

## **To Beautify the City: the Picturesque tradition, the New York urban grid, and regional landscape culture**

Keith N. Morgan

### *abstract:*

Codified by late eighteenth-century British landscape theorists, the Picturesque aesthetic dominated much of American landscape architecture from the early nineteenth century onward. This engagement with nature, which emphasized movement, variety, and changefulness of experience, took root in the Empire City despite, or perhaps because of, the Commissioners Plan of 1811 establishing the ubiquitous orthogonal city grid. Using the examples of designers, engineers, horticulturalists, and other specialists represented in the new volume of The Pioneers of American Landscape Architecture, this paper will consider how the often-simplified narrative of the picturesque, natural, or romantic landscape can be reconsidered as a broader, deeper, and longer trajectory.

Erie Canal engineer David Bates Douglass introduced greater New York to the Picturesque in his designs for Green-wood Cemetery in Brooklyn in 1838. Horticulturalist Andrew Jackson Downing praised this early rural cemetery landscape and launched the campaigns that led to the eventual passage of legislation to create a naturalized park in Manhattan. While the seminal position of Central Park in the history of American landscape architecture and the central roles of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and Calvert Vaux in its creation are widely acknowledged, other key participants in the making of the Picturesque park deserve much fuller examination. The park benefited greatly from the sophisticated knowledge of plant material and design acumen of Austrian-born Ignatz Anton Pilat. The civil engineers John Bogart and John Yapp Culyer both contributed to the success of Central Park and launched regional and national careers from their experiences both there and at other New York area parks.

Even after Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. moved his residence and office from Manhattan to suburban Brookline, Massachusetts in 1883, the legacy of Olmsted firm's Picturesque landscapes continued to shape the public and private landscapes of the greater New York City region, either through direct commissions or through projects undertaken by former members of the firm. The work of Olmsted-trained Harold Hill Blossom in New Jersey's Essex County Parks, the Olmsted collaborations with John Rowlett Brinley on New Jersey great estates, or Olmsted's Leon Henry Zach's supervisory roles in New York City's public landscape commissions, financed by the Rockefeller family, exemplify these relationships.

Following in the footsteps of Downing, horticulturalist-designers also added significantly to the character of the regional landscape. From the work of Harold Caparn at the Bronx Zoo and the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens to the private arboreta of Julian Francis Detmer in Tarrytown, New York to Lester Collins' magical gardens for Innisfree, one can trace the Picturesque sensibility well into the twentieth century.

## American Curves: The Public Works Legacy of Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano

Thomas J. Campanella

### *abstract:*

Few landscape architects in U.S. history have had greater impact on the form and character of the American city than Gilmore Clarke and Michael Rapuano. Steeped in the Beaux-arts formalism then in vogue at nearly all American design schools, Clarke graduated Cornell in 1913 and worked for Charles Downing Lay in New York before being recruited by the Bronx River Parkway Commission to build a "landscaped road" in Westchester County. Over the next two decades, Clarke led an extraordinary team of designers and engineers in creating the first regional infrastructure for the automobile in America: a vast network of parks and recreation grounds braided with sinuous strands of parkway. In effect, Clarke carried the Olmstedian ideal into the motor age, expanding it to regional scale. The Westchester parkways were literally "gardens for the machine," fusing romantic pastoralism with state-of-the-art transportation technology.

One of the landscape architects Clarke recruited was Michael Rapuano, fifth recipient of the Prix de Rome in landscape architecture and 1927 graduate of Cornell. Rapuano's tenure in Westchester was brief; within a few years both men were called upon by Robert Moses to lead an ambitious program of park development in New York City. Moses had already looked to Westchester as a template for the park and parkway system he was building on Long Island, and Clarke had already provided design direction on its crown jewel, Jones Beach State Park. Now Clarke and Rapuano would help bring to life Moses' dream of a modern, integrated, metropolitan landscape: a vision articulated in the 1920s of "weav[ing] together the loose strands and frayed edges of New York's arterial and metropolitan tapestry."

