



Friends of Fairsted Newsletter

Fall 2014

2014-2015 Lecture Series Explores Divergent Perspectives on Place

Daniel Bluestone, Director of the Preservation Studies Program at Boston University, believes that preservation in the United States has its roots in people's attachment to places. Raised in Roxbury and Newton Centre, Professor Bluestone returns to Boston after thirty years leading prestigious preservation programs at Columbia University and the University of Virginia. His most recent book, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (W.W. Norton, 2011) received the Society of Architectural Historians 2013 Antoinette Forrester Downing Book Award for "the most outstanding publication devoted to historical topics in the preservation field that enhances the understanding and protection of the built environment." For the Fall 2014 Lecture, he will explore the changing theories and practices that have guided designers in building residences within the broader landscape and in shaping landscapes surrounding residences.



Photo: Jack Looney

Daniel Bluestone



Photo: Robyn Ivy

Gary Hilderbrand

Gary Hilderbrand is a Principal of the award-winning firm, Reed Hilderbrand Landscape Architects, and is Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. For the Spring 2015 Lecture, Mr. Hilderbrand will draw from his firm's diverse projects, and illustrate how history and geography are filtered through a modern design aesthetic to create meaningful places.

Keith Morgan, Director of Architecture History in Boston University's Department of Art and Architecture, will moderate both lectures, providing an overview of each speaker's perspective on place.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

"Dwelling in Landscape"
Daniel Bluestone
Thursday, December 11, 2014

"Visible Invisible"
Gary Hilderbrand
Thursday, March 12, 2015

Both lectures are at
Wheelock College
43 Hawes Street
Brookline, Massachusetts

A reception will be held at
6:00 PM, with the lecture
to follow at 7:00 PM.

Seating is limited. RSVP:
friendsoffairsted@gmail.com

Friends of Fairsted Host Open House on June 26

The lawn of Fairsted was the perfect setting for an early summer event hosted by the Friends of Fairsted to celebrate the opening of the new exhibits at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. Titled *Designing for the Future: the Olmsteds and the American Landscape*, the long-awaited exhibits offer a multi-media approach to present the scope and meaning of the Olmsted firm's work. Friends and supporters enjoyed refreshments in the garden and after remarks by the co-presidents of the Friends, Lauren Meier and Patrice Kish, the staff of the Olmsted NHS offered tours of the exhibits.



Friends of Fairsted board member Sarah Peskin, right, with Bill Kelley and Susan Rivers.

2013/2014 Lecture Series Highlights the Value of Large-Scale Planning

Friends of Fairsted
Advancing the mission of
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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Friends of Fairsted
99 Warren Street
Brookline MA 02445
friendsoffairsted@gmail.com
www.friendsoffairsted.org

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



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>.

The virtue of large scale planning was the theme of the 2013-2014 Friends of Fairsted lecture series.

In 1878 Frederick Law Olmsted called Buffalo “the best planned city in the world.” That statement was explored in our Fall 2013 lecture by Francis R. Kowsky, Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus at the State University of New York, Buffalo. Kowsky linked the concepts Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux developed for the Buffalo Park System, most notably park segments linked by parkways, to Olmsted’s work in Boston. Robert Yaro, the dynamic President of

the Regional Plan Association, delivered the Spring 2014 lecture titled “The Shaping of Regions: the New York Regional Plan and the Origins of Planning in America.” Yaro stressed the importance of the work of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. who led the group that created the first regional plan for the New York metropolitan area in 1929. Yaro went on to describe the evolution of that initial effort to the work of the present day Association that encompasses support for regional transportation networks, for the planning and improvement of water supply systems, and for the establishment and protection of greenways and parks.

Clockwise from bottom left: Keeana Saxon, Marc Henry Germaine, Bob Yaro, and Newt Levee.



Friends of Fairsted Receive Grant to Update Website

In March 2014, the Friends of Fairsted received a \$5,000 Every Day Capacity Building Grant through the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) to fund professional design services to update and expand its website. NEEF’s grants are intended to strengthen the stewardship of public lands by providing funding for increasing the organizational capacity of friends groups. The Friends are one of 26 non-profit organizations to receive funding

through the grant program’s Winter 2014 round. The project’s overarching goal is to expand the Friend’s organizational capacity by raising the profile and visibility of the organization through its website. The site will feature a new graphic identity for Friends of Fairsted and will be designed to be responsive to a range of mobile devices. The new website launches in early 2015—email friendsoffairsted@gmail.com to request updates, program announcements and our electronic newsletter.

