



Friends of Fairsted

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2012

The Olmsted Firm and the Natural Improvements of Montclair, New Jersey

A Report by the Inaugural Charles E. Beveridge Research Fellowship Recipient, *Barton Ross*

I am honored to have received the first ever Charles E. Beveridge Research Fellowship. It is gratifying that the Friends of Fairsted chose to recognize my project on Montclair, NJ. The 2012 award has already proven to support a very generous and rewarding experience. In August, as part of the Fellowship, I spent three productive days at the Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline examining 111 oversize drawings that were too large to be scanned by the National Park Service (NPS) staff. The NPS Archivists, especially Michele Clark and Mike Dosch, were extremely helpful, making additional copies of research documents and taking me on a delightful tour of the old farmhouse and landscaped grounds.

Since serving as the historic preservation consultant for the Township of Montclair, New Jersey, I have discovered just how important the Olmsted firm was to this prosperous town's early twentieth-century development. John Nolen, the noted landscape architect and ardent follower of Frederick Law Olmsted, wrote a seminal master plan in 1909 entitled, "Montclair: The Preservation of its Natural Beauty and its Improvement as a Residence Town." This book established the planning framework for the unprecedented amount of landscape architecture and park design executed

in the township over the next two decades. These dramatic improvements were never more evident than in the work of the John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., the men responsible for twenty-two projects in the area between the years 1902 and 1930. Nolen predicted in the 1909 Plan that if his proposed recommendations were undertaken, Montclair would be recognized as ". . .the most beautiful suburban town in the world."

Today, Montclair is recognized as one of the most attractive New York suburbs, due in no small part to the executed design work of the Olmsted Brothers. However, over the

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Edgemont Park, Montclair, NJ, 1925 courtesy Township of Montclair Planning Department

Friends of Fairsted

Advancing the mission of Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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This newsletter was prepared by the Friends of Fairsted Communications Committee.

Letter From the President

GREETINGS,

It is both an honor and a pleasure to serve as president of the Board of the Friends of Fairsted this year and I look forward to continued collaborations with the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

The Friends of Fairsted continue to build our partnership with the National Park Service and celebrate their accomplishments and stewardship of Olmsted's home and office, and the associated buildings, grounds, and archives. I was both impressed and appreciative of the tremendous level of expertise and attention to detail demonstrated in the completed interior finishes of the house, which provide an important backdrop to the forthcoming interpretive exhibits, and which will be a featured in an article in our spring newsletter. We look forward to assisting park staff with the full reopening of the site in 2013. Our November lecture by Anita Berrizbeitia was filled to capacity, and I look forward to our second major program featuring Nate Trevethan, of the landscape architecture firm of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates in March. The Board continues to explore ways we can develop and support educational programs devoted to the Olmsted legacy, including the second year of the Charles Beveridge Research Fellowship and celebrations to mark the publication of the forthcoming books, *Community by Design* and *Papers of Frederick Law*

Olmsted, Volume 8: The Early Boston Years, 1882 - 1890.

The Friends will soon be exploring a transition to electronic media. This will also allow us to provide our members with current, up to date information and announcements. We'd love your input. Send an email to let us know how you would like to hear from us and the types of electronic media that you're using. In the meantime, visit our website, www.friendsoffairsted.org to learn more about our activities and programs.

Finally, I want to thank all of you who have generously contributed to the Friends of Fairsted in the past. Your contributions make possible a wide range of public activities such as the lecture series, this newsletter, and financial support we provide directly to the Olmsted National Historic Site and others to enhance public understanding and appreciation of the Olmsted legacy. For example, I was pleased that we were able to offer financial and volunteer assistance for the very successful *Echoes of the Elm* exhibit. I hope you will consider continuing to support our efforts.

I wish all of you a happy holiday season and look forward to seeing you at Fairsted.

