CENTRAL PARK 1851-1871

URBANIZATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING IN NEW YORK CITY

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

BY

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August, 1973

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A crucial factor in American history during the last one hundred and fifty years has been the growth of cities. Perhaps more than anything else urbanization transformed the simple nation of Jefferson's era into the complex modern society of our own time. Particularly in the five decades after 1820 when cities grew to be five to ten times as large as the leading cities of the half century before, there is little exaggeration in saying that no facet of American life was left untouched by the new scale of cities or the accelerated pace of their development.

Not always immediately evident, the implications of this rapid growth of our urban centers was substantial. In terms of social change, increased urbanization fundamentally altered family life, schools, churches, modes of business, political and other public institutions. Societal values and norms were also shifted. In economic terms, the rise of cities was an inseparable part of the industrialization which transformed small artisan towns into communities of factories and wholesale outlets. Furthermore, even the very "way of living on the land underwent a complete metamorphosis ...[for] a national system of cities mobilized scattered villages and farms into a network of regional commercial and manufacturing cities."[1]

No less dramatic than the social and economic impact of urbanization was the physical transformation of cities. The vast increase in the number of people finding it desirable or necessary to live in an urban setting, coupled with new transport technologies permitting them to live relatively

1. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness, New York, 1972, p. 64.

far from their place of work, functioned effectively to break the historic confines of the old city. The result was that the physical environment of the urban place was entirely refashioned and built anew.

The vast majority of the urban environment created during this period was the result of innumerable individual acts in pursuit of private ends. The only logic, other than rudimentary town plans, which served to order, constrain, coordinate or positively effect this process of environmental development, was that dictated by the imperative of market forces. What resulted was an unordered, unsatisfactory and often chaotic environment which is in part today's urban legacy. Without such inventions of the twentieth century as zoning ordinances, building codes, comprehensive plans, renewal programs, or other similar mechanisms, now employed by cities to alter and rationalize the development process, the new urban environment fulfilled general public needs or requirements only fortuitously or in an incidental fashion.

The purpose of this study is a modest one. It is to investigate one small, but critical element of the process of environmental development in mid-nineteenth century New York City. This one element--Central Park--while interesting in itself as part of the city's emerging environment is that much more unique for it is a conspicuous exception to the general rule of an environment being formed wholly by private activity. The park was a conscious, publicly initiated act aimed at positively affecting the development of the city.

The history of the creation of Central Park and its impact upon the city is clearly the story of a major environmental reform. As such, a full understanding of it is quite inseparable from an understanding of

the city itself and the process of urbanization which was then forming and altering the city. Therefore, the park will first be examined in terms of its emergence from the evolving urbanization process; and later as it begins to take form, will be shown in fact, to have become itself a determining factor in the process. By channeling and directing urban growth while serving fundamental social and aesthetic functions, urban open spaces such as parks, plazas, boulevards and squares, help create the very character and ambience of cities. This study, therefore, has two major foci--a specific example of environmental reform, the park, and the city itself whose burgeoning urbanization gave birth to the park. Central Park and the circumstances which surrounded its creation stand as a singular element in the process of urban growth, transformation and response, and by focusing a shaft of light on this one event, it is intended that the larger process of urbanization will also be illuminated.

The period of the park's development to be examined is the twenty-year period from 1851 to 1871. This covers the full stage of its creation from the year in which it was first advocated by a public official, to a period when most of its improvements were essentially complete and it was fully open to public use. At this later date, almost as a premonition of what would become a century-long battle to preserve and maintain it, it came under the control of the Tweed Ring and for a short time suffered from financial exploitation and general misuse. These two decades are the formative ones for the Park for they span the essential stages of advocacy, acceptance, construction and world-wide emulation. They are critical years for the city as well. It is a fascinating period when the strong momentum of social, political and

economic change that accompanies rapid urbanization appeared close to overwhelming New Yorkers. Old accumulated civic problems were magnified and reached states of new urgency, while additional, new problems were being generated daily. And while every era believes its cities are at a point of great crisis, New York during this period was under severe strain. The Central Park was the single greatest public effort mustered by the era to help save the burgeoning city.

Other than in these general terms, it is fair to inquire what in the significance of Central Park merits so intensive an investigation. Why in fact should it interest urban and city planning historians or students of civic reform? There are a number of closely related reasons. First, and in a most elementary sense, because it is there. There is no denying that Central Park is an important and unusual part of New York's cityscape. It is difficult to imagine its absence and its site filled by the same sort of buildings that stretch across the rest of the island from the East River to the Hudson. Though one may today ask at a multitude of levels, given its crime, disrepair, abuse and inaccessibility to the whole city, whether it is any longer functional or able to serve its original purposes, one cannot deny the park's unique presence, its effect on the city, nor that in some fashion it is still being busily used. Furthermore, a park of this scale and sort of design was never replicated in any other part of the large city and it is hardly typical of the general environmental image which the city projects. Thus, though it is a daily and welcome fact of life, it is also an anomaly. It is important for us to know how and why it came into being and to understand the purposes for which it was created. The city is filled with these

individual instances of the effect of the urban development process, and we must understand them singularly if we are to hope to unravel the meaning of them in the aggregate.

In addition to being an important part of the present urban landscape, the park is an example of an aesthetic artifact thrust into being by the city building process. As such, it is a curiosity standing in vivid contrast to the rest of the city. It is, nevertheless, a highly articulated piece of purposeful design which is unusually distinctive, attractive and worthy of preservation and protection from encroachment. This 840 acre preserve in the center of one of the world's most highly urbanized regions is an example of a highly successful bit of urban design. As an aesthetic expression, it is also a symbol of the artistic and urban values of the society which created it. And as a municipal adornment and an attempt at beautification of what was seen as an increasingly tawdry urban environment, it achieved a dimension beyond its functional purposes.

The park has significance well beyond that which was visible within its own boundaries. It is a primary and precedent-setting example of the sort of environmental reform that American cities were going to have to undertake if they were to be redeemed from the conditions resulting from years of neglect and the seemingly inexorable pressure of rapid urban growth. Central Park and similar environmental reforms, furthermore, were symbolic of an emerging recognition that the nation, like it or not, was becoming irrevocably and inescapably urban. It was clear that urbanization was a growing fact of life and cities were where the future of the young democracy was to be acted out. Reform of these urban centers by improvements such as the park was at least tacit recognition of these facts and the

beginning of a concerted attempt to give American cities the same esteem which European cities apparently enjoyed while also beginning to redeem them from the low position to which frequent criticism had relegated them.

As suggested above, the park merits investigation as well because it provides the opportunity to observe the conjunction of forces which create urban problems and in turn generate urban reforms. In a sense, it is a microcosm of the political, social and economic forces which make up the complex process of growth, transformation and reform in an urban place. And thus the nature of the mid-19th century urban condition should become more manifest by studying the history of the park's creation.

It has been argued that specific reform efforts and other urban responses bear unique characteristics which make them particular to their time and location. Central Park as the first major landscape designed park in America, however, became a model for environmental improvement, which was emulated in some fashion during the next fifty years by most every city in the nation. As such it was the impetus to an entire parks movement which over that period radically altered the physical form and landscape of the American city. While each city adopted and utilized parks in their own way, their purpose and effect were generally the same.

In the process of initiating an entire parks movement, Central Park is also the essential catalyst involved in the birth of modern city planning. In laying out and designing this particular park and the many which were later derived from its example, cities were forced to confront the social realities and economic dilemmas which were shaping their communities. Both through specific acts such as the design of new highways or parkways and the laying out of adjoining residential neighborhoods and the less obvious

acts inherent in the imposition of large systems of parks into the urban landscape, the principles of city planning and related reform endeavors were being tested and put into practice. While on the whole rudimentary, they were at times quite sophisticated, and it is clear that in planning terms, parks were involved in much more than just aesthetic improvement or municipal ornamentation. In this sense the park contributed to the emergence of the profession of city planning.

The Central Park is worthy of close study, lastly, because of the talented and unusual personalities that were involved in its early development. Foremost among many is Frederick Law Olmsted, the co-designer and constant protector of the park. At a time just one year after the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth, a date already marked by the appearance of numerous publications and exhibits, it seems particularly appropriate to provide a complete history of the beginnings of his first and most instrumental creation. Olmsted had a rich and diverse career, but first and literally he was the single dominant individual in America concerned with city planning and conscious environmental improvement during the forty-year period following his initial work on Central Park. Unlike many of the reformers of his era, he was an advocate of the virtues of urban living when cities had few friends. His positive contributions to city improvement and planning, in addition to his many park designs themselves, made it clear that parks were intended to serve commercial, social, moral, educative and civilizing purposes. They were to be the social and recreational centers for the entire city, not just the city's lungs or a romantic retrogression. The growth of urban centers was both inevitable and desirable, according to Olmsted, and if cities were to

realize their full and obvious potential, then urban improvements such as parks were absolutely necessary. Out of this uncharacteristically positive perception of the city, Olmsted attempted to use parks to fashion a frontal assault on the city. By introducing picturesque scenery into the urban areas with all its purported effects, Olmsted felt that cities would be made more civilized, more humane, more attractive; for in this era, American cities, although they were urban, were not urbane, and although civilized, they were not civilized enough. It was from the work on his first project, Central Park, that this important pro-urban philosophy emerged.

In summary, Central Park is of multi-dimensional interest to a historian, for it may indeed be interpreted from a number of perspectives--as a symbol of an era's cultural and aesthetic values; as a positive act of improvement and affirmation of urban life; as a reflection of the nature of urban reform and the nature of the urban problems to which it was a response; as a catalyst to an entire environmental reform movement and a testing ground and stimulus to the birth of city planning; and as an opportunity to record the role of the individuals which the park cultivated or those which later nurtured it.

In addition to its obvious significance, the creation of Central Park raises a number of fascinating questions which are important to keep in mind as one proceeds with an analysis of the park. For example, why in a city of 600,000 people where open countryside was close and plentiful, did New York City feel the need to acquire an 840 acre preservation, one-half mile in width by two and one-half miles in length? Why, when New York had so many other pressing problems, such as public health, housing, sewers, roads, unemployment and immigrant assimilation did it so willingly and easily

endorse a scheme which was essentially for the improvement of public recreational opportunities? Why did a city whose total bonded debt amounted only to twelve million dollars, happily consent to incurring in one year $5.6 million additional for the acquisition of a park and then shortly thereafter spend millions more to improve it? Certainly the aims and design seemed audacious, but the cost amounted to an unprecedented example of municipal indulgence, particularly since it at the same time required the removal of nearly 8,000 building lots from the tax rolls. Why, also, was there a great faith that this bit of greenery, in essence a physical improvement, would yield all sorts of social and economic benefits? And lastly, why was the park able to maintain its integrity for a twenty-year period, while every other municipal enterprise in New York was being used for politically corrupt purposes? These are the sorts of questions which invigorate one's interest in the history of the park, and the answers to which will more fully develop the significance of examining the park.

A number of methodological means will be utilized to attempt to record the history of the Park and its full meaning and implications. First, we shall look at some of the constituent forces involved in the process of urbanization and the resultant problems and effects which manifested themselves in New York City. Certain demographic, economic and other social factors important to the "new urban history" are necessarily involved.[1] Part of the analysis will also involve what has been called a topographic history.[2] Both the city and the park are aesthetic artifacts. A primary

1. Stephen Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds., Nineteenth Century Cities, New Haven, 1969.
2. Walter Muir Whitehill, Boston: A Topographical History, Cambridge, 1963.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Melrose, Massachusetts in 1941. He attended the public schools of Wakefield, Massachusetts graduating from high school in 1959. Four years later he was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Upon graduation he served six months active duty with the Air Force and was then employed as a city planner for the City of Poughkeepsie, New York. In September, 1966, the author entered Cornell University's graduate school in the Department of City and Regional Planning. Two years later he was awarded the Master of Regional Planning degree and began his studies of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. For the past three years the author has taught in Cornell's Department of Urban Planning and Development where he presently holds the position of Assistant Professor and has been a planning consultant to several New York State communities.

DEDICATION

To Judy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have accumulated numerous debts in the course of preparing this study. The staffs of the libraries at Cornell and Harvard University were particularly helpful. The New York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York, the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library were also especially valuable resources. I am thankful for their efficient aid and many courtesies.

My thesis committee deserves special acknowledgement. John W. Reps, the chairman, is always inspiring to work with and in the preparation of this study provided invaluable insights and encouragement. Laurence Moore criticized two successive drafts in a patient and searching fashion. Andrew Milnor also provided welcome comments. I am indebted also to Dean K. C. Parsons for creating a favorable atmosphere for research and for granting material aid from the Ovings fund. A Cornell faculty research grant is also gratefully acknowledged. My thanks to Hugh Munn and Sandra Mishanec who carefully and cheerfully typed the drafts.

This work is fondly dedicated to my wife, Judith Hurster Stewart, who bore more than half the burden.

objective and result of the park was to beautify the city, and it did in fact for a time become its finest ornament. Certain well known aesthetic doctrines were involved and are important to an understanding of the rationale for the park. In a sense, this portion of the study will be utilizing the approach of the architectural historian. In addition, that which has been called the city-building process will be used.[1] The park is a part of the built-environment, it did impose itself on the urban landscape, and it did condition and otherwise affect the sort of environment which later grew up around it. Lastly, much of the study will be a familiar historical narrative which describes the urban condition, problems and responses that constitute the urban biographical approach. Specific men, events, decisions and institutions are important parts of the story of Central Park and this descriptive chronicle is at least the basic framework for more ambitious analysis and a more complete perspective.

A final word is in order in regard to the value and relevance of utilizing a historical approach to studying the city, especially as it relates to its applicability to an applied, pragmatic, and professional field of study such as urban planning. This has not often been clear, and it is worthwhile doing here. In general, it should be evident that history may be employed as one more valid and useful tool for understanding the nature of cities. For in one sense the use of the historical approach to the study of the modern city may be particularly helpful if it is viewed as a sort of simulation exercise such as is so familiar to present-day planners. By looking at a city or some aspect of its development at

1. Roy Lubove, "The Urbanization Process: An Approach to Historical Research" in Alexander Callow, Jr., ed., American Urban History, New York, 1969, p. 643.

an earlier time, one has the opportunity to see it in its formative stage stripped bare of its later embellishment, changes, or perversions. As such, it is a clearer, simpler, more elemental perspective, where both intention and fact should be more discernible. The whole rationale for present-day simulation exercises is to reduce highly complex phenomena such as urbanization down to their essential components so that its basic and primary elements may be more precisely understood. The historic reconstruction of a city or some portion of its development process at a past time, seems to me to hold similar potential. Neither can be claimed to develop absolutely precise analogies, but both can be helpful tools used to approximate a better understanding of reality.

The frequent criticism of history centering around the question of completeness of data, does not seem critical to me. The historical record is never fully available nor can one hope for its complete reconstruction from its many diverse sources. Yet, neither does a contemporary social scientist enjoy this luxury, for the most common complaint of the present-day student of the city usually centers around the availability, completeness and quality of the data from which he must build his analysis. In most respects, historical data or evidence is no worse nor better than that available to contemporary urban analysts. In fact there are many instances where historical sources contain a richness, diversity, and tested quality that enhances their usefulness. What is important to scholars of both the contemporary and historical city is the manner in which they interpret the material at hand. Certainly adequate data or evidence is a precondition to good scholarly work, but it is not in itself sufficient to insure quality.

There is also a question about studying some aspect of urban development at a remote period of time as being irrelevant to a present perception of the problem. There is little sense to arguing whether history has lessons to teach or to what extent its lessons are valid to various generations. I would maintain only that history with all its inherent problems and capabilities is but one more valid methodology which can be used to approach the problem of understanding the city. The process of urbanization and the artifact which it creates--the city--is sufficiently complex and impervious to rational analysis that one must employ all those approaches which promise to reveal its intricacies. In many respects, history offers some distinct advantages, and great promises. For example, no one would disagree with the statement that our cities and that which we associate with the urban environment did not spring into existence in some spontaneous fashion. Certainly our cities are the product of a long evolutionary process and by analytically cutting into that chain of events at some point, we can gain an understanding and perspective on the present state of that long and continuous process. If we are to improve our cities or were even able to reinvent them, we must first fully understand how they came to their present state. In a related fashion, it also seems clear that past actions, events and decisions have predetermined or preconditioned our present urban dilemma by restricting, directing or even mandating certain subsequent actions. In this sense, many of both the limitations and successes of the 20th century city are the lineal descendants of decisions made some one hundred years ago. Past decisions regarding the development of the physical city are particularly important for they have often resulted in more or less permanent effects. For example, the location of certain types of industry,

highway routes, harbor facilities, major institutions, or housing types are the sort of past decisions made by cities which have had an enduring, and even present impact on the condition of today's city. We cannot simply ignore that matrix of prior decisions which has circumscribed our past response and which will no doubt continue to condition our future courses of action.

