

Design of Exhibits at Fairsted Underway

As the site prepares for reopening in 2011, efforts are underway to design and fabricate new exhibits to occupy the first floor of the historic farmhouse portion of Fairsted—not the office wing. The exhibits are intended to provide a self-guided educational tour to engage both the person who is just learning about Frederick Law Olmsted and the legacy of the Olmsted firm and the more knowledgeable visitor. Designed to complement and introduce the guided tours of the historic office wing and the restored landscape, the exhibits will be organized around three primary interpretive themes: Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., the work of the Olmsted firm, and the Olmsted legacy. The exhibits will also offer some insight into the domestic side of Fairsted. Celena Illuzzi, Interpretive Specialist at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, is the project manager for the exhibit design and installation.

Exhibit planning and design was kicked off last December at an initial day-long stakeholder workshop that included National Park Service staff and the Friends of Fairsted as well as a variety of individuals and organizations with expertise and interest in preserving the Olmsted legacy. At the workshop, the stakeholder group became more familiar with the spaces within the house intended for exhibits and had the opportunity to provide input into both the interpretive themes and exhibit design framework.

Friends of Fairsted - Board of Directors



Seated from left: Pat Suhrcke, Treasurer; Lauren Meier, President; Carol Winkler, Clerk/Secretary. Standing from left: Caroline Loughlin, Arleyn Levee, Henry Lukas, John Furlong, Frances Shedd Fisher, Miriam Jost, Jean Stringham. Absent: Ronni Devon, Allan Galper, Betsy Shure Gross, Patrice Kish. Photo by Jean Stringham.

Working closely with the Harpers Ferry Center, the interpretive design arm of the NPS, Fairsted staff selected the firm of Formations Inc. from Portland, OR, as exhibit designer/fabricator for the project. Formations Inc. has also designed exhibits for the National Steinbeck Center in California.

In addition to the exhibits, visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy a short film about Frederick Law Olmsted's early life experiences and how they influenced his work. They will also find a quiet place to sit in the Conservatory to contemplate the landscape, or, in the Library, they can conduct research and learn about their own community's Olmsted-designed landscapes.

As design has progressed the Friends of Fairsted have remained involved and have provided input along the way, keeping in mind the goal of having the exhibit presentation help visitors understand the importance of the Olmsted firm and the landscapes they created, and develop an understanding of why it is important to protect this legacy today.

Completion of design and installation of the exhibits is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2011.



Friends of Fairsted

Advancing the mission of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

Newsletter

Fall 2010

Archives Return to Fairsted

Following an absence of several years, the portion of the collection that was removed from Fairsted for the construction process is returning—including photographs, correspondence and catalogs. The move from the fine arts storage facility to Fairsted is being done in stages by a fine arts moving company. In anticipation of the collection's return, the rooms of the Olmsted office were cleaned following the National Park Service conservators' protocols, new carpeting was installed in the Research Room (Lower Planting Room), to cover and protect the floor, and the staff offices have been reinstated. The research room furniture is back in place,

including the light stands. The plans and drawings in the vault were never removed and continue in place.

The move is being done at the rate of one or two truck loads a week to ensure proper handling of these valuable materials and will continue through December. With the help of two interns, the staff has been able to keep up with the move and related registration activities.

An Archives Structural Reinforcement Study is proceeding, along with an assessment of the most efficient storage systems for the archives spaces by Einhorn Yaffee Prescott. The archival areas of the building will need rein-

forcement to continue to bear the weight of the collection. Neither this work nor the introduction of any new purpose-designed or purchased archival storage furniture that may result from the study will interfere with the move back or the ultimate service to researchers.

The historic furnishings of the office wing are also being returned. The entire Fairsted staff, including archival staff, has now returned to Fairsted offices. By the end of December all moves back to the building will be complete.

(continued on page 2)

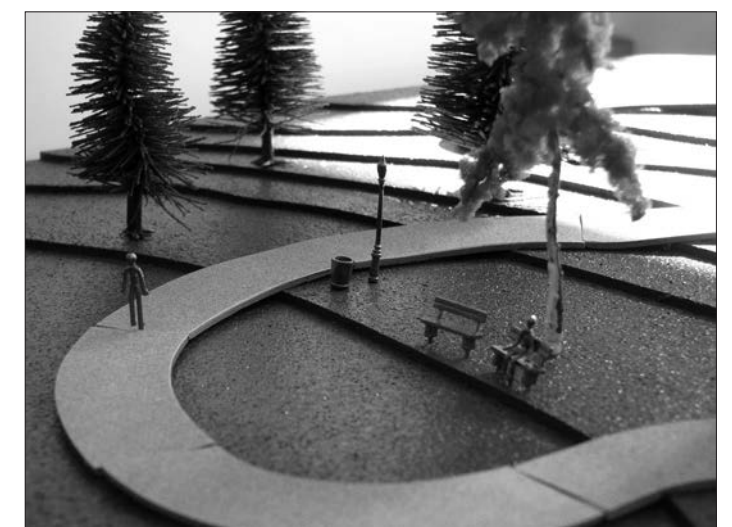
Good Neighbors Welcomes Boston and Brookline Third Graders

2010 was a very good year for the Good Neighbors education program. Fairsted staff introduced Frederick Law Olmsted and the profession of landscape architecture to third grade students from 15 classrooms in Boston and Brookline public schools. Students were welcomed to Fairsted for on-site activities, and staff visited them in their classrooms for pre-visit activities.