Beveridge Fellowship Update

Since our last newsletter, the Friends awarded three grants to support Olmsted scholarship through the Charles E. Beveridge Research Fellowship. In 2014, the Friends provided grants to two individuals. Jeongyon (Mimi) Kim of Atlanta, Georgia received the 2014 Beveridge Fellowship for her proposal “The Small Parks of Frederick Law Olmsted.” This research project will focus on the Olmsted firm’s smaller parks, which Kim noted “have left a quieter legacy on the growth of pocket parks throughout American urban and suburban communities.” This proposal highlighted the contemporary relevance of small parks in dense urban areas in terms of enhancing social connectivity and providing environmental benefit. Specific projects to be examined by Kim include Charlesbank, Wood Island Park, Charlestown Heights, Charlestown Playground, North End Park, and Roxbury High Fort, which will inform a scholarly paper consisting of a written analysis supplemented by archival materials and hard-lined plans. Also in 2014, the Friends awarded a research grant to Samuel Valentine for his proposal “What Lies Beneath: Documenting Buffalo’s Buried Quarry Garden and Envisioning its Rebirth.” This research project will focus on a lost feature in Delaware Park, Buffalo, with the goal of informing restoration or interpretation of the Quarry Garden.

Jennifer L. Thomas, a doctoral student in landscape architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, received the 2013 Beveridge Fellowship for her proposal, titled “Madness, Landscape and State-Craft: the Nineteenth Century Insane Asylum System of New York State.” Thomas’s research in the Fairsted archives provided critical primary source material for her dissertation, with a particular focus on the designed landscapes associated with first eight asylums developed in New York between 1843 and 1891. While in Brookline, Thomas investigated McLean Asylum (Belmont, MA), New York State Asylum (Buffalo, NY), Leake & Watts Orphan Asylum (White Plains,

NY), Government Hospital for the Insane (St. Elizabeth’s, Washington, D.C.), Eastern NY State Custodial Asylum (Rockland County, NY), Hartford Insane Asylum (Hartford, CT), and Craig Colony (Soynea, NY).

Barton Ross, the 2012 Beveridge Fellowship recipient is continuing his research on the Olmsted firm in Montclair, NJ. He noted recently “we have made some good progress in Montclair regarding the research work stimulated by the fellowship.” In particular, Barton noted that the research has helped to explain the role of the Olmsted firm related to the design of Anderson Park.

With support from many generous donors, the Friends of Fairsted has increased the grant award to \$1,500. The 2015 application materials are now available online and will be distributed to institutions and organizations this winter.



Men’s gymnasium, Charlesbank (Boston, MA). Photograph 152-40, courtesy National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

The Charles E. Beveridge Research Fellowship honors an eminent scholar, Series Editor of The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, and devoted friend of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Fairsted) and its archives and collections. Applications are due by 4:00PM Wednesday, April 1, 2015.

For more information, visit www.friendsoffairsted.org.

Park Update

by Myra Harrison

In March 2014, much-anticipated new exhibits were installed at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. In 2009, The National Park Service contracted with Formations, Inc., from Portland, Oregon, to design and fabricate new panels and displays for the firm's office entry and the first-story rooms of the Olmsted house. The self-guided exhibits introduce visitors to Frederick Law Olmsted, the profession of landscape architecture and the Olmsted firm, and their landscape design legacy. The displays were designed to engage both the casual and the knowledgeable visitor, and include a new video on the life of Frederick Law Olmsted, as well as two stand-alone interactive programs, "The Life Cycle of a Park" and "Evolution of the Design Firm," for more in-depth learning.

Photos by Jim Higgins, courtesy of NPS/Olmsted NHS.



In May 2014, the Olmsted Archives storage and reference areas were upgraded with new shelving and furniture to allow improved use of the archival collections. The new storage units and furnishings were carefully designed to complement the historic design office surroundings and meet archival storage standards.

