



Friends of Fairsted

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2011

Friends of Fairsted Presents Pair of Lectures

Friends of Fairsted announces a pair of lectures on the theme “Designing Communities: The Olmsted Legacy in Shaping the American Landscape”. The Friends Program Committee developed this theme to build upon our 2009 lecture by Keith Morgan, which considered the Olmsted firm’s involvement in the suburban development patterns of Brookline. Over the decades of their practice, the Olmsted firm’s numerous projects for public, institutional and private clients across the country indelibly shaped the appearance and organization of urban and suburban environments. The 2011-12 lectures begin on November 17, 2011, with an exploration of the firm’s role in shaping Washington, D.C., as landscape historian Arleyn A. Levee presents “The Enduring Design Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. in the Nation’s Capital.”

In 1900, Washington, D.C., was far from the artistic ideals set forth by Pierre L’Enfant in his 1791 plan. To recapture this vision for a city of monumental buildings and grand spaces, the Senate Park Commission and later the Commission of Fine Arts, was appointed, with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. as the youngest member. Over the following five decades, Olmsted and colleagues expanded upon L’Enfant’s ideals, to ensure an American capital city that was both an iconic representation of a powerful nation and a functional environment for its inhabitants and visitors. Ms. Levee explored this complex topic in a study prepared in 2010 for the Centennial of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. That study will be included in a volume planned for 2012 publication, entitled *A Centennial History of the U. S. Commission of Fine Arts*.

On March 15, 2012, Ethan Carr, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, continues our exploration of the Olmsted legacy in urban and suburban design. His presentation, “Frederick Law Olmsted 1882-1890: Boston, Brookline

and Beyond,” is based on his work as editor of Volume 8 of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: The Early Boston Years, 1882—1890*. Carr’s talk provides an insider’s look at the process of preparing the volume including new and revealing details of the Olmsted firm’s work on the Boston Park System. Friends of Fairsted has supported publication of the volume, forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press in 2012.



Landscape historian Arleyn A. Levee

Both lectures are free and open to the public, beginning with a reception for the speakers at 6:00PM followed by the lecture at 7:00PM at Wheelock College, 43 Hawes Street in Brookline. Reservations may be made at 617-566-1689, ext. 265 or by e-mail to friendsoffairsted@gmail.com.

Friends of Fairsted Program Committee (Phyllis Andersen, Arleyn Levee, Caroline Loughlin, Frances Shedd Fisher, Jean Stringham and Pat Suhrcke) gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; Wheelock College; the Boston Society of Landscape Architects; Brookline GreenSpace Alliance; the Brookline Historical Society; Emerald Necklace Conservancy; The Fenway Alliance; the High Street Hill Association; Historic New England; The Landscape Institute of the Boston Architectural College; the Massachusetts Historical Society; Mount Auburn Cemetery; the Muddy River Restoration Project—Maintenance & Management Oversight Committee; the National Association for Olmsted Parks; the Society of Architectural Historians, New England Chapter; and The Trustees of Reservations.

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.



Former Friends of Fairsted board member
Betsy Shure Gross

Report on the Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted

The long-awaited volume of illustrations of parks and other projects, known as Supplementary Series Volume 2, is in the hands of the publisher, Johns Hopkins University Press, which is looking for contributions that can be used to keep down the price of the book. The Press expects to have the volume available for sale in late 2012 or early 2013.

The next text volume, *The Early Boston Years, 1882-1890*, Volume 8 in the series, will go to the publisher before the end of 2011. Editorial work has begun on the last text volume, *The Last Great Projects, 1890-1895*, Volume 9 in the series.

The volume editor, David Schuyler, of Franklin and Marshall University, has a long association with the project, beginning as assistant editor for Volume 2, which was published in 1981. He reports that the work is going well and expects that the volume will be published in 2015. Projects in the volume include the work at the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and other work in Chicago, as well as parks systems in Louisville, KY, and elsewhere.

For more information on the series, visit the Papers project website at www.OlmstedPapers.org.