Good Neighbors garnered significant support—about \$95,000 in competitive NPS grants—in 2010. Funding supported research for “Tools of the Trade” (one of the pre-visit activities), creation of a new brochure introducing the program to park managers and teachers, bus transportation for eight classes, and the redesign and reproduction of materials for the park design activity.

As the pilot phase of the project approaches its end, Good Neighbors has begun to reach out to new audiences. Fairsted

(continued on page 2)



With help from a model maker, an industrial designer, and a jeweler, the park designed and produced miniature brass benches, lamp posts, play equipment and people for use in the park design activity. Friends of Fairsted purchased park benches and lamp posts. Photo by Celena Illuzzi.

General Management Plan Update

National Park Service staff are working on the new General Management Plan for Fairsted, with input from consultants and focus groups on a variety of subjects, including the archives and transportation to and from the Site. Fairsted staff expects to have a draft available for public comment in the Spring of 2011. The Friends of Fairsted will send an e-mail notification when the draft is available. If you do not already receive e-mail from the Friends of Fairsted and would like to, please send a request to friendsoffairsted@gmail.com.



Fairsted Archives: Source for The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted

Images from the archives at Fairsted will be featured in the next volume of the published Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. The long-awaited volume, *Plans and Photographs of Public Parks, Recreation Grounds, Parkways, Park Systems and Scenic Reservations*, is scheduled for publication in early 2012. A coffee table book format will show plan details of the sketches, preliminary and final plans and historic photographs of the seventy most significant of Olmsted's public parks projects from a variety of sources, including Fairsted. The book will be arranged chronologically based on the earliest date of work in a city, so it will begin with Central Park. It will also include a significant layout on Boston's Emerald Necklace.

The next text volume, due in late 2012 or early 2013, will also feature the Emerald Necklace as well as proposals for the Boston Harbor Islands. Titled *The Early Boston Years, 1882-1890*, this book will include letters from Frederick Law Olmsted to a variety of people and other documents about this work as well as his collaboration with Henry Hobson Richardson on work for the Ames family in North Easton. The volume will also document work elsewhere, including on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, Stanford University and the Niagara Reservation.

Both of these volumes will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press. The Press has already published eight text volumes. Seven volumes cover the time period from 1822 through 1882. Another volume, *Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems*, is not restricted to a particular time period.

The Friends of Fairsted is a member of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, sponsor of the publication of The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. For additional information on the project go to <http://olmsted.org/ht/a/Get-DocumentAction/i/4072>.



Good Neighbors *(continued from page 1)*

staff introduced the program to 97 teachers from Massachusetts. Staff presentations at meetings of the Boston Society of Landscape Architects and the National Association for Olmsted Parks reached another 55 adult learners from across New England and the nation. *Landscape Architecture* magazine, recognizing the value of the Good Neighbors program in raising awareness of the profession of landscape architecture among young people, will be featuring the project in an upcoming issue. By sharing Good Neighbors' fundamental ideas and learning strategies, Fairsted is encouraging other communities to think about the role of parks in building community and to replicate the project in their own school systems.

Historic Resource Study

The Historic Resource Study by Keith Morgan, Hope Cushing and Roger Reed (tentatively titled "Community by Design: The Role of the Frederick Law Olmsted Office in the Suburbanization of Brookline, Massachusetts, 1880 to 1936") is close to final acceptance—all 500+ pages of it. The study documents the physical, intellectual and social environment of Brookline, Massachusetts, that initially drew Frederick Law Olmsted to Brookline and specifically the Green Hill neighborhood, and it explores the subsequent impact of the Olmsteds and their office on the evolution of Brookline. It will be released after copy-editing by the Organization of American Historians, which is collaborating with the National Park Service to produce the study. The report will ultimately be available on-line through the NPS website. Dr. Morgan is also exploring private publication possibilities. All of this is good news to those who enjoyed his lecture last year, as well as those who were unable to attend but are interested in the subject.