These reasons I have listed are, I believe, sufficiently valid and compelling to allay whatever existing prejudices there are amongst planners about seeking to analyze the city by the use of historical methods. One additional rationale for the study of urban history stems from the desire to discover some sense of order underlying the all too obvious chaos of the modern city. In doing so, it will become clear that most past decisions or actions were consciously made, although some will appear fortuitous, yet few were arrived at with a full comprehension of their ultimate implications. We will delude ourselves if we believe that all past actions were critical to the formation of our present condition, yet we would be no more truthful to assume that history has no lessons for us. It is not the intention of this study to go about constructing a set of historical analogies from which to comparatively judge present actions. Such constructs are inherently strained and brittle. Where the facts do suggest reasonable analogies they will be given the benefit of serious if not skeptical reflection. Yet mainly the purpose of this study will be to reconstruct the past decision framework and display the extent of its long term implications. The past is indeed complex and its full reconstruction is not easy. The potential in such an endeavor is, however, sufficiently enticing to be worth our attention.

CHAPTER II

THE URBAN CONTEXT

The Structure of Urban Development--Economics and Population

To understand how and why Central Park was created, it is necessary to understand the City of New York at mid-century. To define the urban context from which the park would emerge, one must ask what was causing urban growth, what the condition of life was that resulted from this growth, and what were the problems and responses that were generated as a result. It is not appropriate within the scope of this study to recreate in abundant detail what daily life in New York City was like in 1850.[1] The intention rather is to develop a more skeletal framework which explains the rapid urbanization of the city and describes the conditions and attitudes in the city in the 1850's that would foster the impulse which created Central Park.

New York in 1850, although still very much at the threshold of major urban growth and dominance, had experienced exceedingly rapid growth in recent decades. From the very outset, the city had always been a successful commercial and mercantile center primarily because it had been able to exploit its strategic location and unusually fine natural harbor. It was not until 1825, however, that it took a quantum jump forward in economic terms, relative to its rival cities. In that year, with the opening of the Erie Canal, the Hudson River became a tributary to the west, opening up the

1. Two helpful sources that begin to do this are: Bayard Still, ed., Mirror for Gotham, New York, 1956, and Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 4 vols., New York, 1952.

entire settled interior of the country and making New York City the terminus for the only efficient route to the transmountain region. As soon as the Great Lakes were reached by the canal, the line of navigable water was extended another 1000 miles making the entire Ohio Valley and the territory as far west as Chicago accessible as a new source of trade and a new market for New York processed goods. The opening up of this vast inland area by the Canal, more than any other economic factor, would be responsible for the commercial position and prosperity of the city by 1850.

The city profited in two ways from the presence of the canal. First, the most immediate and dramatic effect was on the cost of transporting goods out of the interior regions. In 1817, the average cost per ton mile of goods shipped between Buffalo and New York, was nineteen cents. After a few years of operation the canal reduced this to two cents.[1] This meant that the produce and products of this broad inland region could now be sent to New York at modest cost and then distributed to the entire east coast or even transferred for sale to other countries. Secondly, both the products manufactured within the city and the imports that were shipped to it, could now be marketed throughout this growing hinterland. One observer writing near the mid-point of the century assessed the effects of the canal in these general terms:

> "...it is impossible to imagine what would have been the state of things without it. But for this work, the west would have held out few inducements to the settler, who would have been without a market for his most important products, and consequently without the means of supplying many of his most essential wants. That portion of the country would have remained comparatively unsettled up to the present time; and, where now exists

1. Warner, The Urban Wilderness, op. cit., p. 68.

> rich and populous communities, we should find an uncultivated wilderness. The East would have been equally without the elements of growth. The canal has supplied it with cheap food, and has opened an outlet and created a market for the products of its manufactures and commerce. The increase of commerce, and the growth of the country, have been very accurately measured by the growth of the business of the canal. It has been one great bond of strength, infusing life and vigor into the whole."[1]

New York was the focus and at the very nexus of this new economic activity and it flourished all the more because there was essentially no competition. Because the route was the only practical one for such a work, other cities were effectively stymied in their attempts to also make a connection to the rich western interior. Thus, the city's primary competition and the ones through which most western trade had gone through prior to the canal, were not able to overcome New York's natural advantage.[2] The result was that that balance in the rivalry between the major eastern cities was vitally affected and New York began a period of economic ascent that quickly placed it in a prominent competitive position in reference to internal trade. No large city could sustain itself and grow by catering only to the needs of its own inhabitants. This, to a substantial extent, however, was the position to which New York's rivals on the east coast were relegated for the next twenty-five to thirty-five year period. New York, therefore, gained a great head of steam and headstart. Not until the 1850's when new transportation technologies in the form of the railroads and new markets in other areas became settled, were the other eastern seaboard cities able to divert

1. "Report of Israel D. Andrews on the Trade and Commerce of the British North American Colonies," U.S. Sen. Ex. Doc. No. 112, 32nd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, 1853), in Charles Glaab, The American City: A Documentary History, Homewood, Illinois, 1963, pp. 72-73.
2. Julius Rubin, Canal or Railroad? Imitation and Innovation in Response to the Erie Canal in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston, Philadelphia, 1961.

some of the trade from New York and New Orleans. And only after the canal ceased being the most efficient mode of internal transport, did New York begin to receive serious competition again. But, of course, the influence of railroads also benefitted New York City, and helped reinforce the advantage developed by the canal. The railroad represented a mode of transport and trade that was not confined entirely to natural channels, and when for example the Erie Railroad was opened to Binghamton in 1848 and a year later pushed on to Elmira,[1] entirely new regions were brought into the sphere of New York's economic influence.

Although the economic activity generated by the canal was a key factor responsible for the city's growth and prosperity, there were numerous other indicators to display that the city was indeed a mecca for commercial enterprise and business activity. For example, the figures of port officials reflected extensive international trade. In the ten-year period from 1850 to 1860, the value of imports received at the port of New York nearly doubled, and they represented seventy percent of the nation's total.

Year	Value of Imports Received	% of Nation's Total Imports
1840	$ 56,845,924	53%[2]
1851	130,683,030	60%[3]
1860	248,000,000	70%[4]

The amount of exports was smaller but equally impressive. New York handled $53,595,376 worth of export material in 1851, which was more than 25% of

1. Charles H. Haswell. Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York (1816-1860), New York, 1896, pp. 445,457.
2. Richard Swainson Fisher, A New and Complete Statistical Gazetteer of the United States of America, New York, 1853, pp. 579, 581.
3. Ibid.
4. I. N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909, Vol. 5., New York, 1915-1928, p. 1889.

the country's total.[1] By 1862, this value would more than treble to $172 million.

In addition to the dominant position New York enjoyed in domestic and international trade, it also showed strong activity in the manufacturing sector. For example, the 1850 census recorded a total of 3387 manufacturing establishments employing 83,620 persons, and producing manufactured articles in the value of $105,218,308.[2] The census ten years later would record that the city produced a larger manufacturing product than any other city in the republic and more than any single state, except New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. In this decade the value increased by 50% and represented nearly one eleventh of the sum of the entire United States.[3] Auxilliary financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies also reflected this strong economic growth particularly in capital accumulation.[4] Yet, the intensity of economic activity and opportunity on the island is perhaps best mirrored in the figures related to the value of land. In the single year between 1853 and 1854 assessed values of real property and personal estate shown in the Comptroller's Reports increased by more than 12% from $294,637,295 to $330,663,151 and from $118,994,137 to $141,721,338 respectively. The increases were particularly marked in the upper wards.[5]

It is difficult to sketch out a static outline of the economic position of New York City during this period, for as has been suggested,

1. Fischer, op. cit., pp. 579, 581.
2. James Grant Wilson, The Memorial History of the City of New York, New York, 1893, p. 446.
3. William L. Stone, The Centennial History of New York City, New York, 1876, p. 244.
4. Wilson, op. cit., p. 446; Fischer, op. cit., p. 582; Ludlow, op. cit., p. 86.
5. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXXI (October 1854), p. 489.

the growth was extremely dramatic and would continue to be so during the next few decades. But we can summarize the extent of this single city's economic dominance at this one point in time.

By the close of the decade of the fifties, New York was the reception point and distributive mechanism for 70% of the country's imports. In addition, it handled or provided 25% of the nation's exports. Its manufacturing production was the largest of any American city and nearly one-eleventh of the nation's total. No other city could contest its supremacy or rival its accomplishments. Despite the depression of the early forties, and the aspirations of its seaboard rivals, New York's location, canal connections, and the aggressive efforts of its citizens brought it to this enviable position. As a consequence, New York was a speculator's dream. Though there were high risks, great losses and frequent nightmares, the city came to represent the place of opportunity for the unemployed and dissatisfied thousands in both rural American and western Europe. No one seriously claimed that New York's streets were paved with gold, in fact, few were paved at all. Yet in hope, fear and resignation, thousands and thousands of persons converged on the city during this period, attracted by its dynamic economic conditions, and in turn, reinforcing its productive potential.

A necessary concommitant of the city's economic prosperity and a no less important factor contributing to the urbanization of the environment was the city's large and rapid growth in population. Just as the port of New York had developed into the fore-ordained stopping point for most of North America's commerce, it was, too, the locus of most of the continent's in-migration. From a small community of 60,000 inhabitants in

1800, the city's population climbed to 500,000 in 1850, 800,000 by 1860, and in 1864, according to the city inspector's report, it exceeded one million people. In terms of the world's cities, this placed it in size second only to Paris and London. What is even more important than this substantial absolute increase, was the rate at which the population was growing.

In 1830, the city had slightly more than 200,000 residents. Just five years later this had increased by one-third. From 1845 to 1850 the population moved from 370,000 to 515,000, an increase of approximately 40%. And in the decade of the fifties the rate of increase jumped to 65%.[1] These very high rates of growth and the fact that they were sustained over a long period of time, had a very severe impact on the city as a whole and the sort of environment that was being created. The impact of this growth was all the more severe for it occurred in an exceedingly compact area. In 1850, 82% of the entire metropolitan region's inhabitants were on Manhattan Island, and of that figure, 75% of it was clustered below Fourteenth Street.[2] Within this fully settled area, furthermore, the density of population had reached 135.6 persons to the acre. Even by 1864, when the population had spread uptown and over essentially twenty settled wards, one report would note that each rental dwelling in the city had an average of 30.7 tenants occupying it.[3] The effective result of this prolonged, rapid growth at high densities was an unprecedented degree of congestion and a spurt of hastily and often chaoticly conceived construction that was necessary to house the new

1. "New York Population--Absolute Progress," Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXVII (Sept. 1852) p. 310; and no author, The Growth of New York, New York, 1865, p. 10.
2. No author, The Growth of New York, Ibid., p. 11.
3. Kate H. Claghorn, "The Foreign Immigrant in New York City," Reports of the U. S. Industrial Commission, XV (1901) p. 486.

arrivals and to expand the places for their employment. Few aspects of city life would escape the implications of this growth.

Some of the city's large growth in population in this era did come to pass because of natural increase and the movement of some Americans from the countryside. But the majority of the growth was derived from foreign immigration. The reasons they came are many and well-known, but in general terms their primary motivation was the perceived chance to improve their economic and social status. What they found was not always preferable, yet in economic gain it probably was. Wages for comparable jobs were on the average twice as high and the real cost of living was lower.[1] Capital earned a higher return and property could be purchased more cheaply. Artisan and craftsmen positions were still open, and because immigration coincided with the industrial revolution in America, there was an expanding need for men or hands to tend the machines of the factories, build the canals, railroads, shops and roads that moved their products, and to build or otherwise work in the expanding cities where this activity necessarily clustered.

With this promise before them, they came in increasingly large numbers. They landed at all the seaports along the eastern seaboard in varying numbers, but it was strategically located New York that received and disseminated the majority of this human cargo. Reports of the Bureau of Statistics in the Treasury Department reveal that from 1820 to 1860 when five and one half million immigrants came to America's shores, 3.7 million of them were received at New York.[2] The flow of newcomers seemed

1. U. S., Congress, Senate, Documents, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1910-1911, Vol. 12, p. 55.
2. Robert G. Albion, The Rise of the Port of New York, New York, 1939, p.418.

overwhelming at times. In 1850, for example, 370,000 immigrants arrived in America. In 1854, more than 427,000 came. The annual average during this decade was two hundred fifty-nine thousand.[1] The implications for the City of New York is reflected in the fact that in the single month of June, 1853, 49,225 were admitted through the port of New York alone.[2]

Not all of those who came to New York, of course, stayed there. Many were dispersed to all parts of the country. It is impossible to calculate precisely how many actually settled within the city. There is information, however, at least to substantiate the general magnitude of their effect upon New York during this era. We do know, for example, that from 1845 to 1850 when 841,000 immigrants arrived at this port, the population of the city did increase by 144,000.[3] Statistically, this is an imperfect indicator, but it can be further buttressed by data from the 1850 census that records that the foreign born population of New York represented 42% of the city's total. In the next decade, it increased to 47%, and of these, the Irish were most prevalent being 203,000 in number out of the city's 1860 total of 813,000.[4]

As the wharves of New York became daily more crowded with this onslaught of bewildered foreigners, the city's task was to find a way to respond effectively in order to process, assimilate or otherwise absorb them. An adequate response to this massive influx was not always possible.

One immediate effect of the large population being jammed onto the island and indicative of the city's general dilemma, was that the available

1. U.S., Congress, Senate, Documents, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1910-1911, Vol. 20, pp. 4-5.
2. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXX (1854) p. 252.
3. Kate Claghorn, op. cit., p. 464.
4. Robert Albion, op. cit., p. 419.

housing stock was quickly overwhelmed. The combination of a lack of supply of housing, lack of personal resources and local prejudice compelled the immigrants to press into the older residential areas which were being rapidly converted by speculators, into the notorious slums and tenement districts which are legendary. Along with the crowding and inherent poverty of these groups came the rise in social problems which have always been disproportionately high amongst the lower classes. The incidence of crime, delinquency, prostitution, public health problems, mortality and pauperism rose concommitantly with the increasing arrival of immigrants.[1]

The result of these facts were combined with the less tenable concerns about labor competition, a fear of social disorder, the effect of radical political thought on democratic institutions, and even that the wave of catholic immigrants would become the crest of a Papal conspiracy to conquer the world. And thus often the immigrants of the city came to bear more of the responsibility for its social ills than they deserved. Unfortunately, as James Bryce wrote:

> There is a disposition in the United States to use the immigrants and especially the Irish, much as the cat is used in the kitchen to account for broken plates and food which disappears. The cities have no doubt suffered from the immigrant vote. But New York was not an eden before the Irish came, and would not become an eden were they all to move on to San Francisco.[2]

The result of massive immigration to New York City was more than fear and problems. It is clear, for example, that in spite of the deprivation and exploitation frequently endured, the immigrant population as a group

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1. For example, see Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City: 1825-1863, New York, 1949, pp. 200-205; and Annual Report of the City Inspector of the City of New York, for the year ending December 31, 1860, New York, 1861.
2. As quoted in M. R. Werner, Tammany Hall, New York, 1928, p. 62.

did make a substantial contribution to the economic growth of city and in turn received benefits from it in excess of what could have been expected in their home countries. While there were many skilled artisans and professionals who found work in American cities, there were many more who became their servants, laborers and operatives who by their sweat, with their hands, were the motive force of the economic growth which swept New York at this time. Charles Dickens, observing a pair of Irishmen on Broadway in 1842 remarked,

> "It would be hard to keep your model republics going without the countrymen and countrywomen of these two labourers. For who else would dig, and delve, and drudge and do domestic work, and make canals and roads and execute great lines of Internal Improvement."[1]

Although the growth in population which was derived from foreign immigrants did provide a greater basic work force, other more important changes were forced upon the city. Cultural modifications, social diversity, new opportunities and new problems emerged and became part of the forces shaping the city's development. Rapid population growth meant pervasive change, and nowhere would it be more immediate or manifest than in the new urban environment being formed.