Former Board Member Honored for Exceptional Spirit and Leadership

On October 6th at a gala event at the Museum of Fine Arts, former Friends of Fairsted board member and long time historic landscape preservation advocate Betsy Shure Gross was among twelve individuals honored by The Fenway Alliance of Boston for demonstrating exceptional spirit and visionary leadership in

contributing to the cultural vitality of the Fenway community. As a renowned environmentalist and community preservationist, Ms. Shure Gross was celebrated for her long-time activism in efforts to preserve the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted and for her role in transforming historic public landscapes throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Over the years, Ms. Shure Gross has earned various accolades for her work, including the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service award

for Outstanding Contribution to the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; the Garden Club of America's award for Outstanding Achievement in Conservation, Preservation and Stewardship of Open Space; and the Massachusetts Conservation Council's award for Most Valuable Contribution to Conservation through Land Conservation.

Remaining a dedicated advocate, she currently serves on the leadership council of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, as well as on the boards of City Parks Alliance, Boston Harbor Islands Alliance, Massachusetts League of Environmental Voters and High Street Hill Neighborhood Association. She also serves as vice chair of the Muddy River Maintenance and Management Oversight Committee, co-president of Friends of Hall's Pond Nature Sanctuary and advisor to the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance.

For a complete list of individuals honored by The Fenway Alliance please go to fenwayalliance.blogspot.com/p/faces.html

Community by Design Publication Forthcoming

The Library of American Landscape History (LALH), in partnership with the University of Massachusetts Press, will publish a new work, tentatively titled *Community by Design: The Role of the Frederick Law Olmsted Office in the Suburbanization of Brookline, Massachusetts, 1880-1936* by Keith Morgan, Elizabeth Hope Cushing and Roger Reed. The book builds on a historic study commissioned by the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. It provides an insightful examination of the designers and horticulturists living in Brookline, with a focus on the relationship between the Olmsted office and other design professionals in the Green Hill neighborhood. The Friends of Fairsted has awarded LALH a grant to help support the design and editing of the manuscript. This publication will provide more detail than lead author Keith Morgan was able to include in his lecture for the Friends of Fairsted.

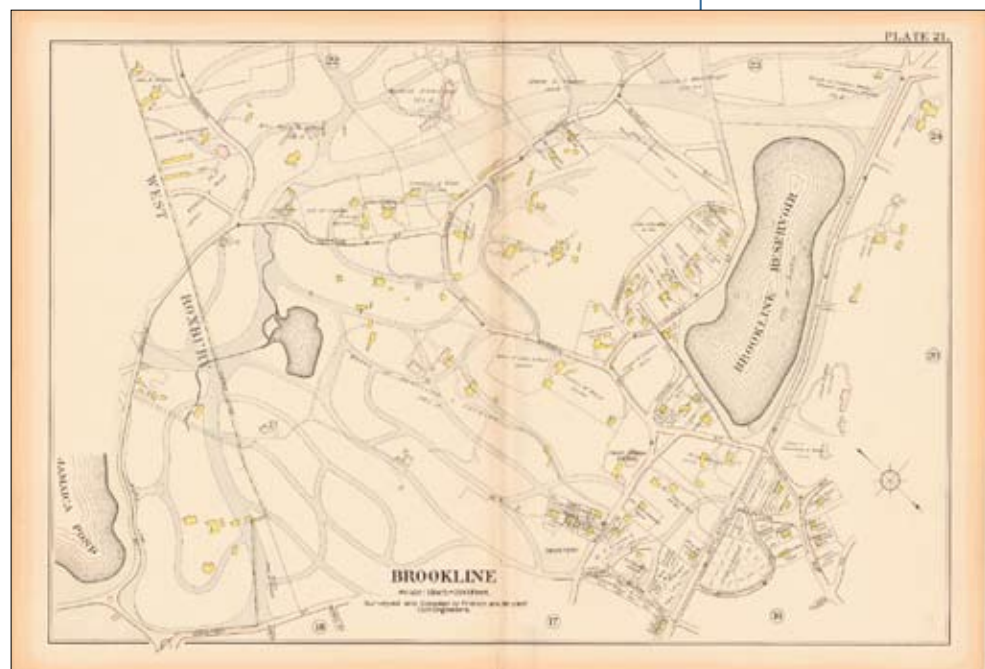
Currently anticipated in early 2013, *Community by Design* is modeled on the award-winning monograph, *A Modern Arcadia, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), continuing the body of knowledge on the role of the Olmsted firm in early 20th century community planning. Together, the authors bring a remarkable range of scholarship in areas such as architecture, landscape architecture and planning, with a special emphasis in this book on collaborations between the Olmsted firm and architects such as H. H. Richardson; Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge; and Peabody & Stearns. *Community by Design* examines the reasons for Frederick