Sincerely,
Henry Lukas
President, Friends of Fairsted

Olmsted National Historic Site Seeks New Volunteers

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline is currently recruiting new volunteers to fill several positions in its Division of Education and Visitor Services. Opportunities are available for people with strong interpersonal skills and interest in actively supporting one of our nation's 397 National Park Service sites. Options include working weekdays on the award-winning education program *Good Neighbors: Landscape Design and Community Building* and either weekdays or weekends interacting with visitors coming to explore this local National Park Service site. For further information, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/frla/supportyourpark/volunteer> or contact Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site's volunteer coordinators at 617-566-1689.

Anita Berrizbeitia Delivers Friends of Fairsted Fall Lecture

Anita Berrizbeitia, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, delivered a lecture on the planning of the Metropolitan Park System on November 15 at Wheelock College in Brookline. Her lecture, "Time Made Visible: Charles Eliot and the Planning of the Boston Metropolitan Park System," explored Eliot's method of landscape analysis that used natural process, especially geology, to reveal scenic and ecological value. Her insights into Eliot's methodology, which originated in his work for the Olmsted firm, offered the audience new ways of thinking about landscape diversity. Professor Berrizbeitia was introduced by Professor Keith Morgan of Boston University, author of the introduction to the 1999 reprint of *Charles Eliot, Landscape Architect*, the definitive biography of Eliot by his father, published by the Library of American Landscape History.

The Friends will be sponsoring a lecture in March of 2013 by Nate Trevethan, of the landscape architecture firm of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, on the firm's design of Brooklyn Bridge Park, the park that is emerging from the former industrial pier system on Brooklyn's waterfront. The date for the lecture will be announced soon on the Friends of Fairsted website at www.friendsoffairsted.org.

Friends of Fairsted lectures are free and open to the public, beginning with a reception for the speakers at 6:00 PM followed by the lecture at 7:00 PM.

Friends of Fairsted gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Wheelock College, Arnold Arboretum, Boston Society of Landscape Architects, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, Brookline Historical Society, Charles River Conservancy, The Fenway Alliance, Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery, Friends of the Public Garden, High Street Hill Association, Historic New England, The Landscape Institute of the Boston Architectural College, Library of American Landscape History, Massachusetts Historical Society, Muddy River Restoration Project Maintenance & Management Oversight Committee, National Association for Olmsted Parks, New England Landscape Design and History Association, Society of Architectural Historians, New England Chapter, and The Trustees of Reservations for the 2012-2013 lectures.



Friends of Fairsted Board President Henry Lukas fields questions for Professor Anita Berrizbeitia after her lecture about Charles Eliot's vision of the Boston metropolitan region. Photo by Erica Max

PARK UPDATES

Superintendent's Report

by Myra Harrison, NPS

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site welcomed Scott Hyndman as the new Supervisory Horticulturist for Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Longfellow House – Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, and John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site. Scott holds a Bachelor of Science from Purdue University in horticulture, with a specialization in public garden management. He also attended the Threave School of Practical Gardening at the National Trust of Scotland, and earned top honors when taking the Royal Horticultural Society's general examination in horticulture. He was employed for several years at the U. S. Department of Agriculture, in various horticultural positions, and also has extensive private sector experience. More recently he served as nursery manager at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, Florida, and continued his private horticultural consulting practice. Scott is a member of the South Florida Arborists Guild, and is pursuing certification by the International Society of Arboriculture. We are delighted to have someone of Scott's education, experience and skills join our park team, where he is working with Senior Gardener Mona McKindley and our other grounds staff.

During a brisk and busy three week stretch this fall, 220 third graders and 51 parents took part in the site's award winning program "Good Neighbors; Landscape Design and Community Building." With National Park Service funding received through a competitive funding program, the site is now gearing up to begin a national roll-out of the Good Neighbors programming model. Working in collaboration with the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) and with support from Friends of Fairsted, the site will host a one-week institute this summer to prepare three NAOP member parks and

their school partners to launch Good Neighbors programming in their respective communities.

