



# Foundation Document Overview

## Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

### Massachusetts



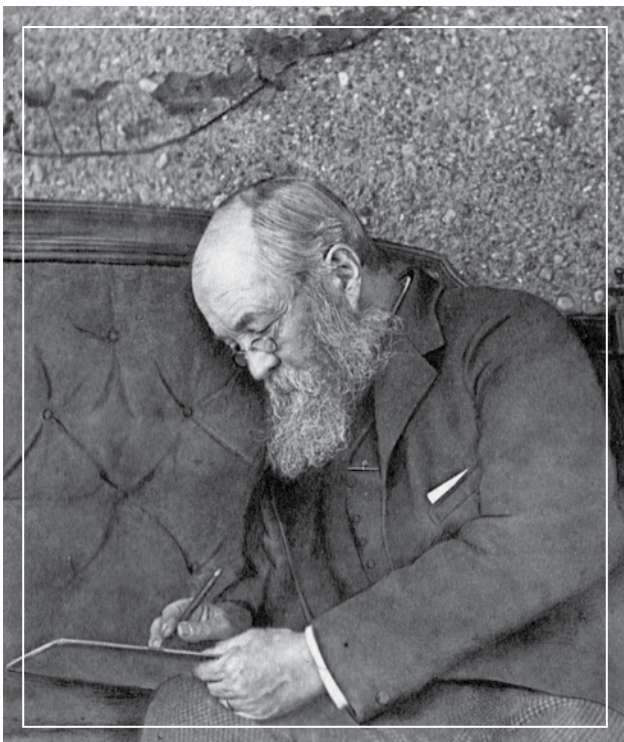
#### Contact Information

For more information about the *Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: [frla\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:frla_superintendent@nps.gov) or 617-566-1689 or write to:  
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## Purpose



*FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves and interprets for the benefit, inspiration, and education of present and future generations, the historic ensemble of the home, office, landscape, and archival collections associated with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and the Olmsted firm.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Ideas and Influence.** Synthesizing aesthetic theories and social reform ideals, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. created a landscape design philosophy that sought to improve the health and well-being of individual people and society as a whole. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and his successors played a central role in defining landscape architecture, city planning, and scenic preservation in the United States and significantly shaped the American landscape.
- **Historic Design Office.** Fairsted was the center of activity for a business that played a seminal role in the emergence and evolution of the professions of landscape architecture and city planning in the United States. The Olmsteds trained early and influential practitioners in those fields, developed multidisciplinary design processes that helped define the professions, and planned and designed internationally significant landscapes, including parks and park systems, grounds of major public buildings and expositions, residential communities, school campuses, and private estates.
- **Archives.** The Olmsted archives, including original plans, photographs, and plant lists associated with the 5,000-plus landscape design projects on which the Olmsted firm worked between 1859 and 1979, is a unique resource that reflects the history of landscape architecture and city planning in the United States. This actively used collection offers insights into the design processes and thinking that produced some of the most treasured landscapes in North America.
- **Landscape.** The Fairsted landscape, including borrowed views of adjacent properties, features signature examples of Olmsted's design principles and allows visitors to experience Olmsted's particular concept of the restorative influence designed landscapes can have on human thought, feeling, and interactions.
- **Ensemble.** The ensemble of cultural resources at Fairsted (structures, landscape, archives) offers a unique opportunity to experience the work of a family of prominent designers, consciously envisioning and shaping their home and work environments over time.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Frederick Law Olmsted House, Offices, Vault, Barn, and Shed**
- **Fairsted Landscape**
- **Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site Archives and Museum Collections**
- **Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site Viewshed and Neighborhood Setting**

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Green Hill Conservation Land (Formerly Part of Gardner Estate)**
- **Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site Archeological Resources**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Olmsted Sr.'s Fairsted Years.** Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s years at Fairsted (1883–1895) represent a remarkably productive period of his professional life. The culmination of diverse life and work experiences and the full maturation of his design philosophy and social ideals resulted in projects of major significance. At Fairsted, he also focused on mentoring the next generation of landscape architects and planners who would carry his legacy forward.
- **Olmsted Brothers Years, 1895–1949.** Olmsted's sons, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., continued and expanded the firm's landscape architecture practice as the Olmsted Brothers, building on its solid reputation and playing an important role in the professionalization of landscape architecture and city planning.
- **Olmsted Design Office an Index of Historic Work Practices.** The rooms of the Olmsted design office, filled with historic equipment and furnishings, reveal the work practices of this influential firm and how they evolved over the decades as the profession of landscape design grew and changed.
- **Olmsted Archives Relevant Today.** The Olmsted archives are a rich collection accessed by thousands of researchers annually for information on specific Olmsted projects or historic topics in American landscape design, city and regional planning, and other areas of research interest.
- **Fairsted's Landscape.** The Fairsted landscape, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and assisted by John Charles Olmsted, is an intimate example of the design aesthetic and principles found in the full range of Olmsted Sr.'s works.



# Description

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, at 99 Warren Street, Brookline, Massachusetts, preserves and interprets the home and office of pioneer landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his successor firms. Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) is widely recognized as the founder of the American landscape architecture design profession and the nation’s foremost park-maker. Congress established the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site as a national park system unit in 1979.

The original authorized boundary included the Olmsted house, with its attached office wing and barn, and 12 other historic structures, including an early 20th century storage vault containing a world-class collection of Olmsted plans, drawings, and associated materials, set on 1.75 acres of landscape designed by Olmsted and his sons. This picturesque complex was called “Fairsted” by Olmsted and his family. To allow the park to accept a gift of 5.31 acres of contiguous Green Hill conservation land, Congress revised the park’s original boundary in 1998 and the National Park Service acquired title to this important parcel in 2001, thus preserving in perpetuity a crucial historic vista. The entire boundary of the park (which includes an access easement over 0.15 acres) now encompasses 7.21 acres.

The site serves as a historic museum with exhibits and tours, a national center for children’s educational programming in landscape, and the principal archive for the study of the Olmsteds’ vast portfolio of landscape designs.

Historic Museum and Landscapes: at Fairsted, self-guided exhibits and a film interpret the career of Olmsted Sr., the projects and philosophies of the Olmsted firm, and the legacy of the Olmsteds in landscape and environmental design and city planning. Tours of the Olmsted design office, with its original furniture and equipment, and of the surrounding landscape enrich the visitor’s time at Fairsted. Guided walks of nearby Olmsted parks allow visitors to experience the wide impact of the design principles that were launched from Fairsted.

Center for Children’s Educational Programming in Landscape: The award-winning educational program: “Good Neighbors: Landscape Design and Community Building” reaches 1,200 local students each year. In collaboration with the National Association for Olmsted Parks, it is being offered as a replicable model to other organizations educating children and caring for Olmsted landscapes across the country.

Major Archival Resource: Serious study of an Olmsted landscape requires research in the Olmsted archives, available onsite and increasingly accessible electronically. The archives document more than 5,000 projects undertaken by the Olmsted firm between 1859 and 1979. They include more than a million records: 139,000 drawings and plans, 70,000 planting lists, 90,000 photographic prints and negatives, 12,000 lithographs, extensive financial and administrative records, and many other categories of items.

Visitation at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in 2015 was 9,473 with 1,200 third grade students participating in the Good Neighbors program. The Olmsted archives serve thousands of researchers through various on-line platforms, with staff routinely scanning and transmitting plans and other documents in response to researcher requests.

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site also serves as park headquarters for Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site (Cambridge, Massachusetts) and John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site (Brookline, Massachusetts).