Translation into the Environment

The inevitable result of the massive economic expansion and concommitant growth in population that had thoroughly engulfed New York City by 1850 was an equally rapid and visible response in growth and transformation of the physical city. Even by the 1830's, the urban landscape had begun spreading northward away from the settled tip of the thirteen-

1. Charles Dickens, American Notes and Pictures of Italy, London, 1957, p. 81.

mile-long island. The tendency and direction of the city's growth arose naturally from the longitudinal shape of the island and was further aided by the fact that the most attractive and desirable locations were on the high elevated plain that constituted the spine of the island. Before this period of rapid growth, New York was a compact little city essentially huddled below Fourteenth Street. It was still well-knit geographically and simple in manners, so that few families even kept a two-horse carriage finding it easier to walk to their destinations. There were no police or firemen--only a few watchmen and volunteer groups. Vendors and milkmen carried their wares from door to door and each householder was responsible for cleaning the walks and streets before their premises. And although class lines were becoming more highly differentiated with the increasing presence of immigrants, the community as a whole remained remarkably harmonious and homogeneous.[1] If one sought an adventure or a small trip, one could leave Fulton Street and go on the Ferry to Brooklyn for two cents.[2]

By the 1840's and 50's conditions seemed much different. Foreign immigration, commercial and manufacturing growth, and the consequences such changes wrought, essentially overran the old city and its social customs. It was first particularly visible in the topography of the city. By 1848, the city's buildings had marched inexorably north as far as 31st Street.[3] As the New York Herald observed just a few years earlier:

1. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (eds.), The Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 1, New York, 1952, p. xi-xii.
2. W. Williams, Appleton's New York City and Vicinity Guide, New York, 1849, p. 49.
3. Diary G. T. Strong, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 335.

> The growth of the city in the upper wards is astonishing. Whole streets of magnificent dwelling houses have been erected in the vicinity of Union Square within the last year and some half dozen elegant churches are in process of erection in the same neighborhood. The Fifth Avenue is rapidly filling up, and in the course of a few years will be one of the finest streets on the continent. Fourteenth Street, running from river to river, is a noble thoroughfare and is now nearly the centre of the fashionable faubourgs, whilst a year or two since it was quite the boundary line of the city in that direction...[1]

The boundaries, if not the extent of this rapid physical growth were well controlled or contained, for although the city street system had already been carefully planned, few were built until sufficient public demand or pressure was evident. The public result of this fact was two-fold. First, a continuing primary business of the Common Council for many years became the weighing and enactment of innumerable ordinances concerned with opening up of new streets, the laying out of sidewalks and curb and gutter stones, the extension of the sewer system and the lighting of streets with gas. The public record is quite literally jammed with such material during this period. Secondly, the provision of street and other urban facilities only upon demand meant that the division between the settled, urban part of the community and the rural unoccupied portion was very distinct. For example, while the city was rather fully settled to 31st Street at this time (1845), one could pick blackberries where Madison Avenue now crosses 35th Street, and small well-scattered country farms and estates were all that could be found above 40th Street.[2]

Although generally welcomed as a sign of progress and prosperity, not everyone accepted this city expansion graciously. The perceptive

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1. New York Herald, Feb. 26, 1845, as quoted in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1789.
2. Benson Lossing, History of New York City, Vol. II, New York, 1884, p. 603.

and peripatetic diarist of New York during this period, George Templeton Strong, remarked from his home downtown, "...this section of the metropolis is beginning to pass all toleration and I think we shall be forced to become immigrants before we are much older."[1] And Walt Whitman observing the tumultuous liveliness of the scene brought on by expansion wrote, "What can New York--noisy, roaring, rumbling, tumbling, bustling, stormy, turbulent New York--have to do with silence?" he asked in 1842. "Amid the universal clatter the incessant din of business and building, the all swallowing vortex of the great money whirlpool...who has any idea...of silence?"[2] All the activity and noise had by 1850 extended the built-up part of the city to more than four miles north of the Battery enclosing a circumference of closely packed buildings equal to nearly ten square miles.

Never before had there been so many improvements underway at one time in the city. As the city extended its streets, shops, and brownstone houses northward, and to the east and west, there seemed to be scarcely a street on which there was not being erected one or more new buildings in place of others too old or small to meet the requirements of the advancing trade and population. Old streets were being widened and new ones constructed and by 1855 work was underway to open the area between 38th and 44th Streets where new buildings were already beginning to dot the landscape.[3] A contemporary guidebook to the city boasted, "twelve noble avenues, each 100 feet wide, run parallel and lengthwise of

1. Diary G. T. Strong, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 262.
2. As quoted in Bayard Still, Mirror for Gotham, op. cit., p. 82.
3. New York Daily Times, Aug. 11, 1855, as quoted in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1861-2.

the island, giving access to the city and these are cut at right angles by numerous streets, every tenth one of which is also 100 feet wide, while the narrow streets are 60 feet in width....There are upon Broadway alone some twenty-five hotels, all elegant in their appointments, and varying in their accommodations from 100 to 1000 guests..."[1] Broadway had indeed become the main street of the new world and the numerous foreign observers commented on it with a mixture of wonder and surprise. Visiting New York in 1854, an Englishman, William Chambers, observed, "...the buildings of Broadway...We see for the greater part of its length, series of high and handsome buildings, of brown sandstone or brick, with several of white marble and granite. Some of the stores and hotels astonish by their size and grandeur..."[2] Six or seven-story buildings were going up on its whole length in a variety of new styles so that it seemed that "the entire length of Broadway...had been measured for a new suit of marble and freestone."[3]

Two indices of the continuing northward progress of business and society were the laying of the cornerstone of St. Patrick's Cathedral at Fifth and 50th Streets in August of 1858,[4] and Columbia University's decision in 1857 to move its campus northward in order to have more room.

The rapid expansion and new construction northward would not slow for many generations. Thousands of new dwellings were needed to accommodate the new arrivals and to relieve the crowding of families who were packed in tenements and boarding houses. A contemporary analyst projected

1. As quoted in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1845.
2. Ibid., p. 1854.
3. Gleasons Pictorial, III (Nov. 1, 1852) p. 317.
4. Bayard Still, Mirror for Gotham, op. cit., p. 127.

that if the city continued to grow at a rate of 75,000 people per year with an average density of 25 persons to a structure, then 3000 structures of all classes would have to be erected each year to meet the need. At that rate, if the vacant streets were filled in numerical order, five streets would be filled up every year. This sort of projection suggested that the city would be built up to 155th Street by 1880.[1]

Such heavy demands and rapid construction brought out both the best and the worst in architecture. In many places high demand and speculation drove land prices so high that only the most wealthy could consider building there. For example, lots 100 x 23 feet on Fifth Avenue commanded $10-20,000.[2] On such a site in 1854-1855, Samuel P. Townsend who had made his fortune in sarsaparilla syrup, built at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, a brownstone mansion costing more than $100,000. For a few years only it remained one of the wonders of New York.[3] This single example was indicative of many similar indulgences which would follow.

On the other side of the issue there were many indications of less than successful architecture. Much of it to begin with was quickly and poorly built. George Templeton Strong, who felt that half of his beloved city was being "pulled down," also reported many instances of jerry-built construction, which sometimes literally collapsed around the builders.[4] Philip Hone would record in his diary in August, 1850:

> "Two new homes in the process of erection fell down yesterday...Both of these disasters have been attended with loss of life and dreadful mutilations of the workmen. The shameful manner of constructing houses intended for renting

1. No author, The Growth of New York, New York, 1865, p. 23.
2. New York Daily Times, Jan. 26, 1854.
3. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1856.
4. Diary G. T. Strong, Vol. 2, p. 34; New York Evening Post, Jan. 16, 1851.

> demands a remedy. Laws should be passed and inspectors of buildings appointed with arbitrary power to prevent the erection of these man-traps. I have noticed...blocks of new buildings so slightly built that they could not stand alone, and, like drunken men, require the support of each other to keep them from falling."[1]

Large speculative ventures were also understandably and necessarily the order of the day. On a site occupied by several small frame houses and shanties, for example, at 44-47th Streets between Broadway and Ninth Avenues, the Astor family contracted for the erection of two hundred, three to five-story buildings.[2] As residential buildings, these rows of town houses, viewed so sympathetically and desirably by later generations, did not always win the approbation of contemporary critics. On August 27, 1859, the New York Times wrote, "Look to the right or left and you see row after row of three or four story tenements--all faced with omnipresent brown stone, and characterized by an undeviating style of steps leading from the sidewalks to the front doors. It might almost be imagined that there is or was but one plan of building residences in New York, so uniform is the appearance of the facades, but an inspection, of course, reveals some variation in the style of exterior finished. Still, it is wearisome to behold such an endless succession of houses so closely resembling each other; and in continuing our walk it was a momentary relief to turn into the streets inhabited by the poorer classes of the community. In relieving our contemplative organs, we aggrieved our olfactories, and were right glad when we again reached a purer atmosphere."[3]

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1. Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851, Vol. 2, New York, 1927, p. 900.
2. New York Evening Post, Jan. 17, 1851, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1832.
3. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1881.

The city advanced not only in the type and magnitude of its building, but it was also rebuilt to meet the requirements of a now much larger population and to perform the vastly different economic functions into which it was evolving. The urban transformation imposed on the city through the growth of its population and economic activities when translated into its physical and geographic matrix, is a complex but normal part of the urbanization process which has always taken place when towns have grown into cities, and cities into metropolises.[1] Certain forms of land use and building necessarily decline and disappear as the city adjusts to its new functions only to use again in a different form or place in another part of the urban area. This evolutionary and regenerative process is still of paramount interest to present-day urban scholars. It is interesting to note that "The Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Condition of Tenant Houses in New York and Brooklyn" so well captured the essence of this process in its public report of 1857:

> As our wharves became crowded with warehouses, and encompassed with bustle and noise, the wealthier citizens, who peopled old "Knickerbocker" mansions, near the bay, transferred their residence to streets beyond the din; compensating for remoteness from their counting houses, by the advantages of increased quiet and luxury. Their habitations then passed into the hands, on the one side, of boarding house keepers, on the other, of real estate agents; and here, in its beginning, the tenant house became a real blessing to that class of industrious poor whose small earnings limited their expenses and whose employment in workshops, stores, and about the wharves and thoroughfares, rendered a near residence of much importance. At this period, rents were moderate, and a mechanic with family could hire two or more comfortable and even commodious apartments, in a house once occupied by wealthy people, for less than half what he is now obliged to pay for narrow and unhealthy quarters. This state of tenantry comfort did not,

1. For a recent, modern treatment of this phenomenon, see, Edgar M. Hoover and Raymond Vernon, Anatomy of a Metropolis, Cambridge, 1959.

> however, continue long; for the rapid march of improvement speedily enhanced the value of the property in the lower wards of the city, and as this took place, rents rose, and accommodations decreased in the same proportions. At first the better class of tenants submitted to retain their single floors, or two and three rooms, at the onerous rates, but this rendered them poorer, and those who were able to do so, followed the example of former proprietors, and emigrated to the upper wards. The spacious dwelling houses then fell before improvements, or languished for a season, as tenant houses of the type which is now the prevailing evil of our city; that is to say, their large rooms were partitioned into several smaller ones (without regard for proper light or ventilation), the rates of rent being lower in proportion to space or height from the street; and they soon became filled, from cellar to garret, with a class of tenantry living from hand to mouth, loose in morals, improvident in habits, degraded or squalid as beggary itself.[1]

Any city experiencing growth such as has been described here, did, of course, develop growing pains and problems. Some were endemic to a city under such pressure; some were symptomatic of broader urban requirements or were only indicative of a specific temporal need; and still others have been so persistent as to appear as seemingly permanent companions to the urban place.

Although New York City was rich, optimistically growing, and had by the 1850's attained the enviable position of being the economic and commercial capital of the American continent, it seemed in many other respects impoverished. For its expansive growth had not been accomplished without penalty or human misery. In fact all too many of the descriptions of the city at this period dwell heavily on this nether side of the city's progress.[2]

Many of the city's major problems at mid-century stemmed from, or were closely related to the quality and amount of housing that was

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1. As quoted in Edward Banfield, The Unheavenly City, Boston, 1970, p. 25.
2. Mathew Hale Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York, Hartford, 1868.

available to accommodate the city's burgeoning population. During this period of great population expansion, not only was the city's housing stock in short supply, but also what was available was quickly overcrowded and often in bad repair. The inadequate housing supply and the inability of the recent arrivals to afford anything but minimal accommodations, meant that particular burdens were placed on the immigrant population. Furthermore, their herding together for reasons of fear, prejudice or the instincts of self or cultural preservation, often resulted in the poor housing being isolated into particularly intense enclaves. The nature of these conditions and their intimate relationship to increased immigration were first publicly aired by Dr. John H. Griscom, the city inspector for the Board of Health, in a precedent-making report published in 1845. Griscom called attention to the condition of tenement houses and the slums growing up around them, and furthermore pointed out the public health problems that were attendant to these neighborhoods. The immediate result was the appointment of city housing inspectors who replaced the fire wardens who had formerly done this work.[1] The long term and more important effect was that the increased public concern that he stimulated led to a further study in 1853 by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. Finally, three years later these disclosures led the legislature to appoint the city's first tenement house commission.[2] The reports of these groups revealed conditions so poor and of such magnitude as to overshadow present-day slum conditions.

1. John H. Griscom, The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of the City of New York, New York, 1845, p. 47-48.
2. Lawrence Veiller, Tenement House Reform in New York, 1834-1900, New York, 1900,pp. 5-10.