Interpretive programming in 2014 explored many facets of the Olmsted story and our visitor numbers continue to grow for both on and off-site programs. "Walks and Talks" remain a very popular way to explore Olmsted landscapes in Boston and beyond. Hilary Clark led a winter tour at the Arnold Arboretum; Brianne Cassetta provided our first walk of Stony Brook Reservation (with MA Department of Conservation and Recreation). In August, a walk of World's End, in partnership with the Boston Harbor Islands and the Trustees of Reservations, was very well attended. This fall, student conservation association intern, Jim Thayer, whose graduate work focused on the Civil War, spoke about Olmsted's work with the United States Sanitary Commission, a less explored side of Olmsted's career. We were also visited by a variety of students in landscape architecture and affiliated programs, including two groups from China, where Olmsted's popularity is growing. Alan Banks continues taking the Olmsted story "on the road" to civic groups and academic programs and has continued working with the Emerald Necklace Conservancy on their work/education program with the MA Department of Correction.

In spite of reduced fall programming due to the government shutdown, Good Neighbors experienced record participation during the 2013-2014 school year. 850 Brookline and Boston students and 80 parents explored the design and real-world impact of landscapes through hands-on experience in Fairsted's landscape, design office, and model shop. Good Neighbors was featured in both the spring and fall editions of the Boston Society of Landscape Architect's Fieldbook.

Fairsted's Interior Finishes Project: Research Highlights

by Carole L. Perrault

During the course of designing the new exhibits for Fairsted, the National Park Service (NPS) did research to learn how the walls and woodwork had been treated historically. In the 20th century, the walls and trim throughout the house and office entry had been painted, most recently in various shades of white. Historical research, combined with architectural investigations and microscopic analysis, revealed that during Frederick Law Olmsted's residency (1883-1898), a richly-toned and textured array of wallpapers, painted finishes, shellacked woodwork, and pigmented pebble-dash stucco had been present in the various rooms of the first floor. Richard Nylander, Curator Emeritus of Historic New England and noted wallpaper historian, when invited to comment, said that this historic evidence presents "a distinctive, unified interior scheme and well expresses the aesthetic of the 1880's, in which nature and art were intertwined and tertiary colors were recommended to provide a background to life rather than to make a bold statement."

NPS Architectural Conservator Carole L. Perrault shares a few highlights of the interior finishes research with us in the following piece.

Photographic Research. Over two dozen interior photographs of Fairsted, dating between 1885 and 1904, are extant in the various archival collections containing family records. The images offer not only a glimpse into the Olmsted family's interior decorating tastes, but also how they used the rooms. A handful of these photographs catch a family member in some activity, while a few are staged portraits where the subject of the photograph was asked to either look directly into the camera or to cast the gaze off to the side toward some introspective space. The room portraits, without a human face, are particularly evocative. They appear to capture the photographer's wistful desire to record the room's decoration for some future viewer. Over a century later, these photographs have collectively assisted the NPS in recapturing the Olmsteds'

home decorating aesthetic to the time when they put down their roots at 99 Warren Street in 1883 and proceeded to fashionably renovate the 1810 house they had purchased for both home and office use.

The photographic cameos of Fairsted's domestic spaces decidedly celebrate the artful interior that was being promoted by the American Aesthetic Movement. [Figure 1] The objects the Olmsteds chose to artfully display in their home were an eclectic representation of eastern and western cultures. The family's domestic spaces were skillfully and subtly arranged by guiding principles that celebrated harmony of form, color, and texture—harmony within each individual room, harmony among the related spaces, and harmony with the surrounding landscape. Clearly, the aesthetic the Olmsteds carried with them in designing landscapes was carried inside to their home decoration choices. Harmony of the whole was a key aspiration.



Architectural Investigations. Behind bookcases, door trim and later wall treatments in five of the rooms slated for exhibits were uncovered fragments of historic wallcoverings. [Figure 2] Four of the five fragments were wallpapers, while one was burlap. [Figure 3] Three of the wallcoverings were installed as part of the Olmsteds' remodeling of Fairsted in 1883-1884—north entry hall

Carole L. Perrault is a Senior Architectural Conservator with the National Park Service, Northeast Region, Historic Architecture, Conservation and Engineering Center, Lowell, MA.