Clarke was appointed consulting landscape architect to the New York City Parks Department in 1934; Rapuano accompanied him as top designer and right-hand man. The pair worked on scores of projects together throughout the city, ultimately leading to the founding of Clarke & Rapuano, one of the first interdisciplinary design and engineering practices in the United States. The firm would help plan nearly all the public works of the Moses years, and consult on major park, highway, housing, and infrastructure projects throughout the nation. The two men forged a nearly flawless working relationship, enabling "one of the most fruitful collaborations in American design history<sup>1</sup>." The elder Clarke was the firm's steady anchor and society presence; the youthful Rapuano, working class son of immigrants, was the firm's design genius; even late in life, he spent hours with junior designers at their drafting tables.

This lecture will explore the legacy of Clarke and Rapuano, and situate their work in the context of landscape design history in 20th-century America. It will argue that while most of Clarke and Rapuano's design work was superficially conservative—formally derived from classical precedents—it was at the same time profoundly modern. Like Moses himself, Clarke and

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<sup>1</sup> Laurie Olin

Rapuano had great faith in the motor car and the freedoms and convenience it promised. Their early work, especially, represents a fleeting moment of fusion between modernity and the Beaux-arts formalism that, in America, was most closely associated with the exclusive garden designs of the so-called "county place era." Clarke and Rapuano took the Beaux-arts to the people, effectively creating a vast civic estate that millions of Americans still enjoy today.

## **Unbounded Practices: Women in the Public Landscape**

Thaisa Way

*abstract:*

Far from being a handful of wealthy women involved in garden design for a few wealthy friends and peers, explorations of landscape architecture's history in the United States reveal a significant presence of women as practitioners, clients, writers, and critics. As the both volumes of *Pioneers* illustrate, during the profession's formative years in the early twentieth century, women actively engaged in the discipline through practices addressing a broad range of project types. Women were featured in professional exhibits, they taught in landscape education programs at prestigious universities, their work was published in professional journals, and they participated in the professional organizations at both local and national levels. Designs by Mary Parson Cunningham, Rose Greeley, and Isabella Pendleton were featured in popular magazines. Martha Brookes Hutcheson, Ellen Biddle Shipman, Ruth Bramley Dean, and Mary Rutherford Jay were frequently invited to lecture to garden and art clubs, civic improvement organizations and professional associations. Katherine D. Jones, Mabel Keyes Babcock, Florence Robinson, and Elizabeth May McAdams taught design, site planning, city planning, and horticulture in programs at Columbia University, the University of California, Berkeley, Wellesley, and the University of Illinois, among others. Nonetheless, the assumption has held that these women designed a few gardens and that is all.

In fact, the public practices of these women ranged from university campuses to city parks to urban housing projects and highway systems. Marian Cruger Coffin designed the campuses of the University of Delaware; Elizabeth Lord and Edith Schryver (who together comprised the respected firm of Lord & Schryver) were hired by the city of Salem, Oregon to design parks and public spaces; Maud Sargent and Elizabeth Bullard worked for Robert Moses in New York City and for the state of New York; Iris Ashwell worked for the Federal Public Housing Authority; Marjorie Sewell Cautley designed and supervised the construction of ten New Hampshire state parks; Ruth Shelhorn was a landscape architect for Walt Disney's Disneyland. Many times, public sites present the work of a number of women practitioners, such as when the New York Botanical Garden engaged Beatrix Farrand and Marian Cruger Coffin. This talk begins to describe the variety and depth of the work and the role of women in shaping the profession through their work in the public landscape.

Retelling the stories of these early women in landscape architecture brings a deeper perspective to the profession and to the development of the American landscape. We have the opportunity to recognize how movements such as sustainable design draw on the precedent-

setting work of H.W.S. Cleveland, Wilhelm Miller, Ruth Dean, Jens Jensen, Elsa Rehmann, and Marjorie Cautley. My hope is that this research might inspire a more thoughtful reflection on our place in the American Landscape, helping us understand what has been lost, what has been gained, and what might be our collective future.

## **The Way it Was: a Landscape Architect in Post-War America**

M.Paul Friedberg

### *abstract:*

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a dramatic and fertile period for the landscape architecture profession. This, to a large extent, can be attributed to the restructuring of urban America from industrial manufacturing centers to post-industrial service centers. While Olmsted in the mid-1800s established the passive urban park as a retreat, a safe harbor from the oppressive work week and the degrading urban environments, this new urban population of young professional and empty nesters was a population that chose to live in the city for its vitality and cosmopolitan character. Possessing time, affluence, and mobility, this group coveted places to live, play, shop, and see and be seen.