The conditions which these reports and other dwelled on essentially centered on three crucial matters: the physical condition of the dwellings, the density or crowded state of the people compelled to live in them, and the implications both of these facts had for the moral and physical well-being of the residents.[1]

A representative tenement house was described in the ninth ward. The building was 16 feet wide, sat on a lot 25 x 103 feet and extended longitudinally from the street to the end of the lot. Two stories high with a basement, it had a yard and verandah of eight feet. It contained eight families adding up to more than a total of 50 residents.[2] Ten years after this description, it was estimated that there were 15,309 such tenant houses in New York, with the average number of families to each being 7.2. Furthermore, the total number of persons residing in such habitations was 495,592, or nearly half the entire population.[3] This is an average of 30.5 persons per tenement house. One official report described the habitation in these terms: "The apartments are dirty, dark and uninviting, often reeking with filth, the walls wholly innocent of whitewash, and the atmosphere impregnated with the disagreeable odor so peculiar to tenant houses. In some the sun never shines and the apartments are so dark that unless seated near the window it is impossible to read ordinary type....The tenants seem to wholly disregard personal cleanliness, if not the very first

1. For full descriptive documentation see amongst others, New York State Assembly Documents, No. 199, 1856; New York State Assembly Documents No. 205, March 9, 1857.
2. New York Assn. for Improving the Condition of the Poor, First Report of a Committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Classes in the City of New York with Remedial Suggestions, New York, 1853, p. 12.
3. Kate H. Claghorn, "The Foreign Immigrant in New York City," op. cit., pp. 454-455.

principles of decency, their general appearance and actions, corresponding with their wretched abodes..."[1]

Forced to concentrate in these tenement districts both because of a lack of alternative housing and lack of money, the residents were also segregated because of a combination of ethnic prejudices and a general fear of the social ills often prevalent in such districts. Because of the lack of any public transportation and the fact that population could only expand northward on Manhattan Island, almost all of the nearly half million people in tenement houses were confined to a four square mile area at the base of the island. The result of this was that this large population was relegated to an area of already inflated property values further driving rentals upward. This situation together with the general rapacity of the landlords meant that rates were set artifically high, often gouging tenants beyond any reasonable level. It was not unusual to receive $13.00 per month for apartments, $1.25 per week for a 12-foot square room,[2] or to earn well in excess of 15-25% on the original investment.[3]

Even the tenements' inhuman conditions were not available to all. Many immigrants arrived penniless or for a vareity of reasons were quickly reduced to a destitute state. For these people conditions were even more wretched. Those fortunate enough to have any means turned for shelter to the cellars and garrets within the slums. The Griscom Report of 1845 graphically describes the conditions within this available shelter:

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1. As quoted in Claghorn, op. cit., p. 456.
2. Ernst, op. cit., pp. 49-50.
3. New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

> The most offensive of all places of residence are the cellars. It is almost impossible, when contemplating the circumstances and conditions of the poor beings who inhabit these holtes, to maintain the proper degree of calmness requisite for a thorough inspection of their miseries, and sound judgment respecting them. You must descend to them; you must feel the blast of foul air as it meets your face on opening the door; you must grope in the dark or hesitate until your eye becomes accustomed to the gloomy place, to enable you to find your way through the entry over the broken floor, the boards of which are protected from your tread by a half inch of hard dirt; you must inhale the suffocating vapor of the heated rooms; and in the dark, dim recesses endeavor to find the inmates by the sound of their voices, or chance to see their figures moving between you and the flickering light of a window, coated with dirt and festooned with cobwebs--or, if in search of an invalid, take care that you do not fall full length upon the bed with her, by stumbling against the bundle of rags and straw dignified by that name, lying upon the floor, under the window, if window there is; and all this and much more beyond the reach of my pen must be felt and seen ere you can appreciate in its full force the mournful and disgusting condition in which thousands of the subjects of our Government pass their lives.[1]

The total number believed to be living in cellars alone by 1865, was 15,224.[2] They paid neither rent nor taxes. Even worse off were the estimated 20,000 squatter population, estimated by the N. Y. Times,[3] who lived in flimsy shanties or other make-shift shelters constructed from available debris. Scattered indiscriminately along the riverfronts and in the vacant territory from 50th Street to Harlem, squatters lived a primitive existence:

> These people (at "Dutch Hill") find employment in the quarry and manure heap near their homes. They possess cows, swine, goats, and fowls in large numbers. The women, boys, and some of the men are "volunteer assistant to the city inspector". They may be daily seen with their carts drawn by themselves and their dogs; or, if fortune has more signally favored them, a rickety wagon, drawn by a decrepit horse with harness of somewhat primitive construction, facilitates their labors. Going from house to house they ransack the ash barrels

1. As quoted in Claghorn, op. cit., p. 453.
2. Ernst, op. cit., p. 197.
3. Robert Ernst, "The Living Conditions of Immigrants," in Allen M. Wakstein, ed., The Urbanization of America, Boston, 1970, p. 259.

> and beg the swill and other kitchen refuse to supply food for their cows, pigs, and goats.[1]

One result of the crowded and unsafe condition of New York's buildings such as those prevalent in the tenement districts, was their ready susceptibility to fire. The many converted and intensely used buildings often with wooden walls and shingled roofs constituted a major hazard to safety in the city. When these frame buildings caught fire there was on hand only a small force of paid firefighters. Most of the task was left to the 34 engines within the entire city manned by the attractively romantic but inefficient volunteer hose companies.[2] These men were further hampered by a lack of adequate public water supply throughout the entire city's built-up area. Major fires ravished large sections of the town in both 1835 and 1845. The first burned over fifty acres for 19 hours,[3] and the second took nearly 300 buildings valued at more than $7,000,000.[4] Other major fires which devastated large sections of the city occured in 1840 and 1853 and graphic descriptions were provided by George Templeton Strong.[5] Many became inured to such occurrences for one English visitor could relate:

> "What is the matter?" said I.
>
> "Only a fire," replied an American Friend; "but don't move. Nobody thinks anything about fires here. Fires are familiar incidents. They are an institution of the country; we are proud of them. Besides we do not believe all the alarms of fire that are raised; for the 'boys' like to have a run. If your own walls are heated by conflagration next door, you may bestir yourself--but not til then".[6]

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1. Claghorn, op. cit., p. 461.
2. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1824.
3. Ernest Risley Eaton, "New York City--A Hundred Years Ago," Quarterly of Phi Alpha Gamma (May, 1934), p. 2.
4. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1792.
5. Diary of G. T. Strong, Vol. 1, pp. 127-128, 138.
6. Charles Mackay, Life and Liberty in America, London, 1859, Vol. I, p. 28.

The city's only major defense to fires was to rebuild generally in brick or stone or to otherwise render them more fireproof.[1]

Such an environment as has been described which was created or reinforced by the all too prevalent tenement districts was believed to have an effect on the moral and social well-being of the city. Many observers dwelt on the moral degeneracy they felt was bred in such surroundings, explaining it often as but part of an irrevocable downward process. "It is to be feared that the miasmial air will creep into their existence undermining the sturdy constitutions and prostrating its victims on a bed of sickness; health failing them, want will follow, and then must come crowding rapidly upon them neglect of home, neglect of children, uncleanliness, drunkness and crime."[2] The spectre of imminent decay did not always happen in this order nor was it as inevitable as here suggested, but its probability was nonetheless real. The crowded conditions, impoverished state, and social change imposed by the city's phenomenal growth guaranteed a moral laxity especially in contrast to a more rigid social standard that had, until recently, prevailed. Certainly the absence of private conveniences, and accommodations of rooms that were a community of beds and bedrooms where people of necessity mixed all ages and sexes, lent themselves to promiscuity, incest, child abuse, and other indecencies. Furthermore, intemperance, prostitution and mental illness, which have always been disproportionately high in areas of extreme poverty

1. For a map showing extent of damage of two major fires in 1835 and 1845, see John F. Watson, Annals and Occurrences in New York City in the Olden Time, Philadelphia, 1846, p. 225.
2. "Report of Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Conditions of Tenement Houses in New York and Brooklyn," New York State Assembly Document 205, 1857, as quoted in Veiller, op. cit., p. 10.

were also readily observable in New York[1]--and they weighed in favor of such arguments. These factors were dehumanizing as well as degenerative, and it is important to note with but very few exceptions, that these general appearances and actions which mirrored the condition of the wretched abodes, were not viewed as a matter of innate depravity but were rather seen as the result of the environment in which these people were compelled to live.

Other social ills such as crime and pauperism were also prevalent and seen as endemic to the environment. Poverty, criminal acts, and misery had, of course, grown along with the city. Poverty had been one of the most common conditions which had brought many of the immigrants to these shores and since only the lower class and temporary laboring jobs were readily open to them, it was usually the state they remained in for at least a generation. Descriptions of the destitution and misery common to the tenement districts fill the literature of the time and there is little requirement to relate them here. Scenes of half-clad, filthy, emaciated creatures huddled into damp, foul cellers are graphic testament to the trials endured, but the official statistics are just as revealing. In 1855, 69% of the cases receiving charitable aid were born in Ireland while 16.8% more were born in other foreign countries. Only 14.2% were considered native-Americans.[2] Most all of these were concentrated in the tenement districts. It is also interesting to note here that poverty was seen as closely related to environment and was not considered a threat, nor as an ineradicable condition of life. Reform through example and

1. See amongst others, Diary G. T. Strong, Vol. II, p. 57; and on Children, Charles Loring Brace, Our Pampered and Vagrant Children, New York, 1859.
2. Claghorn, op. cit., p. 460.

personal exposure to better classes, combined with self-help principles, were seen as the solution to matters of want.[1] The result was that few public mechanisms or institutions were yet in existence to tend to these problems. Such attention as they received came from private philanthropy, religious sources, or internal immigrant aid societies, not from municipal organizations.

An increase in criminal acts was also very much a part of New York's urban scene during this period of rapid expansion. High levels of poverty and desperation led many to an attempt to obtain illegally what was not available through socially acceptable means. And while there were many instances of serious crime, most of the arrests were related to petty theivery, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, gambling and raids on brothels and unlicensed saloons--more symptomatic of social disorder than major threats to society. Complaints ran well ahead of arrests displaying again the gap between reality and the response which an urban society under such pressures could muster. The records of arrests again show that they were disproportionately concentrated within the immigrant and tenement districts.[2] This high incidence of crime was also frequently attributed to the dehumanizing effects of the environment and informed opinion agreed that the solution involved the improvement of the criminal environment, either through direct action within the slums or by advocating that the salvation of the poor depended on getting this surplus to country homes

1. Richard Sennett, Families Against the City, Cambridge, 1970, p. 22; and Alexander B. Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring, London, 1970, p. 157.
2. Claghorn op. cit., p. 460. Also see Ernst, op. cit., p. 202.

by forced emigration westward.[1] This conception of the environment as determinative of social behavior was also logically extended into a belief that if one could expose the residents to a more natural, open environment within the city, then the tone of the countryside might also be transferred to the socially disorganized city.

Social disorder and dissent were manifest as well by the riots which occurred in New York. Never a common or frequent phenomenon, they did occur often enough to warrant review. Although there were four or five major riots within the city in pre-revolutionary times, the first riot which was related to our topic occurred in 1837. Commonly referred to as the flour or bread riot, it originated in the large class of economically precarious workers who were thrown into absolute destitution by the severe winter and depression of that year. Facing possible starvation, four or five thousand people rampaged through stores in order to seize barrels of high priced flour. In 1849, in an Anglophobic reaction to the appearance of a popular British actor, a large riot broke out at the Astor Place Opera House, which was only put down after the militia was called in and twenty-two men were killed and thirty wounded. A third riot of equal magnitude occurred in 1857 mostly over the issue of the State Legislature having removed many elements of local control from the city government, but also exacerbated by the financial depression of that year. The militia also ended this uprising, but only after 8 were killed and some 30 wounded.[2] Sporadic riots such as these, like the constant criminal acts within the city, were an indication of the uneasy state of anxiety and distress characteristic of a diverse and expanding social system under great tension.

1. For a later example of this position, see Charles Loring Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years Work Among Them, New York, 1872.
2. J. T. Headley, The Great Riots of New York, 1712-1873, New York, 1873.

In addition to the urban conditions related to comfort, decency and safety, perhaps the most prevalent and insidious threat emanating from the overstrained environment, and that which touched the lives of all in the enlarged population, was the matter of public health. Many of the impoverished immigrants brought diseases with them or contracted them during the protracted and difficult journey from abroad. Yet the major threat to health came from the conditions in the city itself. With nearly half the population living in tenement districts or worse surroundings, it was nearly impossible to avoid public health calamities. While most Americans could regard the United States as a land of health, virtue and rustic simplicity, by 1850 it was undeniable that America had nurtured slums as squalid as any in Europe and in the process had dotted the otherwise green and pleasant landscape with unnatural and undesirable excrescences by its pockets of urban poverty.[1] New York, in its process of expansion had given birth to a large group of neighborhoods dominated by dilapidated rookeries, damp basements, stifling attics and unventilated closets, which while never intended for human habitation, were crowded beyond capacity. There were places "where dogs would howl to lie, women and men and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings."[2] With few public controls or inspection, public health efforts were hopelessly enfeebled. The seemingly easy to solve problems of garbage and rubbish disposal went unattended, and this condition was exacerbated by the accumulation of filth in back alleys and in the narrow,

1. Charles Rosenberg, The Cholera Years, Chicago, 1962, pp. 6-7.
2. Charles Dickens, American Notes, p. 273 as quoted in Max Berger, The British Traveller in America 1836-60, New York, 1943, p. 28.

unpaved streets. The streets themselves were improperly drained and as late as 1859, two-thirds of the city remained unsewered. And even after the introduction of a public water system in 1842, many dwellings continued to draw their water from polluted wells and in any event few tenements had adequate if any facilities for washing, bathing or sanitary disposal. Furthermore, with no land use controls, the air in many sections stank with the exhalations of nearby gas works, slaughter houses, decaying garbage, and the festering bodies of dead animals.[1] One small indication of the squalid conditions within the city were the frequent descriptions by visitors about the pigs which freely scavenged in the streets. Few seemed to dispute the privilege of their presence, except their natural enemy, dogs. A common sight even on Broadway,[2] their ranks were thinned by two factors. In 1849, the legislature passed a law making it a misdemeanor to throw garbage, offal, and other filthy substances into the street,[3] and secondly there had developed a recognized trade called pig-napping practiced by squatters and others who scooped up the unwatched pigs and sold them to butchers.[4]

The result of these unpleasant facts was that families in New York, particularly the lower classes, suffered grievously from persistent, annoying, and often fatal physical illnesses or disability. Most common were those that thrived and were most communicable in such an environment. They included tuberculosis, malaria, typhoid, typhus, yellow fever, scarletina, smallpox and cholera. The effect of these epidemic visitations

1. Seymour Mandelbaum, Boss Tweed's New York, New York, 1965, p. 8.
2. Charles Dickens, American Notes, New York, 1957, p. 86.
3. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1818.
4. Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 103.

was frightening and devastating. A major public health document published in 1861 stated that in the twenty-two years from 1833 to 1860, 121,476 persons in the city died from communicable diseases, and more than half of these believed to be preventable if adequate and known precautions had been taken.[1] The death rate in 1864, 40 in every 1000, was higher than that of any other large city in the western world.[2] By way of comparison in the years 1898, 1916, and 1932, after many important reforms had occurred and medical science substantially advanced, the rates respectively were 20.26, 13.82, and 10.3.[3] The location of the major hazard was never in doubt, for in 1865 14,600 of the total 19,313 deaths in the city were within the tenement house districts.[4] So bad were the statistics that even ministers stopped urging piety as the single cure for disease, but instead foud it assuring to take up the standard of sanitary reform as well.[5] Cholera had to be more than a judgment of God.

The most feared and pernicious disease was cholera, because its symptoms were particularly severe, and because it was generally fatal to more than half of those it attacked. This most dread affliction reached epidemic proportions in New York City three times during the 19th century--1832, 1849 and 1866.[6] The second wave was particularly devastating. In 1848 cholera, like political disruption, spread throughout Europe and it was only a matter of time before it would be transported from ports like London and Le Havre to the U. S. In New York, it took hold first in

1. John H. Griscom, Sanitary Legislation, Past and Future, New York, 1861, p. 9.
2. Mandelbaum, op. cit., p. 8.
3. Alexander Flick, History of the State of New York, Vol. 10, New York, 1933-1937, p. 180.
4. Charles Loring Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York, op. cit., p. 56.
5. Charles Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 5.
6. For a very full and helpful account see Rosenberg, op. cit., pp.101-120, on which I am heavily dependent for this section.

the city's most notorious slum area, Five Points, an infamous district just below Broadway and Canal Street. Cholera is primarily transmitted through unwashed hands and food, and particularly by a sewage-contaminated water supply. As virulent as the disease was, it could not have thrived where filth and want were not already in existence, and from tenement districts where a decade's accumulation was present, it quickly spread throughout the lower class neighborhoods. By the end of this year, nearly 5100 people had died of the disease.[1] New York was lucky, for other U.S. cities did not escape as easily.

The reasons that public health menaces such as cholera could attack the city with relative impunity were many, including the urban conditions described above. In addition, part of the fault was related to the pace of urbanization which simply outstripped the parallel development of medical science and sanitary reform. Rapid urbanization had created the crowded and hazardous conditions which were ideal breeding grounds for public health epidemics but they had not yet given birth to the solutions which would have protected the public's health. Some few perceptive critics also noted that the city did not avail itself adequately of the resources that were available to it. For example, there was a lag in the passage of legislation and the appointment of inspectors which could have helped abate the epidemics. Stricter control over tenement sanitation or a systematic program for cleaning or depopulating the tenement areas would have been helpful. Also, the few health regulations that were in existence were poorly enforced and there were complaints that many of the existing inspectors were inept and poorly educated.[2] Stricter

1. New York Evening Post, Jan. 2, 1850, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1823.
2. Ernst, op. cit., p. 23.

control over privies, cesspools, cemeteries, and private water supplies was viewed as an encroachment on private property rights, and the resolution of these issues was handled in a political context, rather than viewed as the medical problem it was.[1] In addition, the political decision-makers lagged behind in their willingness or perception of the need to allocate sufficient funds for the provision of hospitals, inspection teams, and quarantine facilities which would have undoubtedly eased the suffering. And lastly, the lack of money amongst the lower class, who were most greatly affected, prevented them from availing themselves of the luxury of leaving town as did the more wealthy, or of receiving medical attention or even purchasing the numerous quack curatives that were purported to be a cure for every ill.