This fall the site also sponsored five walks with three new offerings: "Olmsted's Brookline Neighborhood, Part 2" (which included Warren and Cottage Streets), "The Arnold Arboretum: Seeds of Conservation," and "The Blue Hills Reservation: Charles Eliot's Master Plan," a program co-sponsored with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. In addition, in September, over 700 people visited the "Echoes of the Olmsted Elm" exhibit on display in the site's recently rehabilitated Olmsted barn.

The Olmsted archives staff continues to respond to numerous research inquiries. During the past year, the staff received 1,481 research requests that led to both on site research appointments and over 23,500 electronic images of Olmsted documents, including plans, photographs and plant lists, sent to researchers. Archives staff are also working on a project sponsored by the National Association for Olmsted Parks and the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks to create a website that will feature an interactive map, essays, and digitized maps, plans and historic photographs related to Olmsted designed landscapes in Washington State.

Winter visitor hours at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site began on November 9, 2012. During the winter and early spring, the site will be open to the walk-in public on Fridays and Saturdays with ranger-led tours offered at 11AM, 12PM, 1 PM, 2PM and 3PM. Groups of 10 or more may call ahead to reserve a tour at other times. For more information please call 617-566-1689 ext. 221. The Olmsted grounds will remain open for self-guided tours 365 days a year from dawn to dusk. A pamphlet guide to the grounds can be found by the visitor entrance.

Olmsted Elm Comes Home as the Centerpiece of RISD Witness Tree Project

Once standing as Fairsted's silent observer, the Olmsted Elm finds new expression through the artistic works of Rhode Island School of Design students.

Long considered by experts to be "irreplaceable and the single most significant element in the Fairsted landscape," the Olmsted Elm ultimately succumbed to old age and disease after decades of decline and was removed late in 2010. For many, it was like the loss of not only a friend, but also Frederick Law Olmsted's signature and an important component of many of his designs.

During the month of September 2012, the Olmsted Elm came home to Fairsted when the site hosted an exhibit of works from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Witness Tree Project, "Echoes of the Olmsted Elm." The wood from fallen witness trees was sent to RISD to be used as a teaching tool in a joint history seminar and furniture studio taught each fall by Daniel Cavicchi,



Using August Lehrecke's Camera Obscura to demonstrate, Park Ranger Alan Banks shows a young visitor how such an optical device worked. Photo by Erica Max



A visitor to the "Echoes of the Olmsted Elm" reads about the thinking that went into Jonah Willcox-Healey's 4x5 Camera and tripod. Photo by Erica Max

associate professor of American studies and Dale Broholm, artist and senior critic in the school's furniture design department. "Witness trees are trees that have been identified by the National Park Service as being witness to a significant historic or cultural event in our nation's history," Broholm explained. "So we get the tree from the park service, bring it into the class, and teach about what the trees have witnessed through seminar and also studio where they (students) create objects that reflect what the trees witnessed." In the case of the Olmsted Elm, according to Park Ranger Mark Swartz, the tree "witnessed a significant piece of history, the residency of Frederick Law Olmsted and the growth of our nation's first prominent landscape architecture firm. It's where the profession got going."

After being approached by a park about a witness tree coming to the end of its life, Cavicchi and Broholm determined a theme appropriate for the site where the witness tree grew, which



Would you like the opportunity to stay connected with the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. Olmsted NHS has created a page on Facebook as a forum for fans to exchange information or share their thoughts and experiences about Fairsted. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/OlmstedNHS>

Witness Tree Project *(continued from previous page)*



Christina Xu's megaphone with a revolver inside titled Noise War makes reference to issues raised by the Occupy movement. Courtesy RISD

in the case of Fairsted was “the politics of urban space.” Students visited Fairsted, studied Olmsted and were given three assignments prompting them to explore Olmsted’s varied occupations and reflect on trends in American recreation and conflicts that arise from use of public space. To complete each assignment, the students then constructed objects from

the elm wood inspired by their research and exploration of the historical context.