During this time, the profession experienced significant change, matured, returning from its Arcadian, anti-urban era to favor social relevance. Pressures of change presented designers with new materials and new sensibilities, compelling the profession to recognize that the city must be approached on its own terms as a center of social and cultural interaction.

Without precedent or experience, a few adventurous professionals ventured into this unknown territory, blending new urban spaces, new architectonic forms, and industrial materials in response to the social and cultural demands of this new urban population. They invented spaces that facilitated the opportunities for formal and informal interaction. Understanding the street itself as a place for the people, and the space between buildings as inhabitable, these designers remade the European ceremonial plaza as market place of culture, performance, and celebration.

Increasing in confidence and stature, the landscape architect was no longer satisfied to inherit the arbitrary left over space after the buildings were placed. Demanding, and granted, a place at the table, they experimented boldly with the creation and reinforcement of the urban fabric. Space, now understood to be critical to the urban experience, could not be left to chance.

Today, the profession is experiencing transformation yet again. In recent decades, materialism and market place considerations slowly trumped the social concerns valued in the 1960s. Though we may remain committed to our social role in the city, clients in the private sector seek the landscape architect as a commodity, accruing value to their brand. Professionals are being asked to replace social content with uniqueness for the sake of marketability. The prior upheavals, and the novel forms they compelled, were noticeable for their novelty; the

profession is now being asked to make designs “different” purely to call attention to themselves. This commercial sector led shift has a reductive impact on the quality and content of much of today’s design. Professionals are being chosen on the basis of how well their designs sell.

Our profession has always responded to the values of the era. Due to the economic downturn we may be entering a period of reevaluation, rethinking our priorities again. It will be interesting to see how this will shape our profession. What is clear is that this is not an insignificant luxury profession, handmaiden to aristocracy. Tomorrow will allow us to contribute in the area of conservation, preservation, and new and creative open space.

### **The Impact of Legacy: What it means to research, practice, and education.**

Laurie Olin

#### *abstract:*

Though most inquisitive Americans know that the landscape we live in did not just happen by itself and are aware that things have been built, the land changed, places dramatically affected by human activity; there is a near consensus that not only have Americans plowed under most of the great prairie and cut the forests that once covered the bulk of the continent, but also that these actions have had an unfortunate effect upon the rivers and streams around us. Even the air, the very sky above us, has changed due to our collective actions.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness in the general populace that a profession exists which has as its purpose the improvement of our environment through design and planning, that there are people who have been trained to create places of ecological health and humane beauty: landscape architects.

From gardens to regional infrastructure, the work of landscape architects is now in the news at local and national scales. Government agencies, business corporations, cultural institutions, and private citizens are turning to landscape architects to help in the planning of new parks, communities, campuses, and to help rescue deteriorating places, both wild and cultivated.

For many people, it must seem as if this group of useful souls has recently and somewhat spontaneously appeared. The truth, of course, is that the planning, design, and building of landscapes of great beauty and purpose has been occurring for centuries.

This second volume of the *Pioneers of Landscape Architecture* will be an enormous help in expanding the collective knowledge of the many diverse threads within the field of landscape architecture. Any telling of history that emphasizes a particular series of individuals and the establishment of a distinct (and therefore limited) canon of works, that employs a linear narrative of successive generations, cannot do justice to the volume, diversity, and

achievement of the many individuals involved. The design and creation of the American landscape is no exception.

A major field of cultural endeavor, landscape architecture is often collaborative and its practitioners often generalists, traits that allow enormous contributions to the planning, engineering, design, and repair of countryside, urban land, and all the gradients between. Landscape architects regularly embark upon a detailed a quest for environments that are not merely attractive, but sustainable, well made, just, and spiritually moving.

Recorded here are dozens of individuals and their accumulated contributions. The hundreds of landscapes impacted by these individuals form a great heritage for America. The works presented are often unacknowledged and undervalued, neglected and in danger of destruction or transmogrification through inappropriate development. Yet these places have contributed to the quality and character of our cities and landscapes; revealing their many layers affords us the possibility of a future that is "both/and" rather than having to settle for one that is "either/or".