One common theme regarding a remedy or cure for all these illnesses in the city with important implications for this thesis runs throughout the public health literature of the day. The causes of ill health and epidemic diseases were not fully understood for this was before the time of a general acceptance of the germ theory of disease. The result was that a great deal of emphasis was placed on the nature of the environment in which the diseases flourished rather than on the immediate, direct causes themselves. All of the official commission reports and most amateur critics singled out particularly the lack of fresh air and sunshine in the crowded tenement quarters as partial, but main causes of the diseases. The inspector in a district between 23rd and 26th Streets noted, for example, that "those whose sunken eyes, pale cheeks and colorless lips speak more eloquently than words of the anemic condition inevitably results from the absence of pure, fresh air and general light

1. Griscom, op. cit., p. 9.

of the sun."[1] And the Griscom Report of 1845 even condensed the causes to couplet form:

> These vapors with malignant breath
> Rise thick, and scatter midnight death.[2]

One official report went to considerable lengths to show that the incidence of disease in a given space was positively correlated with the number of people and cubic feet of air within that area.[3] The authors of this 1853 report went on to say,

> "...even one person shut up in a small airtight chamber would not live through a single day. It is computed that the population of a crowded city, by the mere natural action of their lungs, in the course of twenty-four hours, vitiate a layer of air as large as the whole area inhabited, at least a yard in depth or thickness; to say nothing of the amount spoiled and rendered unfit for breathing by fires, and furnaces, damps, candles, gas, gas-works, nuisances, and all manner of deleterious manufactories. Were it not for the providential arrangement that air thus vitiated is in constant motion to ascend, making way for fresh air to take its place, we should always be in danger of suffocation in a room without a draft, or in a city without a wind. This explains why the contracted and crowded tenements of the poor become a permanent source of ill health--..."[4]

Certainly fresh air and sunlight may be important to good health, but even when their deficiency is combined with other common conditions in slums-overcrowding, insufficient sewer and water facilities, filth in the homes, and streets, dampness in cellars, inadequate diet--they are still but a contributory factor in the aggravation and spread of disease. They are not the prevailing cause. But what is important here is not the fact but the belief, and the belief was that disease was caused,

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1. As quoted in Claghorn, op. cit., p. 456.
2. As reprinted in Charles Glaab, The American City, Homewood, Illinois, 1963, p. 122.
3. New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, First Report..., op. cit., p. 17.
4. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

transmitted or was somehow a part of the vague atmospheric malaise that had become identified with the lower class neighborhoods. There was the feeling that disease crept into the city on the miasmal air of the tenement districts and that if only you could open up or ventilate these districts, or the city as whole, then it would soon be dispelled or dissipated.

The city was not under constant seige of epidemic, of course, nor was it ever brought to a standstill by disease. Most often it was the scene of busy activity, its streets filled with shoppers, businessmen and workers going about their daily duties. Broadway, along its two and one-half mile length, became a great promenade of beauty and fashion where often the silks of China, and the other rich eastern fabrics could even be seen.[1] One contemporary in 1858 described Broadway as not unlike the Strand in London or a Paris Boulevard. Early each morning it would begin to fill with country vehicles bringing supplies to market and shortly from all the side streets and byways would flow the many workers on foot, horse or by ferry who converged on the center city each morning. Shortly thereafter, clerks arrived to open the shops and they were followed by a wave of shoppers and businessmen who quickly filled the streets and sidewalks.[2] These pleasant street scenes which were frequently related by commentators, masked another major problem that was endemic to all expanding urban centers. The new population which had crammed into the city and forced its boundaries to be recast outward disfiguring its physical appearance, had to find their way across the widening distances between home and work, business, or other essential activities. Transportation facilities and

1. E. Porter Belden, New York: Past, Present and Future, New York, 1849, p. 29.
2. James Grant Wilson, The Memorial History of the City of New York, New York, 1893, pp. 464-5.

roads lagged behind the need for them, and it is probably only with partial hyperbole that an English traveller could desdribe traffic conditions within the city in 1854 by saying:

> Pack the traffic of the Strand and Cheapside into Oxford Street, and you still will not have an idea of the crush in Broadway. There are streams of scarlet and yellow omnibuses racing in the more open parts, and locking each others wheels in the narrower--there are helpless females deposited in the middle of a sea of slippery mud, condemned to run a gauntlet between cart wheels and horse hoofs--there are loaded stages hastening to and from huge hotels--carts and waggons laden with merchandise--and "Young Americans" driving fast trotting horses, edging in and out among the crowd--wheels are locked, horses tumble down, and persons pressed for time are distracted. Occasionally, the whole traffic of the street comes to a deadlock, in consequence of some obstruction or crowd...[1]

Such Gordian knots of carts and carriages were common enough to indicate the sort of problem the city was caught in. For a growing city to prosper commercially and function efficiently over extended space, a comprehensive transportation system of new roads and mass facilities such as street-railroads and omnibuses had to be brought into being. Other forms of communication also had to be rethought now that the city was no longer a small, compact entity where intimate face to face contact was possible. Messenger service, postal service, telegraph, telephone, street railways and many other forms of communication and transportation had to be brought into increased use, or even invented to overcome the problem of distance which an extended and more widely settled city had introduced.[2] New roads would relieve congestion by helping to move the traffic faster and the opening up of new sections of the city to development would lessen density and population pressures. Yet as with most of

1. As quoted in Bayard Still, op. cit., p. 154.
2. Seymoud Mandelbaum, op. cit., passim.

the city's internal problems, more time would have to pass and more money be invested, before these solutions were forthcoming.

Last to be considered as a major urban problem which befell New York at mid-century, is the nature of local municipal government--that legally constituted entity to which so much of the burden of growth and its attendant problems had to fall. It was itself in an attenuated position. By 1850 there was undeniably placed a great strain on local governmental institutions. Needing to extend vastly its rudimentary public services, redefine its role in light of new realities, and become responsive to a new and more heterogeneous electorate, the old ideals which had adequately guided the government of the city up to this point were quickly being eclipsed. New York City was no longer a small town which could hope to be governed by a small town ethos which simply anointed the city's economic elite to fulfill their roles of stewardship and public services. The city was fundamentally changing and in the process its governmental forms, responsibilities, and officials were changing with it. In essence, the decade of the fifties was a period of transition which would see new leaders put into office by a more pluralistic electorate, and begin to develop a group of full-time managers and institutions--a bureaucracy--to run the city, uncover its ills, and confront its problems. With the new belief that any man could serve effectively in public office, control was wrested from the old elites.[1] Unfortunately, in the process of this transition, abetted by the extreme social flux and the magnitude of the problems and opportunities which the city offered, the entire process of

1. For a more full description of such a transition see, Robert C. Wood, Suburbia, Boston, 1956, pp. 30-36; or Robert Dahl, Who Governs?, New Haven, 1961, pp. 1-88.

local government became perverted. Like its housing stock, public and transportation facilities, the expanding city simply outgrew its former governmental structures and procedures, and had to begin to reconstruct more appropriate forms.

The heyday of bossism and corruption in New York is usually identified with the reign of the Tweed Ring from about 1866-1872. Yet it must be remembered that the conditions which permitted and the people who performed such legendary exploits came into political life and learned their trade during the early 1850's. Symptoms of fraud and instances of outright corruption were innumerable during this period. This was particularly true in regard to the granting of contracts for city services and the innumerable urban extension and building projects that were being carried on to enlarge the city. For example, franchises and licenses for new street railway routes were only conferred on friends or associates who would then cooperatively return a portion of the profits to their benefactors.[1] Additionally, since such franchises were usually given away or untaxed, rather than sold or used as a continuing revenue source, the city was also deprived of much needed income.[2] Granting rights of way and extending streets in such a fashion as to first confer benefits on their friends, while personally retaining or purchasing primer corner lots, was another way in which the Common Council gained its reputation as the conduit for local corruption.[3]

Government officers had come to the point of acting as political

1. New York Daily Times, Jan. 13 & 14, 1853, and New York Tribune, Jan. 13, 1853 as quoted, Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1847.
2. New York Evening Post, Nov. 23, 1852, as in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1843.
3. New York Tribune, July 28, 1852, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1841.

entrepreneurs, often selling their's and the city's services directly to the public. In addition to the illegal opportunities, entrepreneurship was often written into the law. For example, coroners, the county sheriff, and certain minor court officials and clerks were all compensated by fees paid directly by the people they dealt with. The chamberlain, in return for assuming responsibility for public funds, was permitted to retain the interest earned on city bank deposits.[1] And lastly, as if to sanctify such actions, it was not uncommon of the council to personally indulge their fancy by such acts as celebrating Washington's Birthday by entertaining a few 1812 War Veterans and in the process consume at public expense, "three thousand segars, five gallons of brandy, and twenty baskets of champagne."[2]

If such jubilant, or more often secret, committee meetings were the method by which such actions were decided, then the large amounts of revenue being generated by a generally wealthy, prosperous and ever-growing city provided the means. The payers of these revenues, many of the newspapers, and some good and honest citizens, were, of course, appalled by all this. Yet, simple outrage rather than effective action seemed all they could muster. Some did not even see any harm being done, for profit from governmental public action seemed only natural and harmless. They might even have agreed with George Washington Plunkitt who ended his famous disquisition on honest graft by epitaphically stating, "He seen his opportunities, and he took 'em."

1. Seymour Mandlebaum, Boss Tweed's New York, New York, 1965, p. 55.
2. Doc. No. 62, Board of Aldermen, 1854, quoted in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1857.

The government of the city quickly earned a very bad name so few honest men wished to risk association with it or its officials.[1] And even its own sporadic attempts at internal reform were observed contemptuously, for in 1858 the Council appointed a Standing Committee on Frauds, about which the New York Herald remarked, "The only purpose of this Committee is, we are satisfied, to formalize and perpetuate existing abuses...We are, therefore, compelled to arrive at the conclusion that the appointment of this Standing Committee on Frauds is only a sham, intended to cheat our citizens into the belief that our city shepherds are keeping strict watch and ward over the public wool."[2]

One of the few official groups to confront seriously the effects of transitional politics in the city was the state legislature in Albany. The city was legally the creature of the state, and it held the power to 'rein' in its excesses by changing the grant of authority made by the city charter. By altering the charter three times in 1849, 1853, 1857, the state whittled away at local powers hoping to control the repeated scandals and acts of corruption that had displayed the incapacity of the Board of Aldermen to govern the city effectively or fairly. Some said that reconferring some of the local powers back to the state was done on the theory that it was better to have a partly corrupt rather than a wholly corrupt body determining local policy.[3] Some acts were also motivated by partisan politics, yet by and large it was an honest desire to try to save the state's largest and most important city from itself. This was attempted

1. James Parton, "The Government of New York," North American Review, Vol. 103 (1866), pp. 413-65.
2. New York Herald, Jan. 21, 1858, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, pp. 1872-3.
3. Frederick Shaw, The History of the New York City Legislature, New York, 1954, p. 4.

by numerous devices which included the usurpation by the state of the appointment of many executive officers, the movement of certain powers to other groups like the county supervisors, the creation of independent, quasi-governmental commissions such as that which administered the Central Park,[1] and by direct intervention into the budgetary process of the city as by such means as establishing a debt limitation of no more than 8% of aggregate valuation.[2]

These charter changes were only partially effective, and in the process of the state's attempt to reimpose order and honesty to the city's government it strongly undercut the tradition of home rule and autonomy which had been a prize premise of local democracy. Throughout the fifties and sixties, the city chafed under what they felt were discriminatory restrictions, and lost no chance to blame their own ineptness and inability to respond to its problems, on the strictures imposed by the state. So strong were the feelings about home rule that when the state shifted control of the Police to the metropolitan level in 1857, this act became the primary cause of the riot during that year.[3]

In some respects the picture drawn of New York at mid-century is a rather bleak one. A city rapidly growing out of its adolescence would have its usual identity problems and have at the same time the dilemma of assuming its full adult responsibilities. Every era sees its time as one of crisis and New York of 1850 was no exception. And yet it would be unfair and too simple just to represent the city as unresponsive, impotent

1. For a review of all the charter changes see, Edward Dana Durand, The Finances of New York City, New York, 1898, pp. 66-97.
2. Laws of New York (1853), Chapter 603, as quoted, Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1853.
3. J. T. Headley, op. cit., pp. 129-131.

or totally overwhelmed in face of its condition. There were elements of this, of course, as it surveyed its future course, but it did not stand entirely mute before its problems. In the same halting and piecemeal way that cities have always gone about solving their urban problems, New York displayed clearly the gap or lag which seems all too frequently to intervene between an adequate perception of the reality that exists and what must be marshalled to alleviate its causes. New York responded to its growth related dilemmas, neverhteless, with a host of attempted reforms and urban improvements. If New York was expanding too fast to expect reasonably that institutions and individuals could always keep pace, then at least some improvements, not always systematically conceived or executed, could be offered up. Some would be collectively decided upon and aimed solely at the public interest; others were essentially private endeavors aimed at yielding a profit for their sponsors. Yet, in the aggregate, they each began to improve the condition of life within the city.

One indication of the movement toward reform was the numerous tenement and public health commissions appointed to investigate conditions within the city. Such study groups often coaxed into existence specific legislation, while increasing public awareness as to the magnitude of the problems--both of which were essential prerequisites to the abatement and later control of such scourges to which medical science would only later provide a cure. Such organizations were responsible during the decade for the palliative efforts of increased public inspection and improved drainage,[1] and the modest beginnings of a "model" tenement

1. Fitzhugh Ludlow, "The American Metropolis," The Atlantic Monthly, XV (Jan. 1865) p. 78.

movement within the worst sections of the city.[1]

These groups, along with the natural growth of the city, gave birth to new or larger institutions better prepared to respond to the city's new state. Hospitals and a number of public charitable organizations began to respond to the needs, immigrant aid societies sprang spontaneously from the ghettos, churches reached out for new congregations, newspapers (20 by 1853),[2] journals, libraries and public schools and colleges were formed to serve the new, large population, and police, fire and other public governmental agencies expanded to help control the situation.

A whole set of physical improvements and public services were initiated that would alter the beleaguered environment while at the same time facilitating the opportunity for the population to spread out across the city. For example, many of the streets, while recently opened, were unpaved, covered at best with wood or stone. In the early 1850's, old wooden pavements were torn up or the mud pushed aside, and a new permanent surface, a German process called "Russ paving" was approved and systematically extended throughout the busier parts of the city.[3] The Common Council, in addition, authorized that curb and gutter stones be set and sidewalks constructed at busy mid-town intersections. Furthermore, sewer and gas service to light the city was being brought to large sections of the city. And while only one-third of the city was sewered by 1856, substantial momentum toward full service was generated during the decade.[4]

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1. See Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, pp. 1856, 1860; and Lawrence Veiller, op. cit., pp. 1-16.
2. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1845.
3. New York Evening Post, May 18, 1850, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1828.
4. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1830.

Similarly, the two hundred twenty-nine miles of gas lines in the city in 1854,[1] grew to more than eight hundred miles by 1864.[2]

In addition, a successful beginning had been made at providing a permanent dependable supply of pure water for the city. Water drawn from local wells or collected in cisterns had proven inadequate especially in light of the effects of the cholera epidemic in 1832 and the major fire of three years later. Moved to action primarily by these two events, the Common Council in 1835 authorized the creation of a distant reservoir and aqueduct which would carry water throughout the entire city. Seven years later at a cost of thirteen million dollars the project was completed.[3] Under the direction of an independent Board of Water Commissioners, a reservoir for the storage of 500 million gallons of water had been created well up into Westchester County, and a new aqueduct that traversed most of the 58-mile distance to Manhattan and crossed the Harlem River carried the water to a receiving reservoir at 86th Street in the city. From this 35-acre facility, water was distributed by 170 miles of iron pipe through the streets of New York.[4] Following its completion in 1842, the profits made from what until that time had been the city's most costly and ambitious public improvement, were used to amortize the initial debt and then through the next two decades to expand the network to most all of the city's residents.