Figure 1. Aesthetic Movement Interior. John Charles Olmsted reading in the family library at Fairsted, March 29, 1885. The small photograph propped on the mantel is of the family's sitting room. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Graduate School of Design.



Figure 3. History Revealed. Wallpaper installed in 1883 was uncovered behind a late-19th century bookcase in the family's library at Fairsted. Here the fragments are being removed for conservation and reproduction by a Studio TKM conservator. Note the corresponding woodwork's historic decorative paint treatment. Photographed by Carole Perrault, November 2010.

(1), sitting room (2), and library (3); while two were installed slightly later, coinciding with the extension of the north parlor/front office (4) and the renovation of the front central hall (5). Only the dining room, known to have been papered above the chair rail, did not divulge a fragment to sleuthing eyes.

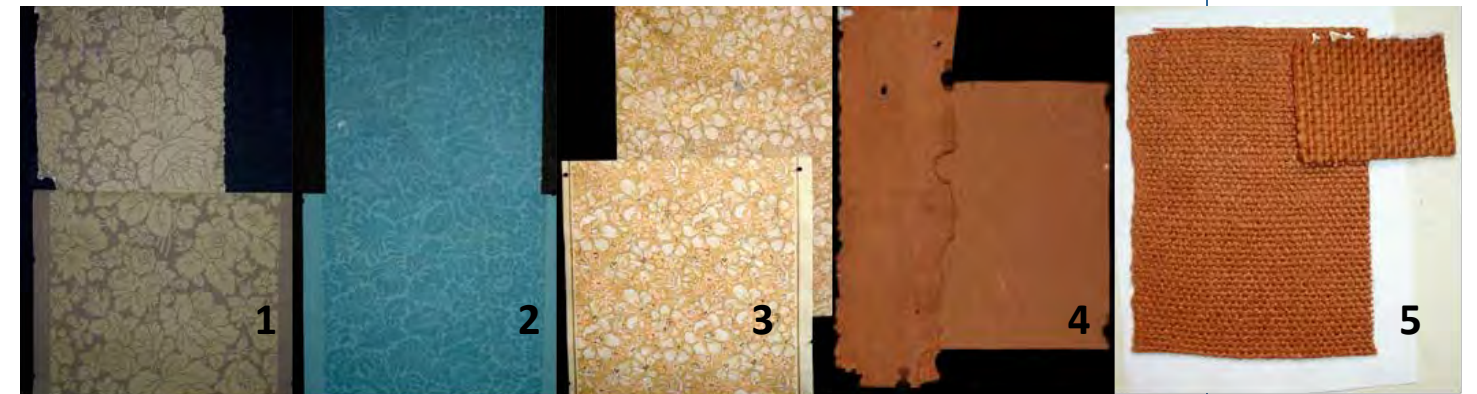
The revealed north entry hall and sitting room papers are printed with an all-over foliage pattern in two shades of one color—olive green for the north entry hall (1) and blue green for the sitting room (2). The revealed library paper (3) consists of a stylized floral pattern printed on embossed paper in seven colors with bronzing. The revealed north parlor/front office fragment is a pale taupe ingrain paper (4), while the revealed plain burlap of the front central hall is dyed a shade of burnt sienna (5). The wallcoverings are those visible in the historic photographs and are thought to have remained in place well into the 20th century. Microscopic paint and finishes analyses were performed to determine the corresponding period trim colors and treatments.

The revealed wallcoverings at Fairsted typify the stylistic shift that took place in American wallpaper taste in the 1880s—a shift from the popular French naturalistic wallpapers to that

of English Reform Movement papers, as best exemplified by William Morris, Walter Crane, and Christopher Dresser. Explicitly, the swing was from large-scale three-dimensional patterns to smaller-scale, flat, conventional (non-representational) patterns that more honestly suggested the materials used and the surfaces decorated. The wallpaper patterns that the Olmsteds selected for their domestic spaces were derived from nature and were consciously designed to be background papers. They evoked an intentional quietude that was imparted both by the subject matter and by patterns that would grow barely discernible at a distance. The tertiary colors that dominate the palette were promoted by reform tastemakers and were a product of period advancements in the manufacture of paints and in color theory that was grounded in science.

