

Development of Landscape Architecture and Design from 1840-1940 - Malcolm D. Cairns

I. Introduction

- A. The American Colonial and early Federal eras imported to the New World English, French, Italian, and Spanish traditions of landscape and garden design.
- B. The following century is noteworthy for its innovation through the design of estates, rural cemeteries, public parks, parkways, state and national preserves, town plans, and residential subdivisions.
- C. Landscape design in the United States flourished in the years 1840-1940, evolving into the profession of landscape architecture, highlighted by the founding of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899.

II. Andrew Jackson Downing

- A. The emerging practice of American landscape architecture paralleled populist and nationalist movements of the mid-1800s
- B. Andrew Jackson Downing is noteworthy for his contributions to the development of the professional practice of landscape architecture by carefully connecting landscape design to American cultural parallels of the time, and particularly elevating landscape gardening as a fine art of rural life in the countryside
- C. Downing wrote books of design with illustrations for rural cottages and estate residences
- D. His designs provided an American application of English romantic or the natural style of landscape design
- E. He was inspired in the works of Humphrey Repton, Uvedale Price, and George Loudon. Downing praised their taste in landscape gardening as cultivated and elegant. Many of the finest parks and pleasure grounds of the English gentry bore witness to the skill and harmony of their designs
- F. To Downing and others of his time the extension of the example of landscape gardening for country estates to the design of public spaces was logical

- G. The popularity of rural cemeteries provided ample evidence that landscapes created in this romantic style of English aristocratic rural estates was desirable for creating public open spaces in America for public enjoyment

III. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.

- A. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. is the father of American Landscape Architecture
- B. Olmsted was a writer, a scientific farmer, and social reformer
- C. He won the 1857 competition with architect Calvert Vaux to design Central Park in New York City
- D. Olmsted and Vaux went on to design numerous city parks, subdivisions, and campus plans, among them are Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1865), the South Parks of Chicago (1871), Mount Royal park in Montreal (1874), and Belle Isle Park in Detroit (1881)
- E. Olmsted was the landscape architect for the World's Columbian Exposition (1893) in Chicago, the campus plan for Stanford University, the U. S. Capitol grounds, and the Emerald Necklace around Boston, an innovative interconnected system of parks, drives, and scenic parkways
- F. Olmsted believed in the therapeutic qualities of the rural landscape and sought to provide parks as a means to find relief from the crowded and polluted city centers
- G. His design for the village of Riverside in the suburbs of Chicago created a pastoral setting for families to live in domestic tranquility removed from the city hustle, filth, and noise
- H. Olmsted was an advocate for the preservation of natural scenery and is generally credited for saving Niagara Falls and Yosemite Valley from exploitation, creating the foundation on which the National Park Service is based
- I. The Olmsted association with landscape architecture as a fine art was carried on through the extensive work of his sons, John Charles and Frederick Law Jr

IV. Rural Cemeteries

- A. The American Rural, Romantic, or Garden Cemetery movement evolved in part as a reaction to overcrowded, often unsanitary conditions in church and public burial grounds
- B. The rural cemetery downplayed the prominence of individual grave markers, and became characterized by flowing lines of drives and paths, the massing of trees into picturesque and pastoral groupings, and views into the distant landscape
- C. Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston (1831) is a prominent early example of the design of a rural garden cemetery, emulating the landscape designs for English aristocratic estates such as Stowe and Stourhead
- D. Spring Grove Cemetery (1845) in Cincinnati is another example
- E. For Graceland Cemetery at Chicago, O. C. Simonds advocated planting native plants, becoming the forerunner of the Midwest Prairie Style of landscape design, popularized by Jens Jensen in his designs for park and estate landscapes
- F. These precedents led to the landscape scenery type of cemetery without vertical funeral architecture and monuments, such as Forest Lawn in Los Angeles (1916)

V. Parks

- A. The nineteenth century romantic or naturalistic era in the arts drew inspiration from the natural beauty of the American landscape from which emerged a uniquely American designed landscape – the public park
- B. Unlike the private royal hunting parks of Europe, such as the Chateau of Fontainebleau in France or a nobleman’s private parkland, such as that designed by Prince von Puckler-Muskau for his own enjoyment in Germany, America parks were created for public use

- C. Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, England, was the first park developed from public funds, and became the inspiration for New York Central Park (1857)
- D. Fundamental to the design of public parks in America was the presumed uplifting effect of rural scenery in the midst of crowded, dirty, and polluted cities
- E. By the 1880s, the concept of a single public park extended to systems of parks interconnected by parkways. The Emerald Necklace of Boston (F. L. Olmsted & Charles Eliot, 1894) is an excellent example of an interconnected urban rural park system
- F. George Kessler is notable in the expansion of the City Beautiful ideal to creating civic designs for park systems in Kansas City, Denver, Dallas, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis of urban architectural character as a framework for urban development
- G. The popularity of rural nature continued beyond the cities to preserving natural scenery for recreational opportunities. Yellowstone (1872) became the first national park and a state park movement followed.

VI. Residential Communities

- A. Nineteenth century landscape architecture expanded to create designed landscapes in which people lived.
- B. The Chicago suburb of Riverside (1869) designed by Olmsted and Vaux is an early example of a master planned community. Others preceded it and many more followed, but this is an outstanding suburban model of a designed landscape as a residential community for the wealthy.
- C. Forest Hills and Sunnyside Gardens are examples of Progressive era landscape planning of residential communities extending the benefits for middle and lower income families

VII. Estates

- A. The design of American country estates of the wealthy created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the outskirts of industrial cities were based on the European examples of French chateau, Italian villas, English country manors, or Spanish haciendas
- B. In the preceding era of colonial America, these estates were of Renaissance design with long live oak allés, and formal parterres
- C. The later estates were suburban homes and retreats from the industrial city
- D. The Vanderbilt Mansion at Ashville, North Carolina, the Biltmore is an example of the grandeur at the pinnacle of the romantic era in estate design.
- E. Estate landscape developed from 1889-1930 were part of an unparalleled era of economic growth in America resulting in unrestrained displays of wealth.
- F. It also was a time when landscape architecture flourished as a fine art in the integral composition of house and garden architecture that typify this as a golden age of American landscape design, brought to an end in the stock market crash of 1929

VIII. Federal Programs of the New Deal

- A. The Great Depression of the 1930s led to a great advancement in American landscape architecture as President Roosevelt's New Deal program prominently featured landscape architecture
- B. The New Deal programs remain as enduring landmarks of the time
- C. Transportation projects created the Blue-Pidge Parkway and Skyline Drive in Virginia and North Carolina
- D. Resettlement programs created Greenbelt, Maryland, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin
- E. Recreation programs created the state park system of Florida, and all across the nation

IX. Modernism

- A. The modern movement in design arts emerged

- B. There is a waning of interest in University landscape design curricula based on the Ecole des Beaux Arts axial symmetry, rules of order, vistas, and allés popular in the Country Place and City Beautiful eras
- C. Streamline symmetry of the Modern Style emerges
- D. The landscape designs of Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo, Lawrence Halprin, and James Rose ushered in the modern era, turning its back on tradition and symmetry
- E. Devoid of classical ornamentation, asymmetrical balance, an emphasis on functionality, and adaptations to the more casual lifestyles characterize Modern landscape architecture of mid-twentieth century America

X. Conclusion

- A. World War II created modernization and efficiency in American landscape architecture, ending the romantic attraction to nature, or at least put it to rest until would rise again in the 1960s