Law Olmsted's relocation to Brookline from New York, and describes the work of the firm in more than 150 commissions in Brookline, executed between 1880 and 1936. The richly illustrated narrative also documents a rapidly growing suburb and the challenges this presented to the Olmsted firm, whose ideal vision of the American suburb was originally defined by Olmsted Sr., but which evolved substantially under the direction of his sons and others in the later firm. As Robin Karson noted in the manuscript abstract, as the nation continues to debate the cultural significance and environmental impact of suburbia, this book will fill a gap in the professional literature particularly with respect to the history of Brookline.

The Friends of Fairsted participation is made possible by donations and will be acknowledged in the volume. Friends president Lauren Meier said, "I am very pleased that we are able to support this important publication."

New Friends of Fairsted Grant Program!

The Friends of Fairsted has established a grant program to support publications, programs, exhibits, education materials or other media that advance the knowledge and appreciation of the Olmsted legacy and that support the mission of Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. This new initiative begins in 2011 with funding to the Library of American Landscape History to support the publication of *Community by Design* by Keith Morgan, Elizabeth Hope Cushing and Roger Reed. Requests for funding will be considered by application and invitation, as the budget allows. This new program provides clear guidelines and criteria for those seeking funding. For more information, please see the grant program guidelines and application posted on the Friends of Fairsted website www.friendsoffairsted.org.



Atlas of the Town of Brookline, Surveyed and Compiled by French & Bryant, Civil Engineers, 1897

PARK UPDATES

The Olmsted Elm Lives On



On Monday, September 26th students and faculty from the Witness Tree Project, a collaborative project between the National Park Service and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), visited Fairsted to learn more about the Olmsted Elm, its remaining stump and its environment. Witness trees are those defined by the National Park Service as having been present

during significant events or trends in American history. The project combines a history seminar and studio course to study 19th century urbanization and reform. Final products from the project, which will include art objects crafted from the elm's wood, will ultimately be exhibited.

At the same time, propagation of the cuttings from the original tree continues at the Arnold Arboretum. As of this summer there were forty cuttings three inches tall, not all of which have rooted. The plan is to keep them in cold

storage over the winter and in February or March plant them for slow growth on their own. The cuttings will be moved out of the Arboretum to a nursery for planting. The success rate is expected to be less than fifty percent, typical of this difficult process.

In case propagation of a viable clone does not prove possible, Olmsted NHS staff have collected elm seedlings from the site that could provide a new elm that is genetically related, though not genetically identical, as a backup option. These should prove significantly easier to propagate, with a success rate of ninety percent. The last option would be to plant a disease-tolerant hybrid elm variety that might be trained to look similar to a classic American elm. The choice of variety would benefit from research on elm varieties being done by the NPS in Washington, D.C., at this time.

The loss of the Olmsted Elm was significant and, to many, extremely sad. One benefit has developed, however, and that is the conversation generated around strategies for honoring and replacing other mature trees at the site that will inevitably decline at some point.



Above: RISD faculty member Dale Broholm, and a student from the Witness Tree Project course looking at the Olmsted Elm during the class visit on September 26.

Right: RISD Witness Tree Project course students examine Olmsted Elm stump during September 26 visit to Fairsted.

Both photos by Matt Griffing. Courtesy of National Park Service/Frederick Law Olmsted NHS.