Not since the Erie Canal did such a public improvement prove so useful or was so highly celebrated. The large amount of money and effort

1. Gleason's Pictorial IV, p. 157 as quoted, Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1848.
2. Fitzhugh Ludlow, op. cit., p. 82.
3. For full details see Nelson Blake, Water for the Cities, Syracuse, 1956, pp. 144-171.
4. Michael Aaron Rockland, ed., Sarmiento's Travels in the United States in 1847, Princeton, 1970, pp. 216-217.

involved in such an undertaking was appreciated by all when a forty-foot high stream of water spurted out of one of the public fountains in Union Square and from another near city hall. Jubilation reigned supreme and public ceremonies and parades were the order of the day.[1] One General George P. Morris was even moved to write an eight stanza ode of low quality doggeral to help immortalize the event.[2] Some even saw the moral temper of the city being improved for no longer would it be necessary to spike the bad water with ardent spirits to make it palatable, as had been commonly done before.[3] On a more serious level, the ready availability and convenience of pure water permitted a further building boom to begin, now that the physical city was less constrained by health and fire considerations.

With major progress being made in supplying pure water by the 1850's, many individual entrepreneurs turned their attention to taking advantage of the opportunities which congestion and traffic movement held out. The primary mode of public transit during the decade was by horse-drawn car or omnibus each designed to hold forty to sixty people. This was, of course, a substantial improvement over the older alternatives of walking or single passenger private carriages, but they soon became so numerous that they also contributed to the general congestion within the city. Responding to private pleas, the Common Council issued licenses to each car and granted franchises for each specific street railway route. Each license and franchise granted meant another opportunity for favor or graft, and the result in general was a degree of poorly controlled

1. Diary of G. T. Strong, Vol. 1, pp. 188-189.
2. E. Porter Belden, op. cit., pp. 39-40.
3. Nelson Blake, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

over-expansion in transit facilities. Even while their motives might be suspect, the nature of the arguments the Council responded to were valid enough. One petition for an extension of franchise stated the case in these terms in referring to the omnibus,

> ...How much it has increased the aggregate profits of labor by diminishing distances, and how many million exchanges have been enlarged, by bringing the producer and consumer together, a few facts will clearly show.
>
> More than seventy thousand persons are transported daily within the city, below 42nd Street, making for the yearly travel upwards of twenty millions, a number equal to the entire population of the United States.
>
> [They] have under use forty-five miles of public streets. There are five hundred omnibuses utilizing more than 5000 horses and 300 employees.[1]

Fourteen years later one source could boast of the city that it had twenty-two hundred car and omnibus drivers operating six hundred and seventy-one cars over twenty-nine different stage, and ten horse, railroad routes.[2] In the same year, local legislation was passed to recoup a portion of the enormous publicly created profits by requiring that 10% of the receipts be returned to the city.[3] Unfortunately, while the intention of the ordinance had been positive, much of the tax never reached the public treasury, but rather was diverted into the pockets of individual officials.

By this time the city had begun to bring its public transportation facilities into line with its needs. Yet, a more complete, realistic, and efficient solution would have to wait for the development of elevated railways in the 1870's or the subway, the first of which was completed

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1. New York City, Board of Aldermen, Doc. No. 47, July 8, 1850.
2. Fitzhugh Ludlow, op. cit., p. 82.
3. New York Times, April 11, 1864, as quoted Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1912.

in 1904. Both of these forms of transit were proposed and actually demonstrated during this era, the elevated as early as 1847,[1] and a prototype subway in 1864.[2] But they would have to await the new technologies and financial capabilities of a later time.

In spite of the unavoidable emphasis which any such history must fairly develop, New York City at mid-century was not all problems and profit. At this time of social and political distress, there was also pleasure. There were numerous incipient signs to show that the city was beginning to move haltingly toward a cosmopolitan grandeur, culture and intellectualism more commensurate with its new wealth and size. This new cosmopolitan cast was primarily manifested by certain cultural and social achievements of the native Americans, but it was further spiced by the effects of the many ethnic enclaves within the city.

As early as the 1830's, there were more than half a dozen theaters within the city and Shakespearaan and other classic productions were popular and well subscribed events. In addition, a few museums were in existence where wax figures were prevalent. They included the American Museum of John Scudder and Reuben Peale's museum on Broadway opposite the Common. Another popular meeting ground was the "pleasure gardens" within the city. Niblo's Garden, the Atlantic Garden, and the Vauxhall were examples of these fashionable and gay combinations of theatre, concert hall, hotel and nightclub.[3] Music was also very popular within the city, and Mozart and Beethoven were the common fare devoured by the concert-goers.[4] And

1. New York Evening Post, Oct. 12, 1847, as quoted, Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, pp. 1805-6, also Vol. 3, p. 698.
2. New York Times, April 11, 1864, as quoted, Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1912.
3. Ernest Risley Eaton, "New York City--A Hundred Years Ago," The Quarterly of Phi Alpha Gamma (May 1934), p. 3.
4. Diary of G. T. Strong, Vol. 2, p. 23.

throughout the city were examples of the growing interest in the arts, for most of the public squares displayed handsome new pieces of sculpture and the new architectural creations dotted along the new uptown streets, were praised by the residents with obvious civic pride.[1]

In addition, the city's growing wealth and size, and its constant exposure to other countries, had developed a social ambience which was simultaneously both informal and ostentatious. Many of the rigid social customs of Europe were not adhered to along the public boulevards of this new American city, and yet indeed in areas such as fashion, New Yorkers consciously emulated the high styles of Europe. One perceptive English visitor commented on this personal extravagance by noting, "the mere volume and circumference of hoop or crinoline of the ladies of London and Paris are, to those of New York, but as butterflies compared with canary birds."[2]

There is no doubt that there were cosmopolitan currents already in motion, and that New York was reaching toward urbanity during this era. But it is equally clear that Americans were also deeply insecure about these matters of culture and social status. Every new accomplishment or statistic was immediately compared with its European counterpart. And abetted by many critics such as Dickens, who viewed the American cities as primitive colonial outposts, many seemed genuinely surprised to discover any artistic or cultural achievements present in cities like New York. Even then, they treated them as anomolies. With such criticism

1. Diary of G. T. Strong, Vol. 2, p. 23.
2. Charles Mackay, Life and Liberty in America, New York, 1859, p. 15.
3. Ibid., p. 21.

New Yorkers too willingly agreed, and thus their social confidence and pride were hardly very high. The result of this insecurity was that new social, cultural, and intellectual accomplishments which would indicate their receptivity and growing desire for urbanity, were feverishly sought and courted. One particularly illustrative example of this phenomenon involved the appearance of the Swedish singer, Jenny Lind, who had before so successfully charmed English audiences in 1848 and 1849. Not to be outshone by the reception given her in London, and to help display the real nature of American cultural demand, New York showered her in attention and even greater fame. Brought to New York by the promise of Mr. Barnum of $1000 per night for two hundred nights, the Swedish nightingale gave her first performance at a New York theater on September 11, 1850. The New Yorkers responded in unprecedented fashion, filling the house for every performance and following her in crowds wherever she went. She further endeared herself by donating large amounts of her fees to public charities and soon "so great was the desire to see her that parties that failed to obtain tickets for the Garden hired rowboats and rested in the river outside the Garden.[1] To a very few the spectacle which was accorded her reception, which included single ticket sales at $225 apiece and an opening house worth $36,000, was at least amusing and certainly out of proportion to the residents' real state. "Lindomania unabated; it's a prevalent morbid passion for assuming the form of an ass for the privilege of drinking in her sweet voice through the preternaturally prolonged ears of the deluded victims of the terrible new disorder."[2]

1. Charles H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York 1816-1860, New York, 1896, pp. 463-65.
2. Diary of G. T. Strong, Vol. 2, pp. 17-20, and Ibid., Vol. 1, p. xl.

There were other semi-carnival events which in their crude way became symbolic of the city's desire for increased sophistication. One of the best known was the Crystal Palace initiated in early 1852 when the Common Council granted a five-year lease at a dollar per year for the plot of land between 40th and 42nd Streets near Sixth Avenue and Reservoir Square, to a group of private individuals led by Messrs. Latting and Riddle. On the site they constructed an innovative glass and cast iron structure covering more than 110,000 square feet copied from a similar building fabricated by Joseph Paxton in London a few years earlier. It was designed to house the Exhibit of Industry of All Nations, and as such, this first world's fair in America, like all the others which would follow it, was a thinly disguised carnival behind which operated a tourist attraction, trade show, civic boosterism, and the opportunity for competing nations to display their mechanical prowess and inventiveness. The exhibit was opened by President Pierce on July 14, 1853, and residents and tourists from around the world flocked to it, to climb the 300-foot Latting Observatory from which the full extent of the city's recent growth could be viewed, and to look down on the precariously perched and attractive building.[1]

> The fairy-like Greek cross of glass, bound together with withes of iron, with its graceful dome, its arched naves, and its broad aisles and galleries, filled with choice productions of art and manufactures gathered from the most distant parts of the earth--quaint old armor from the Tower of London, gossamer fabrics from the looms of Cashmere, Sevres china, Gobelin tapestry, Indian curiosities, stuffs, jewelry,musical instruments, carriages and machinery of home and foreign manufacture, Marochetti's colossal equestrian statue of Washington, Kiss's Amazon, Thorwaldsen's Christ and the

1. For a full description of the Crystal Palace and the Exhibition see Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, pp. 1848, 1852.

> Apostles, Powers' Greek slave, and a host of other works of art beside--will long be remembered as the most tasteful ornament that ever graced the metropolis.[1]

Taste, of course, changes over time, but what would remain clear to later generations was what the Crystal Palace represented. The European exhibits broadened America's outlook and provided a standard for comparison with other nations. The domestic displays helped prove to the rest of the world that the young nation was proudly coming of age both culturally and industrially. Symbolic of the energy, wealth, optimism, and glittering future aspiration it reflected, it was probably most important as a sign of the new stature which New York City now hoped to enjoy in the community of world cities.

Trying to capture the spirit of the city in a short developmental history is difficult for it was a period of tremendous activity, flux and contrast. But like America itself, New York was optimistic, feeling that while it had its present problems, it could be confident of its future destiny, no matter what it was to be. Anyway, why shouldn't it be, for it was phenomenally growing and expanding particularly in its economic and physical dimensions. It was emerging from its youthful stage, buoyant and essentially healthy. Unfettered by European traditions and isolated from its political problems, it had as well handily outstripped its few competitors, and unlike Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Newport and Charleston, its success was in the future. Having eclipsed its few rivals by a combination of natural advantage and hard commercial effort, the city by 1855 was riding the growing tide of economic, social and

1. Mary L. Booth, History of the City of New York, New York, 1859, p. 752.

political dynamism, to what looked like a new threshold. Most city residents could now find themselves in agreement with what deTocqueville had written in 1835:

> "America is a land of wonders, in which everything is in constant motion and every change seems an improvement. The idea of novelty is there indissolubly connected with the idea of amelioration. No natural boundary seems to be set to the efforts of man; and in his eyes what is not yet done is only what he had not yet attempted to do."

To the more introspective critics, such an attitude of exuberance had to be tempered by the wide disparities visible in the city which were even more undeniable. For as one contemporary observed, "Nowhere else does the carriage of the millionaire spatter the gaunt beggar at every hour on every crosswalk. No other human hive can show the counterparts of Fifth Avenue and Baxter Street....The raggedness of our waterfronts implies that we are poor indeed, and the massive grandeur of our central plateaus declares that we are rich beyond computation."[1]

Such contrasts certainly tarnished the image of a limitless future for the Empire City. But interestingly, both perceptions worked in favor of reform. For those who saw chaos all about them improvement was mandatory to lessen the burdens and rectify the conditions generated by the city's recent expansion. For those to whom the city represented opportunity, they urged both private and governmental acts of a grand scale in order to facilitate urban progress. The Central Park which would become the era's dominant improvement would gain support from both of these positions--one which saw it as a partial answer to some of the city's enumerated ills, and the other as a major urban adornment and

1. Edward Crapsey, The Nether Side of New York, as quoted in Callow, op. cit., p. 48.

accomplishment, at least symbolizing the city's attainment, promise, and pride as had the Croton Aqueduct and Crystal Palace.

The purpose of providing this developmental history of New York is to establish a backdrop against which the story of Central Park may be unfolded. By revealing the basic forces of urbanization and showing how they progressively transformed the urban environment, one has a better sense of the process of city development. The park would, of course, intervene into this ongoing process and also shortly become a new force within it.

The intention of this urban history was, as well, to make explicit some important facts about the city during this time period. For example, it was a time of tremendous economic opportunity and expansion with both extreme wealth and poverty in evidence. It was a period of unprecedented immigration and population growth which forced the rapid expansion of the physical city out across the landscape and demanded social and political assimilation. Such a rate of growth strained or exceeded the ability of the city to provide housing and the resultant crowding manifested themselves in the form of tenements and public health problems. Inevitably, the gulf was widening between the public services and improvements required by this vastly larger and different city, and those which could be provided on short notice. In the process, older governmental forms and mechanisms were outgrown and the possible institutional responses overwhelmed. On the positive side, this dynamic movement did in general increase the city's economic well-being, did spark a beginning for solving of urban problems, and did begin to formulate a society of greater sophistication, greater urbanity, and greater urban consciousness. All of these facts would soon become intimately intertwined with the issue of Central Park.

Furthermore, it was also becoming evident that with the growth of cities like New York, America was very much becoming an urban nation. To a country that had been taught that the U. S. had been born in the country, and its most cherished institutions and ways of life were uniquely shaped in a rustic mold, this was an unpleasant and often denied fact. Yet, the trend was clear. Like it or not, the future of America was to be in its cities, or would be acted out there. The yeomen, the pioneer, and small town ways were on the ebb, to be replaced for better or for worse, by the immigrant, the factory worker, the political boss, and the urban reformer.

CHAPTER III

EARLY MOVEMENT AND ADVOCACY

One forward-looking citizen of New York, using the pseudonym of Veritas, recognized the city's need for a large, carefully designed park as early as 1785. In a letter printed in the New York Packet on August 15, this individual urged the mayor and aldermen of the city to consider these facts:

> It is a very general complaint that there is not in this great city, nor its environs, any one proper spot, where its numerous inhabitants can enjoy, with convenience, the exercise that is necessary for health and amusement.
>
> Those whose affluence supplies the means, fly in their carriages to enjoy the refreshing breezes of the evening, during the sultry months of summer, thro' the different tours that our little island affords...[1]

He went on in his extended request to note that most older European cities had already made such arrangements, and that it would be only prudent to do so in America's leading port. His particular reference was to an improvement of the existing Battery promenade and a new park in the vicinity of "the Fields" or the area near where City Hall Park was subsequently developed. To insure that the best possible plan would be available, he further suggested that a competition be held and that a prize be offered for the best scheme that was forthcoming.

This proposal by an anonymous New York resident was indeed prophetic for its time, and to a degree the sentiment which it represented had some effect, for the Battery over the years was improved on a number of occasions, and the area at "the Fields" was shortly converted into a

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Theodora Kimball, eds., Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903; Vol. II, New York, 1970, pp. 18-19.

public use. Yet, the long term effect of this public plea was negligible, for in the next twenty-five years not a single new open space was designated or acquired by the city. In 1811, when the Common Council adopted a city-wide plan which established a gridiron street pattern for the undeveloped portion of the island up to 155th Street, seven new open spaces were randomly reserved for future parks and squares.[1] Even then, because these projected spaces totalled only 470 acres or but 4.2% of the 11,400 acres platted, the Commissioners who drew the plan felt compelled to defend this modest allocation.

> It may, to many, be matter of surprise, that so few vacant spaces have been left, and those so small, for the benefit of fresh air, and consequent preservation of health. Certainly, if the City of New York were destined to stand on the side of a small stream, such as the Seine or the Thomas, a great number of ample spaces might be needful; but those large arms of the sea which embrace Manhattan Island, render its situation, in regard to health and pleasure, as well as to convenience of commerce, peculiarly felicitous; when, therefore, from the same causes, the price of land is so uncommonly great, it seemed proper to admit the principles of economy to greater influence than might, under circumstances of a different kind, have consisted with the dictater of prudence and the sense of duty.[2]

Arguing that it was only prudent to limit expenditures for functional open spaces, which would primarily benefit future generations, they

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1. There were essentially seven in number: Observatory Place, located at 89th and 94th Streets between 4th and 5th Avenues; a public market between 6th and 10th Streets and 1st Avenue and the East River; the Parade Ground bounded northerly by 34th Street and southerly by 23rd between 3rd and 7th Avenues; Bloomingdale and Manhattan Squares on the east side between 3rd and 9th Avenues at 53rd-57th Streets and 77th and 81st Streets, respectively; Harlem Square bounded by 6th, 7th, 117th and 121st Streets; and Harlem Marsh running back from the Harlem River to Fifth Avenue between 106th and 109th Streets. Lastly, there were four small spaces left within the plan especially visible at the point of conjunction where the new plan joined the established city streets. Of these "sundry small places...the children of necessity," essentially wide street intersections, the largest was Union Place.
2. William Bridges, Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan; with Explanatory Remarks and References, New York, 1811, pp. 25-26.

concluded that the 470 acres reserved would have to be sufficient. Besides this allocation would be in addition to the Battery, City Hall Park, Bowling Green and Washington Square which had existed from colonial times.