Textual Research. The gnawing interior finishes questions, unanswered in Fairsted's historic structure report or by in-situ architectural research and photographic research, led the researcher to undertake a limited amount of narrowly-focused textual research for answers. The research provided some insight into the who, the what, and the why of the interior treatments chosen by the Olmsteds.

When Frederick Law Olmsted moved his family to 99 Warren Street in 1883, he was 61, and his wife, Mary, was 53. Family correspondence suggests that Mary Olmsted and her adult children, John and Marion, had definite opinions about wall treatments and home furnishings, and they did not always concur with one another in matters of taste. As was typical for a well-traveled and sophisticated family of comfortable means of this time period, they each carried with them a well-studied and refined sense of taste—a taste that reflected an understanding and critical eye of current trends in home decoration and furnishings. This notion is best realized through the lens of two sets of John's correspondence, written twenty years apart.



During the winter of 1877-78, John visited London. In lengthy letters back home to his father, John wrote in exquisite detail, and with much personal commentary, of his exploration into the decorative arts. He visited the Jeffrey & Co wallpaper manufactory, where he described looking over a number of designs by Walter Crane, Dr. Dresser, and others, and of being shown the factory. He wrote of visiting upholstery and carpet companies, furniture factories and shops and architectural glass studios, of spending time in the Royal Architectural Museum at Westminster, and of attending lectures on decorative ornament at the Architectural Association. He concluded that what needed remedying "is the taste of the masses and that of manufacturers of cheap wares." John further expressed that he felt it "much easier to design pleasing effects by using imitations of nature than conventional decorations suggesting nature." He felt the "latter must be a higher art and be more satisfactory if well done." He told his father that he took good notes and he would tell him more on his return.

In the winter of 1898-99, John, at 46 years old, was preparing to marry for the first time. Through letters he exchanged with his fiancée, Sophia "Fidie" White, we are given further insight into John's taste and critical judgment in regard to home decoration and, more importantly, how that taste was realized at Fairsted. In late 1898, John and Fidie had leased a house at 16 Warren Street, where they would reside following their marriage in January 1899. John was

often traveling for the landscape design office, so to his fiancée fell the responsibility of decorating their home-to-be. Fidie felt insecure in this role. John offered guidance and recommended that she enlist his sister, Marion, who, both brothers acknowledged, had a good color sense and had inherited an unusual ability in matters of taste. John admitted that he did "set a good deal of store upon the wallpapers and carpets and curtains," adding that he preferred "either uniform tints like cartridge or butcher paper or builders paper or else simple all over foliage patterns in two shades of one color—like our house [Fairsted] in short, or rather I should say our dining room and parlor and halls." He concluded by noting "that the home I am leaving [Fairsted] is more nearly to my taste than any other I know of that is not beyond my reach. I particularly like books in plain dark wooden bookcases..." This correspondence confirmed for us the ingrain paper found in the North Parlor/Front Office, it confirmed the all-over foliage patterns in two shades of one color found in the sitting room and hall, and more importantly, it confirmed that the elusive paper on the dining room wall (above the chair rail) was a similarly designed paper to those in the sitting room and hall.

Building on the research of the NPS, a diverse team of highly skilled conservators and artisans set out to recapture the finishes of the Olmsted's era. Their work yielded beautifully re-created finishes that provide a meaningful contextual background for the newly installed contemporary exhibits.

Figure 3. Harmony of the Whole. Fragments of historic wallpaper revealed during in-situ architectural investigations at Fairsted are aligned here adjacent to 2011 reproductions. From left to right: North Entry Hall (1), Sitting Room (2), Library (3), North Parlor/Front Office (4), and Front Central Hall (5). Photographed by Studio TKM, 2011.

Notes:

Ingrain is a color through paper, generally of uniform tint.

Historic quotes are from the John Charles Olmsted Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Friends of Fairsted
99 Warren Street
Brookline MA 02445



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Boston University, Department of History of Art and Architecture
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