New Interior Finishes at Fairsted

The National Park Service is nearing completion on interior finishes in the first floor of the house, which will be the location for new self-guided exhibits. These new finishes, including wallpapers, paint and the original varnish finish on the paneling in the office entry, reflect the aesthetics of the Olmsted family during their residency, particularly in the north parlor, sitting room, library and halls where the new exhibits will be installed. The dramatic change, with deep rich tones, accentuates the architectural character of the interiors and provides a visually interesting framework for the new exhibits.

The work is the result of careful research and implementation, led by Carole Perrault, Architectural Historian and Conservator with

Perhaps the greatest challenge, and most labor-intensive element of the project, is recapturing the original finish in the front entrance to the house and office. Here, paint had been applied to the original, historic cypress washboard paneling. Over several months, Brigid M. Sullivan, Chief Conservator with the Northeast Museum Services Center of the NPS, carefully removed the paint and then carefully restored the wood to its original appearance. The result is truly remarkable.

At this time, work on the plant room (also called the conservatory) is still underway. Conservators are

faux painting the rustic stucco, after the NPS determined that removing the paint would damage the original material. This work on the historic interior finishes has been a tremendous inter-disciplinary undertaking, including scholars, conservators, fabricators, park staff and interns, who all participated in different aspects of the work. More information, including a list of all individuals who contributed, will soon be posted on the park's website.



Top: Brigid Sullivan, Chief Conservator, NPS Northeast Museum Services Center restoring the original finish of the cypress washboard paneling in the office entrance.

Left: New painted trim and wainscot with blue floral wallpaper fabricated under the supervision of T.J. McClintock in the house sitting room.

Bottom right: New brown wallpaper in the north parlor, fabricated under the supervision of T.J. McClintock.

All photos by Lauren Meier



the National Park Service. According to Richard Nylander, Curator Emeritus of Historic New England, who consulted on the project, the paint colors and wall covers reflect forward-thinking tastes of the late 19th century. T. J. McClintock supervised the fabrication and installation of the wallpapers, which include two patterns in the library and sitting room, and solid colors in the north parlor and hall. Appropriate trim colors complement the paper in each of these rooms. While the color choices vary dramatically from room to room – together they feel coordinated and welcoming.



Good Neighbors Honored by Boston Society of Landscape Architects

On April 28, 2011, the Boston Society of Landscape Architects (BSLA) honored *Good Neighbors: Landscape Design & Community Building* with an Award of Excellence in Communications. Liza Stearns, Education Specialist at Frederick Law Olmsted NHS has been leading the development of this innovative multidisciplinary third-grade curriculum, and Friends of Fairsted is proud to be one of many partners that support this innovative program, providing volunteer support, funding for materials and curriculum assistance.

Below: Students from the Heath School in Brookline react to a park design created by classmates.



At right: Students take a moment from their design work to consider the sensitive relationship between hardscape and softscape.

Photos by Joel Veak. Courtesy of the NPS, Olmsted NHS.



This BSLA award comes just as the program is finalizing the last components of the curriculum. With the re-opening of the office wing at Fairsted, the NPS is continuing to develop the curriculum to demonstrate the steps involved in designing a landscape—from civil engineering to plant material selection. Other elements of the program, already in practice, introduce image-rich and inquiry-based discussion on Frederick Law Olmsted and the profession of landscape architecture. Specific activities at Fairsted explore the art and science of landscape design, including understanding how the selection and placement of design elements enhances the look, feel and function of a place. In the model shop at Fairsted, students have the opportunity to work in teams to design a park, based on a hypothetical client's needs. The individual team models are combined together, with much fanfare, to create one united community park. In 2011, field trips to the Fairsted grounds and model shop were attended by 420 third-graders from 17 classrooms. The last component, visits to one of two landscape architecture offices, highlights the professional practice today, including the role of computers and models in the creative design process. In June, Friends of Fairsted President Lauren Meier welcomed a third grade class from the William Henderson Inclusion

School in Dorchester to her office at Pressley Associates, where the students experienced what it's like to be a landscape architect in 2011. One third-grader summed up the experience as he left the landscape architecture firm "Thank you for introducing me to my future profession!"