The students’ projects ranged from a walking stick to French curves and a level. One student created a fully detailed and functional 4x5 camera and tripod. Inspired by the Occupy movement, student Christina Xu, created a megaphone with a revolver inside titled “Noise War.” In an interview with the Boston Globe, professor Broholm explained, “It’s about public protest and noise becoming a weapon.”

The exhibit, which ran from August 31 through September 27, was well attended, as visitors were interested to witness this final chapter in the saga of the Olmsted Elm. This fall, the Witness Tree Project focuses on wood from felled witness trees at Val-Kill and Springwood, the homes of Eleanor and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. For more information on the Witness Tree Project or to download the exhibit guide, visit <http://www.nps.gov/frla/planyourvisit/elmexhibit.htm>

The Olmsted Firm and the Natural Improvements of Montclair, New Jersey *(continued from page 1)*

decades, the recognition for the firm’s artful hand in the town’s beautification has been lost. As the town’s consultant, I can attest to the sometimes misguided renovations including the alteration of park landscapes and vistas, substitution of tree and planting varieties, and replacement of the original hardscape materials. Currently, only one park, Anderson Park (1903-12), is a designated landmark and subject to design scrutiny by the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission. I believe that if stakeholders were made aware of how historically important these open spaces are, not only to the history of Montclair, but also to the history of landscape architecture, a much more productive dialogue would develop to ensure best preservation practices are employed in their continued maintenance.

Currently, in Montclair, an existing conditions survey is underway for each of the twenty-two projects to ascertain how much of their origi-

nally designed landscape is intact. Following this research period, the goal is to compile the available materials into a published paper to be used by future scholars and researchers on the subject. The invaluable information gained through this Fellowship award should provide the impetus for local nonprofit preservation groups, such as “Friends of Anderson Park,” to fund future National and State Register Nominations. It is hoped these designation reports will lead to local restoration funding and landmark protection status, ensuring the Olmsted designed parks of Montclair will be visited and enjoyed by many proud generations to follow.

Barton Ross of Livingston, New Jersey is the first recipient of the Charles E. Beveridge Fellowship. Mr. Ross is a practicing architect, historic preservationist, and graduate student at Columbia University pursuing a master’s degree in construction administration.

Lauren Meier joins Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted

In September, the National Association for Olmsted Parks and The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted announced the appointment of Lauren Meier as Associate Editor of Supplementary Series, Volume 3 (SS3), the last of the 12-volume series. Charles E. Beveridge is the Series Editor and Editor of SS3. Lauren is the former president of Friends of Fairsted and a current board member. The last volume is a companion to Supplementary Series Volume 2 (SS2), which is devoted to Olmsted’s park work. SS3 will be a richly illustrated compendium of Frederick Law Olmsted’s most important commissions in fifteen categories, including regional planning, residential communities, academic and residential institutions, government buildings, expositions and private estates, with over 300 illustrations including plans and photographs. Some of the best known projects to be included in the volume are the U.S. Capitol grounds (Washington, D.C.), Biltmore estate (Asheville, North Carolina), World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago), Stanford

University (Palo Alto, California), multiple projects for the Ames family (North Easton, Massachusetts) and Olmsted’s home, Fairsted (Brookline, Massachusetts). The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers Project is administered by the National Association for Olmsted Parks, which is leading the completion of the series. Supplementary Series Volume 3 is scheduled to be delivered to Johns Hopkins University Press in early 2014, with a 2015 publication estimate.

The anticipated publication of the companion to SS3, Supplementary Series Volume 2: Plans and Photographs of Public Parks, Recreation Grounds, Parkways, Park Systems and Scenic Reservations, is 2014. Also underway are the two final books in the 9-volume chronological series of Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 8: The Early Boston Years is forthcoming in 2013; Volume 9: The Last Great Projects, 1890-1895 is scheduled for publication in 2015. For more information on the Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, please see <http://www.olmsted.org/flo>.



Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, North Easton. Photo by John Charles Olmsted, November 11, 1902, courtesy NPS, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.



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