

The Olmsted Archives

Frederick Law Olmsted
National Historic Site
Massachusetts
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



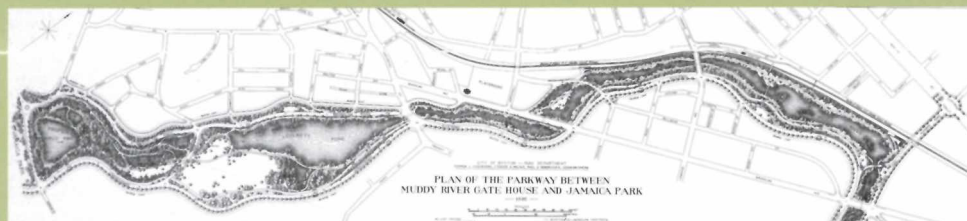
Olmsted Plans and Drawings Collection.
Plan #502-8 Central Park, New York City, NY
Map of the Central Park, 1871.

Enduring Legacy

The **Olmsted Archives** contain close to 1,000,000 original documents and are one of the most heavily researched museum collections in the National Park System. Park and city planners from across the United States use these records each year to rehabilitate and rebuild many of the nation's most significant and beloved landscapes to the lasting benefit of millions of people. Historians, students, and preservation planners use the collection to document historic areas and to produce exhibits, films, and scholarly publications.

The collection includes landscape architectural drawings and plans, plant lists, photographic prints and negatives, lithographs, financial records, job correspondence, and records and reports relating to over 5,000 landscape design projects undertaken by Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted firm. These records document the firm's design work for parks, city and regional planning projects, residential communities, college and school campuses, grounds of public buildings, estates, and exhibits and fairs, including:

- Acadia National Park, Maine
- Atlanta Parks, Georgia
- Baltimore Park System, Maryland
- Boston Park System, Massachusetts
- Buffalo Park System, New York
- Central Park, New York City
- Chicago Park System, Illinois
- Louisville Park System, Kentucky
- Riverside, Chicago, Illinois
- Seattle Park System, Washington
- Stanford University, California
- US Capitol Grounds, Washington, DC
- United States Military Academy, West Point, New York
- White House Grounds, Washington, DC
- World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois.



Olmsted Lithograph Collection.
Olmsted Lithograph #927 Muddy River,
Boston, MA
Plan of the Parkway Between Muddy River
Gate House and Jamaica Park, 1892.

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) is widely recognized as the founder of American landscape architecture and the nation's foremost park maker. At the height of his career, Olmsted established a full-scale professional office in Brookline, Massachusetts, which expanded and continued his landscape design ideals, philosophy, and influence over the course of a century. The Olmsted home and office ("Fairsted") were designated a National Historic Landmark in 1963 and became part of the National Park System in 1979.

The firm that Olmsted established in Brookline played a seminal role in the development of landscape architecture in the United States. It served as a training ground for many landscape architects, and was active in the founding of the American Society of Landscape Architects and in establishing the country's first formal training program in landscape architecture at Harvard University. The firm included the prominent landscape architects John Charles Olmsted (1852–1920), Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870–1957), Charles Eliot (1859–1897), Warren Manning (1860–1938), Henry Sargent Codman (1863–1893), Arthur Shurcliff (1870–1957), James Frederick Dawson (1874–1941), and Henry Vincent Hubbard (1875–1947). ■



Olmsted Photograph Album Collection.
Photo #509-50 Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY
Undated.

The Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park Service, preserves the home, office, landscape, and archival collections associated with Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted landscape architectural firm. The site is open for tours of the historic office wing and exploration of the landscape and on-site exhibits. Staff also provide landscape walks and public programs featuring the firm's work and legacy, and engage young people through curriculum-based programming. Combined with the access to the archives described in this brochure, these offerings work together to enhance appreciation of the Olmsteds' achievements and encourage stewardship of many of America's most valued public spaces. ■

Fairsted, Brookline, MA, as it appears today.
Photo by Steven Sternbach.

The Collections

Landscape Design Records

(1859–1979) help to illustrate the design process for over 5,000 projects undertaken by the firm. The design records contain:

- plans and drawings
- planting lists
- correspondence
- photographs
- lithographs
- published reports.

Plans may include initial surveys and topographic maps, field sketches and notes, as well as several versions of preliminary plans, general plans, planting plans, and presentation drawings. These records also illustrate the Olmsted firm's involvement in horticultural science and the development of the park movement, including the establishment of the National Park Service. ■



Olmsted Photograph Album Collection.
Photograph #274-02-ph002
World's Columbian Exposition,
Chicago, IL
Undated.



Olmsted Photograph Album Collection.
Photograph #529-1732 Fort Tryon Park, New York City, NY
Undated.

Reference Collections

(1839–1974) include extensive study material gathered and used by the Olmsted firm, as well as design examples and information about landscape products. The reference materials contain:

- photographs of international landscapes
- advertisements
- atlases
- nursery catalogs
- reports
- articles
- newspaper clippings
- periodicals
- books.

Administrative Records

(1880–1980) provide additional context for the landscape design process. As a whole, these records document the firm's employment patterns and operational methods. Records in this collection also detail the purchase of specific materials used for landscape design projects.

The collection includes:

- ledger and accounting books
- billing records
- office memoranda
- advertising and promotional literature
- personnel files.

Personal Papers

(1847–1980) include Olmsted family photographs, financial records, professional and personal association records, and selected papers of Olmsted firm principals, including Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870–1957), James Frederick Dawson (1874–1941), and Henry Vincent Hubbard (1875–1947).



Olmsted Employee Scrapbook FRLA15821-123.
The Olmsted Archives personal papers collection includes cartoons drawn by the firm's employees.

Research Appointments

The Olmsted Archives is open to the public Monday through Friday by appointment. Reference assistance, finding aids, and reprographic services are available. Researchers should start their search by going to the Olmsted Research Guide Online (ORGO) at www.redisov.com/olmsted. ORGO provides a complete written inventory of all plans in the Olmsted Archives, as well as references to related documents. After determining the Olmsted job number and project name, the researcher should contact the archives staff for further assistance.

The collections are searchable through finding aids and databases, such as:

- ORGO, the automated online database at www.redisov.com/olmsted
- *The Master List of Design Projects of the Olmsted Firm, 1857–1950* (National Association for Olmsted Parks, 2008).
- additional finding aids at <http://www.nps.gov/frla/olmstedarchives.htm> and https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/sets/



Preservation and Public Access

In 2004, the National Park Service completed a 15-year processing project to make the Olmsted Archives available for public use. Through this project, 138,000 plans and drawings were individually conserved and inventoried. Archivists continue to deepen their understanding of the collections, refining catalog records and developing finding aids. The museum collections also include historic office furnishings and equipment.

The National Park Service is currently pursuing options to digitize the archival collections, including the large-scale plans and drawings, as well as other sought-after records such as the photographs and plant lists. Some digital images are available through a limited in-house digital program. ■



Olmsted plans and drawings collection 1980; stored in protective tubes in a climate-controlled vault; and photograph albums being digitized by National Park Service staff to preserve the files and make them widely accessible.

For appointments, assistance, and information, contact the Olmsted Archives reference staff at:

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site
99 Warren Street, Brookline, Massachusetts 02445
■ Telephone: (617) 566-1689
■ Fax: (617) 232-3964
■ E-mail: frla_olmsted_archives@nps.gov
■ Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/frla>

Accessibility: Wheelchair-accessible parking is available. Please contact the reference staff regarding accommodations for research visits.