At mid-century, after Grammercy, Hudson, Union and Madison Squares had also come into being, one might think that the city had provided park lands at least minimally commensurate with its new size and population. Yet in 1850, an inventory of the public open spaces within the city revealed a total of but 170 acres.[1]

TABLE OF THE AREAS AND LOCATIONS OF ALL THE PARKS ON PUBLIC GROUNDS OF NEW YORK

		Acres
Battery.....	Battery Pl.,State & Whitehall Sts. & harbor..	10
Bowling Green....	Broadway at its southern termination.....	..
Park.....	Broad'y,Chambers,Centre and Chatham Sts.....	10
Duane Park.....	Duane between Greenwich and Hudson Sts.....	..
" "	Duane between Washington and West Sts.....	..
Five Point Park..	Little Water, Cross & Anthony Sts.....	..
Hudson Square....	Hudson, Beach, Varick & Knight Sts.....	4
Washington Sq....	Waverley Pl., McDougal, 4th & Wooster Sts....	9
Tompkins Square..	Avenues A & B & 7th & 10th Sts.....	10
Union Place.....	Broadway between 14th & 17th Sts.....	3
Stuyvesant Sq....	Both sides of 2d Av. between 15th & 17th Sts.	3
Grammercy Park...	3d & 4th Avs. & 20th & 21st Sts.....	1
Abingdon Square..	Hudson & Troy Sts. & 8th Avenue.....	..
Madison Square...	5th Avenue, Madison Place, 23rd & 26th Sts...	6
Bloomingdale Sq..	8th & 9th Avenues, and 53rd and 57th Sts.....	18
Hamilton Square..	3d & 5th Avenues, & 66th & 69th Sts.....	24
Manhattan Square.	8th and 9th Avenues, & 77th & 81st Sts.....	19
Observatory Place	4th & 5th Avenues & 89th & 94th Sts.....	25
Mount Morris.....	Both sides of 5th Av. bet. 120 & 124th Sts...	20

Source: E. Porter Belden, New York: Past, Present and Future, New York 1849, p. 34.

This was three hundred acres less than the admittedly modest future reservations outlined on the Commissioner's plan alone, and of these only those below Fortieth Street had been acquired, improved, or opened for public use. What had happened during this forty-year interval? In

1. New York Evening Post, Aug. 5, 1850.

spite of the city's substantial expansion and the intention announced by the city's plan, the Common Council had consistently refused to appropriate the money to purchase the open spaces designated by the Commissioners as desirable and necessary at a minimum. Falling back on the argument that the island was surrounded by broad reaches of water and was near the open fields of New Jersey and Long Island, and reluctant to spend large sums for future benefit as opposed to present needs, the city short-sightedly failed to buy any of the recommended lands designated on their own plan. The fate of the Parade Ground, the largest single open space designated on the plan, illustrates the city's general response and failure in this regard.

Shortly after the acceptance of the Commissioners' plan, citizens owning property within the area identified as the Parade, petitioned the city to condemn and purchase the property quickly, for any private use or exchange of the land had been essentially constrained by its public designation on the official plan. With pressure mounting for action, instead of purchasing it as had been anticipated, the city in 1814 asked rather that the state allow it to reduce the projected area. They successfully argued that it "...is much larger than is requisite and if the same should be opened conformably with the map or plan...the expense thereof will be enormous and infinitely beyond the advantages which can possibly arise therefrom...."[1] Thus, the largest open space projected was more than halved. Instead of the proposed boundaries of 3rd and 7th Avenues, the width was limited to the two blocks between Fourth and Sixth, while the proposed length running from 23rd to 34th Streets was pulled

1. Laws of the State of New York, passed at the Thirty-Seventh Session of the Legislature, Albany, 1814, p. 206.

back on its northern boundary to 31st Street. In 1829, the Council, bending to similar pressure and using the same cost-benefit rationale, struck the remaining 106 acres from the map and allowed it to revert to private building sites.[1] Over the years a similar fate would befall the other open spaces that were to have been reserved according to the 1811 plan. And thus, by 1850, with the city vastly expanded and inhabited by more than a half million people, it was increasingly clear that the city's policy regarding open space acquisition had been mistaken.[2]

Not only were there few functional open spaces in evidence, but those that did exist in New York were essentially small, in deteriorating condition, and often susceptible to proposals for encroachment.[3] Furthermore, the majority were still clustered downtown, away from the primary direction of growth and all too many of them were often accessible only to the wealthy residents who had built their homes nearby. In the forty-year period following the adoption of a city-wide plan with its open space reservations, the physical city had changed in very fundamental ways. Unprecedented growth and expansion had deprived it of what had been its rural character. There had been a change from the small, sparsely built up city, with its many open lots and proximity to broad open reaches of landscape, to a densely packed city with long

1. City of New York, Common Council Minutes, Vol. XVII, March 31, 1828. In 1847, six of the acres originally within this large site were purchased as park land and upon later improvement became known as Madison Square.
2. It is interesting and ironic to note that during the same decades that the city was arguing that the cost of land was too expensive to justify its acquisition for public parks, it was simultaneously selling off hundreds of acres north of 23rd Street. This was the remainder of the public domain granted the municipality by the colonial Dongan Charter in 1686. See John W. Reps, "Public Land, Urban Development Policy, and the American Planning Tradition," in Marion Clawson (ed)., Modernizing Urban Land Policy, Baltimore, 1973, pp. 29-40.
3. New York Evening Post, Oct. 12, 1852; New York Daily Tribune, January 26, 1860.

blocks of congested tenements with few or no yards nearby. What could be said in 1811 or 1821 or even 1831 of the nearness of water, the large open areas of the upper part of the island, the innumerable private garden plots attached to private dwellings, and the easy access for those with time to retreat to the open fields of New Jersey, Staten Island, and Long Island, was simply no longer true by 1850.

Nowhere in New York was there a single large tract of land reserved for public recreation. As one commentator noted:

> There was no place within the city limits in which it was pleasant to walk, or ride, or drive, or stroll; no place for skating, no water in which it was safe to row; no field for baseball or cricket, no pleasant garden where one could sit and chat with a friend, or watch his children play, or over a cup of tea or coffee, listen to the music of a good band. Theatres, concerts, and lectures were the only amusements within reach of the mass of people; the sidewalks, the balconies, the backyards, the only substitutes for the Hyde Park or Tuileries of the old world, or the ancient freedom and rural beauty of Young New York.[1]

Not only was the lack of such facilities in New York evident, but as suggested by this comment, this was not a condition shared by European cities. For many decades, most cities in England and on the continent did have within their confines, a number of very large open spaces that were rural in aspect and available for multi-functional uses. There are several reasons for this. European cities had been undergoing urbanization for a longer period, and thus the need and importance for civic open spaces had been long recognized. Secondly, over time more attention had been given to city planning in European cities, and reservation of public open spaces within the plan was a more accepted custom. And lastly, large preservations of open land had been a long tradition within

1. Clarence C. Cook, A Description of the New York Central Park, New York 1869, p. 13.

these countries. From medieval and Renaissance times, the large private gardens and hunting preserves of the royal, ecclesiastical and aristocratic families were a common part of the landscape. By the 19th century, when urbanization had engulfed many of them and when popular revolutions freed others from private control, these preserves were often reclaimed or given over intact to a more public usage within the urban areas.

In America, such large urban open spaces did not exist.[1] For generations, America had perceived of itself as a primarily rural and unsettled territory, but now its young cities were as rapidly growing as any in the old world. Along with their growth, there was an increasing recognition that urban land, at least, was not an inexhaustible resource for only private use. The need to provide urban amenity, such as large landscaped parks sufficient for the needs of concentrated populations, was becoming clear. And for the country's most rapidly expanding city, the demand for what European cities had found necessary for many decades, was quickly manifesting itself. William Cullen Bryant, the articulate and influential editor of the New York Evening Post, was the first to bring the issue into public view.

Bryant had long recognized the substantial lack of park space within the city, for as early as 1836 he had privately expressed to his family and friends his opinion that the city should reserve before it was too late a large area of the island's remaining woodland for

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1. Three possible exceptions to this general statement might be suggested, the Boston Common, Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, and Forsythe Park in Savannah. Yet the Common was never really intended for public recreational use until the Public Gardens were later added; Fairmount Park was functioning at this time only as a forest preserve for the purpose of protecting the city's watershed; and Savannah's large park was not improved for use until after 1850.

future use as a public park.[1] Even though at this time there were public outdoor amusement centers such as Contoit's, Niblo's, and Vauxhall Gardens where one could sit and have a drink and be entertained, what Bryant had in mind was a large preserve of landscape open to the public at large for out of doors relaxation and recreation. Aware no doubt of Dickens' remark in 1842 that New York's summer climate was such that it could throw a man into a fever merely to think what the streets would be like if it were not for the daily breezes from the bay, he had also been frequent witness to the summer exodus from the city that by this time was becoming ritual. To escape the stifling summer atmosphere in the growing metropolis, hundreds of people flocked whenever possible to the open and cooling reaches of Staten Island or Hoboken. The rich, as well, in ever greater numbers began to flee to Europe, "to walk in the Tuilleries, to drive in Hyde Park, to drink coffee under the lindens in Berlin." Others founded the tradition of a summer exodus to Saratoga or Newport. In July and August nobody who was "anybody" was to be found in the city.[2]

On a hot July day in 1844, Bryant went on a walking tour of upper Manhattan for the purpose of examining several large tracts of land that might be suitable for what he had in mind. He returned, having looked at a number of sites, and having witnessed a large number of residents fleeing the city for the holidays. Writing for his July 3rd issue, he made his thoughts public in a proposal which appeared under the heading, "A New Park."

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1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 22.
2. Central Park Association, The Central Park, New York, 1926, pp. 21-22.

> The heats of summer are upon us, and while some are leaving the town for shady retreats in the country, others refresh themselves with short excursions to Hoboken and New Brighton, or other places among the beautiful environs of our city. If the public authorities who expend so much of our money in laying out the city, would do what is in their power, they might give our vast population an extensive pleasure ground for shade and recreation in these sultry afternoons which we might reach without going out of town.
>
> On the road to Harlem, between Sixty-Eighth Street on the South and Seventy-Seventh Street on the North and extending from Third Avenue to the East River, is a tract of beautiful woodland, comprising sixty or seventy acres, thickly covered with old trees, intermingled with a variety of shrubs....There never was a finer situation for a public garden of a great city. Nothing is wanted but to cut winding paths through it, leaving the woods as they are, and introducing here and there a jet from the Croton aqueduct, the streams from which would make their own waterfalls over the rocks, and keep the Brook running through the place always fresh and full....
>
> As we are now going on, we are making a belt of muddy docks all around the island. We should be glad to see one small part of the shore without them, one place at last where the tides may be allowed to flow pure, and the ancient brim of rocks which borders the waters left in its original picturesqueness and beauty. Commerce is devouring inch by inch the coast of the island and if we rescue any part of it for health and recreation it must be done now.

As Bryant had stated his case, it was primarily an appeal for the preservation of some of the island's natural scenery. It seemed in his view that it would only be a short length of time before continued commercial expansion and success would continue to move the city northward covering all with bricks, mortar and new streets. Secondly, once an appropriate area had been put aside, it should be made available for public use and enjoyment, particularly as a relief from congestion and stifling summer climate which annually engulfed the city.

The specific site he recommended was commonly known as Jones' Woods, one of the few large tracts still intact on the city's east shore, and which was a small remnant of the primeval forest that had once covered all of Manhattan. Bryant had inadvertently underestimated the size of

the woods for it was approximately 160 acres in extent, rather than the seventy which he had guessed. Bryant had chosen a handsome site for his proposed park, one which would have enhanced the city and been able to take advantage of its beautiful setting along the East River--in fact this worried him. It seemed unfair and probably difficult, he stated in his article, to compel the owners to sell such a desirable piece of property.

Not one to give up a good cause easily, however, Bryant continued to return in his editorials to the city's need for a large public recreation spot. Less than a year after his first appeal, the editor-in-chief found himself in England. From there he wrote a letter back to his paper in which he glowingly described the verdant expanses he had seen all over the continent, but especially near London--at Hyde Park, St. James' Park, Regent's Park and Kensington Gardens.[1]

> Nothing can be more striking to one who is accustomed to the little inclosures called public parks in our American cities, than the spacious open grounds of London. I doubt, in fact, whether any person fully comprehends their extent, from any of the ordinary descriptions of them, until he has seen them or tried to walk over them....
>
> These parks have been called the lungs of London and so important are they regarded to the public health and the happiness of the people, that I believe a proposal to dispense with some part of their extent, and cover it with streets and houses, would be regarded in much the same manner, as a proposal to hang every tenth man in London....
>
> The population of your city, increasing with such prodigous rapidity...make it a cause of regret that in laying out New York, no preparation was made...for a range of parks and public gardens along the central part of the island or elsewhere...."[2]

1. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post, A Century of Journalism, New York, 1922, p. 195.
2. William Cullen Bryant, Letters of a Traveller; Or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America, New York, 1850, pp. 168-173.

In his letter of June 24, 1845, Bryant introduced three common themes that would often be taken up by the proponents who would later join him in his endeavor to secure a public park for New York City. First, in describing the utility and beauty of the public parks that had so impressed him in Europe, he introduced the idea that they were the rightful models for whatever similar improvements New York would take on. There was also an implied reproach that New York with all its commercial success, had failed to achieve in its urban center the same level of attractiveness and amenity that was so common in most of Europe's industrial and commercial cities. So enthusiastic over what he had seen in Europe, he could not understand why the growing, wealthy cities of America should not also want these attractive examples of urban necessity and sophistication.

Secondly, he mentioned what would become a very common argument in favor of parks. That is, that parks were the cities' pulmonary organs and they were, therefore, inextricably related to its good health. They could by their very nature help open up, ventilate and clear out the city.[1] As the son and grandson of doctors, this no doubt seemed a worthwhile and reasonable conclusion to Bryant. And lastly, his letter suggests that a location within the Central portion of Manhattan might be desirable. This showed Bryant's flexibility in regard to his proposal, but for later advocates of a New York park, this issue of the exact location would often seem to overshadow the basic question of whether or not to have any park at all.

It is not surprising that the idea of environmental reform through

1. "The Lungs of London," Blackwood's Magazine, XLVI (August, 1839) pp. 213-237.

the reservation and improvement of a large public park should originate with Bryant. Having given up the practice of law in the late 1820's and unable to support himself adequately through his otherwise successful literary endeavors, he moved into the editorship of one of New York's leading newspapers. As a respected member of the city's intellectual and literary leadership, he often used the pages of his paper to urge stronger municipal action to meet the mounting needs of the expanding community. His editorials frequently catalogued the city's problems, explained the defects of municipal service, and exposed the growing corruption in local government. He strongly supported charter reform believing that the city's larger size required new governmental mechanisms and that American democracy at the local level must be brought into conformity with its professions. In pursuit of these ends he fashioned his paper into a basically reform-minded journal.[1]

What Bryant had done with his two major articles that had appeared within the span of eleven months, was to thrust into public view the issue of a new public park for New York, which many New Yorkers already perceived to be an essential requirement for their growing city. Further, he articulated the arguments which he felt should compel the city fathers to act on the matter. But, as he no doubt knew all too well, the enactment of public improvements or urban reforms, especially those which seemed to involve high costs, the loss of tax revenues, and the compulsory condemnation of private property, was often a long and tedious process. There was no strong immediate public response to his proposal; nonetheless, the Evening Post tirelessly and effectively

1. Allan Nevins, op. cit., pp. 134, 180, 201-206. Also see Parke Godwin, A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, Vol. I, New York, 1883, pp. 253-254.

pursued the idea over the next few years. "Its editors had the more faith in it, they said, because while New Yorkers were somewhat slow in adopting plain and homely reforms, they were likely to engage eagerly in any scheme that wore an air of magnificence. They wouldn't take the trouble to keep the streets clean, but they would spend millions to bring a river into the city through the Croton aqueduct, forty miles long. They wouldn't sweep Broadway, but they would cover Blackwell's Island with stately buildings, some of them not needed.[1] It remained to be seen, indeed, whether it was New York's propensity to indulge more willingly in the larger, more difficult, more visible and impressive public improvements. But one thing was clear, by the end of the decade Bryant, by carefully courting public support for what he felt was an eminently worthy public endeavor, had successfully planted the idea and carefully prepared the ground for other proponents who were now prepared to join in the battle.

