed an occasion worth celebrating. The success of the park inspired the creation of public recreational grounds in numerous other American cities throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and launched what would become the profession of landscape architecture in the United States. Equally important Central Park represents a dramatic expansion of municipal responsibility and

power. Although the park was constructed and administered during its first thirteen years by a state-appointed commission—to prevent jobs from becoming patronage positions for the city's Democratic leaders—its creation was an assertion that the physical health and psychological welfare of the urban population was a legitimate concern for the municipal corporation. The millions who, like Mumford, have visited the park over the last century and a half are beneficiaries of this enlarged vision of the responsibilities of city government and of the model of stewardship the park and the Greensward design represent.[36]

Two landscapes designed by Olmsted and Vaux are open to the public in Orange County—Downing Park in Newburgh and Hillside Cemetery in Middletown.

Notes

For Robin

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Statistical Report of the Landscape Architect, 31st December 1873, Forming Part of Appendix L of the Third General Report of the Department," in New York City, Department of Public Parks, *Third Annual Report* (New York, 1875), pp. 46-47; Clarence C. Cook, *A Description of the New York Central Park* (New York, 1869), p. 110; George E. Waring to F. L. Olmsted, Oct. 17, 1859, in Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as Olmsted Papers.
2. This paragraph is describing the "Panorama of Manhattan Island, City of New York and Environs . . . Drawn from Nature and on Stone by John Bornet," 1854, Eno Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallace Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City.
3. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 59-91.
4. Egbert L. Viele, "Report of Egbert L. Viele, Engineer-in-Chief," in New York City, Board of Aldermen, *Documents* 24 (1857), doc. 5, Jan. 19, 1857, p. 12; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park" [Jan. 1859], in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol. 3, Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 205-12; Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," ibid, p. 90.
5. [Frederick Law Olmsted], *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, ed. Charles C. McLaughlin (1852; reprint ed., Amherst, Mass., 2002), p. 145; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196.
6. Vaux to Clarence Cook, June 6, 1865, Olmsted Papers; Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Theodora Kimball, eds., *Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903 (Forty Years of Landscape Architecture)*, 2 vols. (New York, 1922-28), 2: 95.
7. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 178n2; Olmsted and Vaux, "Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park, 'Greensward,'" in ibid., pp. 120-22; Olmsted to William Robinson, May 17, 1872, Olmsted Papers; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196. In the text accompanying the Greensward plan Olmsted and Vaux estimated that the city had to acquire 17,000 lots in assembling the land for the park. Clarence Cook, by contrast, stated that the commissioners of estimate and assessment had to evaluate the claims of owners of 7,500 lots. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 120; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, p. 21.

8. Historians who have analyzed the competition for the design of Central Park include Ian Stewart, "Politics and the Park: The Fight for Central Park," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 61 (July-Oct. 1977): 135-49; David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 83-84, 210n17; Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 95-120; and Sara Cedar Miller, *Central Park: An American Masterpiece* (New York, 2003), pp. 81-88.

9. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 23-24; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 121-22; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 216; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, pp. 35-36.

10. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 127-29; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 214.

11. Olmsted and Vaux to Henry G. Stebbins, Jan. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series 1: Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn F. Hoffman (Baltimore, 1997), p. 250; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196; [William J, Stillman], "Sketchings. Central Park," *Crayon* 5 (July 1858): 210.

12. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 121-22, 124, 129-30. See also Charles E. Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape* (New York, 1995); Charles E. Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted's Theory of Landscape Design," *Nineteenth Century* 3 (Summer 1977): 38-43; and Susanna S. Zetzel, "The Garden in the Machine: The Construction of Nature in Olmsted's Central Park," *Prospects* 14 (1989): 291-339.

13. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 125-26.

14. Ibid.

15. Elizabeth Milroy, "The Public Career of Emma Stebbins: Works in Marble," *Archives of American Art Journal* 33, no. 3 (1993): 2-12; idem., "Works in Bronze," ibid., 34, no. 1 (1994): 2-13.

16. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 129-30; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 215. Olmsted and Vaux to Henry G. Stebbins, Feb. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series* 1: 255-73.

17. Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," *Journal of Social Science* 3 (1871): 23; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 129-30; Olmsted, "Park" [1861], in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 354-55; Olmsted to Ignaz Pilat, Sept. 26, 1863, Olmsted Papers; "Central Park," *Scribner's Monthly* 6 (Oct. 1873): 683.

18. Olmsted and Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn, New York: Being a Consideration of Circumstances of Site and Other Conditions Affecting the Design of Public Pleasure Grounds" (1866), in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series* 1, pp. 90-91; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 23; Olmsted, "Park," pp. 354-55; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, p. 81.

19. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 126-27; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 213-14; Olmsted and Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn," p. 92.

20. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 131; Olmsted, "Park," p. 355.

21. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 119.

22. Olmsted, "Statistical Report of the Fourth Annual Report of the Landscape Architect, 31st December 1873," pp. 46-47; Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1861), p. 26; idem., *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863), pp. 6-7; idem., *Fifth Annual Report* (New York, 1862), p. 7; Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Minutes, Aug. 5, 1859; Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 150-51.

23. For the Charter of 1857 see Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York, 1981), pp. 384-97.

24. Olmsted quickly realized that the new charter had not removed the park from politics; it gave preferment to one political group over another. He later described the events of 1857 as a "storm of reform" that changed little and quickly subsided. With evident cynicism he wrote in 1878: "There is a power which ordinarily lies ineffective back of all the political vices of our cities. At times it is stirred with shame, disgust and indignation; organizes itself and makes a loud demand for reform. The politicians out of office take advantage of the opportunity not only to secure the removal of those who have been in office but to make them as they go forth serve the purpose of scape goats. A few changes of form and method are made and the citizens are reconciled to a system under which the old vices are cherished only more warmly than before." Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," Olmsted Papers.

25. Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Minutes, Aug. 27, 1857; Olmsted to John Hull Olmsted, Sept. 11, 1857, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* 3: 79-81; Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, Dec. 8, 1860, ibid., pp. 286-87; Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," pp. 85-87; Olmsted, "Influence," undated manuscript, Olmsted Papers.

26. Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 150-58; J. M. Murphy, et al., "Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Examine into Condition, Affairs, and Progress of the New York Central Park," in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1861), pp. 86-98, 121-22; Olmsted to John Olmsted, Jan. 14, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 113-14; Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, Dec. 8, 1860, ibid., pp. 286-87. Although historians such as Morton Keller and Stephen Skowronek focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century eras, many of the organizational tendencies they describe were evident, in perhaps rudimentary form, in the park's construction and management. See Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977) and Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

27. J. M. Murphy, et al., "Report of the Special Committee," pp. 121-22.

28. Olmsted to James T. Fields, Oct. 21, 2860, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 269-74; "The Central Park and other City Improvements," *New York Herald*, Sept. 6, 1857; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 28.

29. Olmsted, "Report to the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, Relative to the Police Force of the Department," in New York City, Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, *Documents*, doc. 41, Oct. 24, 1872 (New York, 1872), pp. 2-3; David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol. 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874* (Baltimore and London, 1992), pp. 41-43.

30. Olmsted to Parke Godwin, Aug. 1, 1858, Bryant-Godwin Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Rare Book & Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, New York City; Olmsted to H. W. Bellows, Oct. 30, 1860, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Bellows, "Cities and Parks: With Special Reference to the New York Central Park," *Atlantic Monthly* 7 (April 1861): 416-29 (quotations pp. 421, 422).

31. Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 18.

32. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, 6:* 3-5, 18-19, 37-45.

33. Olmsted to Henry G. Stebbins, Feb. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series* 1: 272; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 120. See also Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown: An Illustrated History* (Boston, 1976).

34. Olmsted, Vaux & Company to the Chairman of the Committee on Plans of the Park Commission of Philadelphia, Dec. 4, 1867, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 6: 232;

35. Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life* (New York, 1982), p. 10.

36. For discussions of the influence of Central Park on other cities see Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, pp. 101-46; Daniel Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 36-61; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); and Francis R. Kowsky, "Municipal Parks and City Planning: Frederick Law Olmsted's Buffalo Park and Parkway System," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46 (March 1987): 49-64.

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