The award citation noted that *Good Neighbors* engaged students with a variety of learning styles, making both

Continued on next page

Good Neighbors Honored by Boston Society of Landscape Architects

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the process of landscape architecture and its value in creating healthy communities clear and interesting to them. The program was also praised for its replicability; in fact, an article in the August 2011 issue of *Landscape Architecture* magazine has introduced *Good Neighbors* to a national audience, and an article in the summer 2011 issue of *Horta* presented the program to an international audience. A ten-minute video documentary produced by Saving Daylight Productions is

available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GglkdDpxIyY to give parents and schools a flavor of the program.

As a result of the program's success, the National Association for Olmsted Parks is working to introduce the *Good Neighbors* curriculum in communities with Olmsted parks across the country. "I wish my child could participate in the program," one BLSA reviewer commented. Soon children beyond Brookline and Boston may have the chance to learn first-hand how parks are designed and built to help build communities.

Update on Exhibit Design

Park staff continues to work on the design and development of exhibits to be installed in the first floor of the historic farmhouse portion of Fairsted. Additional time has been spent by staff to refine the content of the exhibit with input from Frederick Law Olmsted scholar Dr. Charles Beveridge and Arleyn Levee, landscape historian specializing in the work of the later firm of the Olmsted Brothers, John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., their partners and associates. "This is a great opportunity to help visitors to Fairsted understand the importance of the Olmsted firm and the landscapes they created," said Lee Farrow Cook, Site Manager. "This is a story about a place with connections to many other places, which required us to spend more time fine tuning the rich and multi-layered narrative of the exhibit," she added.

Other work on the house has been completed to support the installation of the exhibits, including restoration of hardwood floors, installation of historic finishes (see article p. 5), and electrical upgrades for enhanced lighting.

Installation of the exhibits in the first floor of the Olmsted house is scheduled for summer 2012.

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (NHS) is currently offering ranger-led tours of the Olmsted Historic Design Office and Landscape by reservation. Tours are offered Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9:00AM, 11:00AM and 2:00PM, and Sunday at 11AM, 1PM and 3PM. All tours have a limit of 12 people so please make your reservations as soon as possible to assure a place on the tour you prefer. For more information and to reserve a place on a tour please call 617-566-1689 ext. 221 or email Olmsted NHS at Alan_Banks@nps.gov."

New yellow floral wallpaper in the house library, fabricated under the supervision of T.J. McClintock, one of the rooms where exhibits will be installed in 2012.

Photo by Lauren Meier





Friends of Fairsted
99 Warren Street
Brookline MA 02445

Friends of Fairsted Welcomes New Board Members

The Friends of Fairsted welcomes **Phyllis Andersen** of Boston, and **Annie Blair** of West Roxbury, Massachusetts, as new members of the Board of Directors.

Phyllis Andersen is a landscape historian and urban landscape specialist. Her credentials include former director of the Institute of Cultural Landscape Studies of the Arnold Arboretum and long-time instructor at the Landscape Institute of the Boston Architectural College, a program formerly situated at the Arnold Arboretum and earlier at the Radcliffe Institute. She has also taught at the Yale College Seminar Program and Roxbury Community College. Phyllis is the author of numerous articles and several book chapters. She is currently working on a book with the working title of *A Matter of Taste: The*

Public Pleasure Garden and Civic Life for the University of Virginia Press.

Annie Blair is a registered landscape architect for the Town of Brookline Parks and Open Space Division where she is responsible for the design and public outreach of a wide variety of parks and open spaces, including the on-going rehabilitation of the Olmsted-designed parks in the Emerald Necklace. Annie has served as chair of the American Society of Landscape Architects Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group and is an active member of the Boston Society of Landscape Architects.

The Friends gratefully acknowledge the hard work and contributions of former board members **Frances Shedd Fisher**, **Betsy Shure Gross** and **Jean Stringham** whose terms ended in April of 2011.