Archives Return

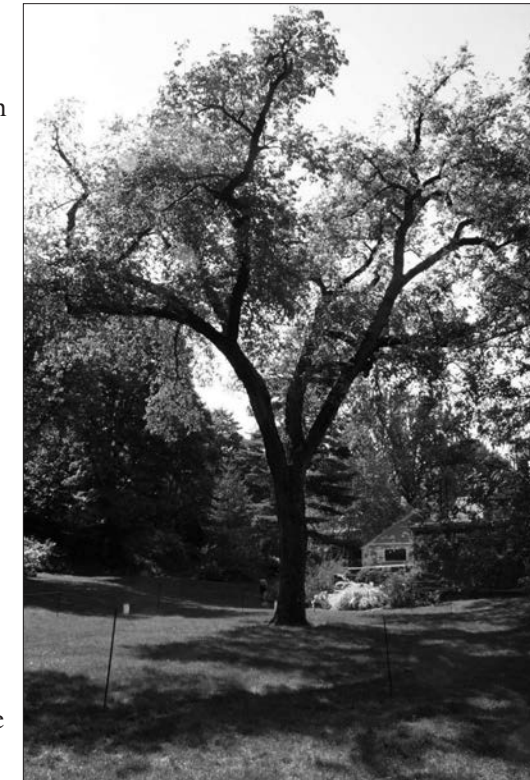
(continued from page 1)

Other Collections News: With funding received some years ago, a firm under contract to the Northeast Museum Services Center provided a report recommending furnishings and objects to be reinstated from the Olmsted Collections into their original locations in the following spaces: Bookkeeping Room, Ladies Lunchroom, Middle Clerical Office/Principal's Office, Shipping Room, Plans Clerk Office, Photo Storage Room. Fairsted staff is now reviewing the recommendations. If the plans could be implemented in the future, the re-furnished spaces would greatly enrich the visitor's experience by illustrating many of the support functions that enabled the firm to function.

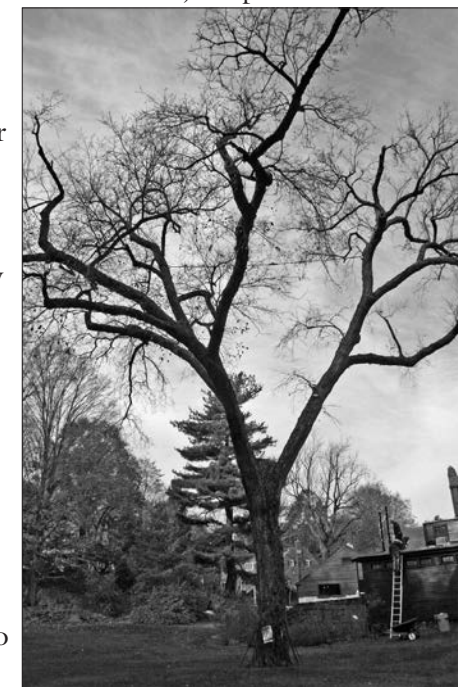
Olmsted Elm in Decline

When Frederick Law Olmsted purchased the small Brookline farmstead from the Clark sisters in 1883, the property contained rolling topography, pasture land, and a few fruit trees and elms. As Olmsted and his step son, John Charles, worked to adapt the property into the residence and office they called "Fairsted," an existing American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) became the centerpiece and organizing element for the sweeping south lawn that is one of the most characteristic design features of the landscape. This "green-sward," with its indeterminate edge, is a small version of the pastoral landscapes found in many of the firm's great parks. Even after Frederick Law Olmsted's death and the firm's expansion and addition to the office wing well into the 1930s, the south lawn remained virtually unchanged and the "Olmsted Elm" continued as one of the most significant features of the landscape. For this reason, the residential side of the Fairsted landscape still illustrates the senior Olmsted's original intentions for the property.

In 1968, the first threat to the elm included the construction of a large swimming pool and brick terrace adjacent to the house; the pool and terrace were promptly removed by the National Park Service shortly after they acquired the property in 1980. While the tree survived the nearby construction, little is known about the damage that may have occurred to its root system. Its advancing age means that the tree has experienced many conditions that are common to over-mature trees or those that are in



May 2010 photograph of the Olmsted Elm, prior to the removal of major limb. Photo by Jean Stringham.



Two views of the Olmsted Elm in November 2010, after limb removal. Photos by Jean Stringham.

senescence. This is, however, the most significant single plant in the Fairsted landscape – it is a symbol and a visual reminder of the Olmsted associations that make this a national historic site.

The NPS has continued to monitor the tree and has taken actions to treat a variety of maladies associated with its advanced age and deteriorating structural condition, and to treat diseases such as Dutch elm disease and fungal infections. Despite constant care and monitoring, the tree experienced branch dieback in 2009, and in July 2010 it developed a significant crack that raised safety concerns and necessitated removal of a major limb. The lawn area under the tree canopy is currently fenced to protect visitors from potential falling debris. Other issues include internal decay that further threatens the structural integrity of the tree.

At present, the condition of the elm is worrisome; it receives weekly monitoring and the NPS continues to provide regular care to extend its life as long as possible. At the same time, the NPS is considering both

long- and short-term plans for its future, such as documenting its history, considering strategies for eventual replacement, and determining the best methods to commemorate this important part of Olmsted's history. For now, we can only hope that the elm tree hangs on as long as possible, until a suitable replacement, which is currently being propagated in collaboration with the Arnold Arboretum, is ready for planting so that Fairsted will always remain the "place of elms."