No more valuable ally could Bryant have hoped for than Andrew Jackson Downing, who first wrote of a large public park for New York in 1848. Downing, America's first writer on subjects relating to landscape architecture, was born in the beautiful Hudson highlands, at Newburgh, New York, in 1815. The son of a wheelwright turned nurseryman, Downing, though formally unschooled became thoroughly familiar with horticulture and landscape matters. In 1841, at age 26, he wrote his first book, A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America. The book was an immediate success, quickly going through more than six editions, and it brought to

1. Allan Nevins, op. cit., p. 196.

the young author instant fame. He followed this volume a year later with his Country Residences and in 1845 he completed, The Fruit and Fruit Trees of America which in the next seven years before his death exhausted fourteen editions. It was his first book, Landscape Gardening, however, that insured his reputation. In it, he had argued articulately for the adoption in America of the English ideals of landscape architecture which were part of the picturesque gardening principles then popular throughout Europe. These theories were hardly original with him, as he freely granted, drawing rather from the established works of Repton, Price, and especially John Claudius Loudon.

During the decade of the forties Downing put these principles into practice with great facility by ornamenting numerous country estates along the Hudson Valley according to these ideals he preferred to call "the art of rural embellishment." In 1850, his last book appeared, The Architecture of Country Homes, which in reaction to what he termed "the tasteless temples" of the Greek revival, strongly advocated the construction of homes in the architectural style that came to be known as the gothic revival. The book, as well, contained chapters on interior design, decoration and furnishing. So widely read were all his books, which contained a mixture of the artistic and the practical aspects of house, garden and decorative design, that he came to hold a pre-eminent position as arbiter of public taste. It was no wonder, that Fredrika Bremer, the celebrated Swedish novelist who visited the United States and Downing in 1849-51, could write, "nobody, whether he be rich or poor, builds a house or lays out a garden without consulting Downing's works; every young couple who sets up housekeeping buys them."[1]

1. Fredrika Bremer, The Homes of the New World, New York, 1853, p. 46.

The great following and respect his work enjoyed from thousands and thousands of Americans probably stemmed from the fact that there was a newly emerging, prosperous middle class of Americans who were very much in need of advice which would give form and direction to the style which their new economic position permitted them. In this regard, one of his contemporaries called his books, "invaluable to the thousands in every part of the country who were waiting for the master word which should tell them what to do to make their homes as beautiful as they wished."[1] There is no doubt that as a writer of popular books on landscape gardening, architecture, and on popular style Downing had a profound impact on the taste of Americans and the appearance of its countryside. Most of his ideas were hardly original, and it is probable that his popularity stemmed in part for his "ability to make abstruse romantic theory intelligible and attractive to his fellow Americans."[2]

In addition to writing his popular books and developing a successful practice with private clients, Downing had been asked by Luther Tucker of Albany to serve as the editor of a new journal on rural taste and life. From July 1846 until his death six years later, Downing served in this capacity and helped develop the Horticulturist, into another lively and successful vehicle for his ideas. It was from this forum in the October 1848 issue that he first publicly joined with Bryant as an advocate for the New York park. Writing an article in the form of a dialogue between the editor and an American traveller returning

1. Quoted in Russell Lynes, The Tastemakers, New York, 1954, p. 24.
2. Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Homes, with an introduction by George Tatum, New York, 1968, p. viii.

from Europe after five years, Downing asks the traveller what appeared to be the greatest difference or contrast now between the old and new worlds. The traveller responded patriotically, that in most things America is more advanced, save "public enjoyments, open to all classes of people, provided at public costs, maintained at public expense, and enjoyed daily and hourly, by all classes of people. Picture galleries, libraries and the like, I suppose you allude to?", asked the editor.

"Yes, but more especially at the present moment, I am thinking of PUBLIC PARKS AND GARDENS---those salubrious and wholesome breathing places, provided in the midst of, or upon the suburbs of so many towns on the continent--full of really grand and beautiful trees, fresh grass, fountains, and in many cases, rare plants, shrubs and fountains. Public picture galleries, and even libraries are intellectual luxuries; and though we must and will have them, as wealth accumulates, yet I look upon public parks and gardens, which are great social enjoyments, as naturally coming first. Man's social nature stands before his intellectual one in the order of cultivation."[1]

In this article the traveller goes on to say that having witnessed the great revolutions, tumult and bloodshed common throughout Europe that year, he was convinced that whatever barriers of class, wealth and fashion there were in democratic America could be greatly ameliorated by establishing public places of resort such as parks and gardens. "By these means you would soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated.

1. A. J. Downing, Rural Essays, New York, 1869, pp. 139-140.

Nothing tends to beat down those artificial barriers...so much as a community of rational enjoyments."[1] Furthermore, Downing suggested that the democratic means of public subscription or taxation as the means of paying for such public places. This article attracted attention locally as one would expect from Downing's popular stature in such matters, and indeed Bryant must have been pleased to have such helpful support in his crusade.

Less than a year later, in the July 1849 issues of The Horticulturist, Downing fired another salvo on behalf of the idea of a park. In an article on "Public Cemeteries and Public Gardens" he again pointed out not only the established fact that New York had too little park space for its enlarged population but also a precedent existed which displayed that the public would use the sort of public open space which he and Bryant had in mind. These were thr rural cemeteries which in the absence of urban parks were being used as public recreational grounds.

The rural cemetery in America had developed as a response to the public health fear of continued burial of large numbers of people within the urban area in close proximity to the water supplies often still derived from nearby shallow wells. The concern, first voiced in Paris and London at the beginning of the 19th century, led to the establishment of new large burial grounds well away from the urbanized area. The first American example, Mt. Auburn, was opened in 1831, six miles outside of Boston in the then distant suburb of Cambridge. Its immediate success and romantic attractiveness encouraged other cities

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1. Ibid., p. 142.

to follow suit quickly. By 1850, Laurel Hill was established near Philadelphia, Greenwood in Brooklyn, and other fine examples were built in Cincinnati, Baltimore, Rochester, Albany, and other large cities.

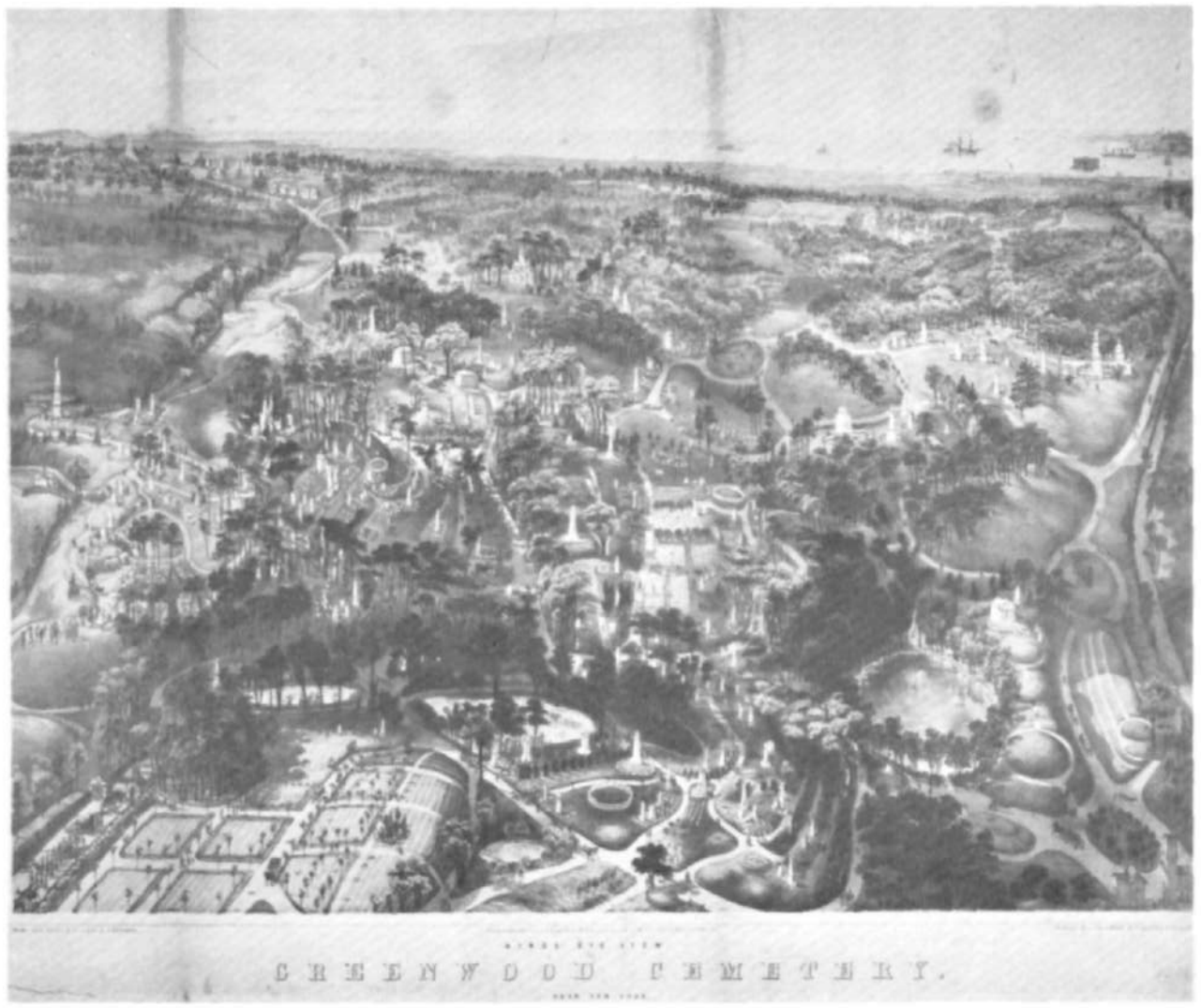
All of these rural cemeteries were laid out according to the picturesque principles of the English landscape school so that a naturalistic effect was achieved. An abundance of curvilinear roadways was laced along the natural lines of the terrain which was further embellished by artificial ponds and horticultural gardens. As time passed the landscape was further decorated in classic and Victorian splendor by the elaborate tombs, monuments, temples and sculptural adornments which were often the products of the era's most respected artists and architects.[1] The overall effect, at once a mixture of natural beauty and melancholy sentiment,[2] was one of tremendous attraction to the romantic sensibilities of America. The result was that residents of the central cities flocked out to these landscape preserves to wander through these outdoor galleries of art that were set harmoniously within a carefully contrived landscape design.

The popular response to rural cemeteries was unexpected and probably undesired. In one nine-month period, Downing noted more than 30,000 people visited Laurel Hill and supposedly nearly twice that to Greenwood. Local entrepreneurs quickly responded by offering for sale guide books and descriptive brochures which helped choose the most attractive routes and chronicled the background of each person buried

1. For example, see Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., Victorian Cemetary Art, New York, 1972.
2. Wilson Flagg, "Rural Cemetaries," Hovey's Horticulture, XIX (1853) p. 486.

Figure I. View of Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York, 1852.

Lithograph drawn and printed by J. Bachmann, New York, 1852.


GREENWOOD CEMETERY.

there on a monument by monument basis. Street railways extended their lines to meet the demand and extra cars were run out to the grounds on weekends. In self defense, most of the cemeteries had to pass strict rules regarding times of access, prohibition of picnics and fishing, and the limitation of concessions and alcoholic beverages.[1] Some even sold tickets of admission. Downing watched all this develop, and particularly New Yorker's fondness for making the long trip to Greenwood.[2] He rightfully interpreted it as clear evidence of the social requirement and obvious utility of a large landscape design park. The relationship, for Downing, was absolutely clear.

> The great attraction of these cemeteries,to the mass of the community, is not in the fact that they are burial places, or solemn places of meditation for the friends of the deceased or striking exhibitions of monumental sculpture, though all of these have their influence. All these might be realized in a burial ground, planted with straight lines of willows and somber avenues of evergreens. The true secret of the attraction lies in the natural beauty of their sites and in the tasteful and harmonious embellishment of these sites by art.....Hence, to an inhabitant of the town, a visit to one of these spots has the united charm of nature and art.--the double wealth of rural and moral associations...in the absence of public gardens, rural cemeteries in a certain degree supplied their place. But does not this general interest, manifested in these cemeteries prove that public gardens, established in a liberal and suitable manner, near our large cities would be equally successful?
> ....The finest band of music, the most rigid police, the certainty of an agreeable promenade and excellent refreshments, would, we think as surely tempt a large part of the better class of inhabitants of our cities to such a resort....If the road to Mount Auburn is now lined with coaches, continually carrying the inhabitants of Boston by the thousands and tens of thousands, is it not likely that such a garden, full of the most varied instruction, amusement, and recreation would be ten times more visited....It would be the general holiday ground of all who love to escape from the brick walls, paved streets, and stifling atmosphere of towns.[3]

1. Ian R. Stewart, "Parks, Progressivism and Planning," unpublished MRP thesis, Cornell University, 1968, pp. 14-26.
2. Joel H. Ross, What I Saw in New York; or a Bird's Eye View of City Life, Auburn, New York, 1852, pp. 322-326.
3. Andrew Jackson Downing, "Editorial," The Horticulturist, IV (July, 1949), pp. 9-11.

At the end of this article, Downing, still casting about for a proper way to finance such a scheme, suggested this time that the acreage could be bought by a joint stock company and its maintenance provided by a modest admission fee charged to the public.

With Downing now hammering away at the park issue, and Bryant continuing to keep it before the public eye through the columns of the Evening Post, at least a part of the city's leadership began to coalesce around the issue. The publicity of these two men had caught the attention of the city's mayor, for in his second annual message to the Board of Aldermen on January 7, 1850, Mayor Woodhull reminded the city legislators that all the existing public squares below Forty-Second Street in the aggregate comprised only 63 acres. This was less than one-fourth of those available to London. "The advantages of open squares in a populous city, are so apparent, and so important, that no well governed city was ever content to be without them." Woodhull told the councilmen that not only did they beautify the city and aid public health but also "they are the great breathing places of the toiling masses who have no other resort in the heat of summer or in time of pestilence, for pure air or healthful recreation, either for themselves or children."[1] And thus with this endorsement, the issue was placed fully within the public arena.

Woodhull, apparently chose not to run for reelection in the mayoral contest of 1850, yet this did not affect the matter of the park. Sufficient public interest had been generated behind the idea of the park, that both candidates in the fall campaign advocated its construction as a primary part of their respective platforms. Fernando Wood, one of the

1. Quoted in Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1826.

candidates, who had been abroad and who was impressed with the beauty of foreign parks, particularly those of Brussels, was vociferous in pressing this issue. Wood, the nominee of the Loco-foco party, was a controversial figure, viewed by many as untrustworthy and representative of a new breed of city politicians, who were first and foremost concerned with their own self-interest. While to the park supporters, his heart was in the right place, many would agree with Philip Howe's comment, "Fernando Wood! Let the books of the Mechanics' Bank tell his story... Wood, instead of occupying the mayor's seat, ought to be on the rolls of the State Prison. But our blessed universal suffrage will raise a flame with this Wood to drive away Whigism, Conservatism, and good honest Democracy as we formerly knew it."[1] Partly because of his questionable character, Wood lost the election to his opponent Ambrose C. Kingsland. Kingsland had also pledged to do something about the public clamor for a park, and accordingly, shortly after taking office, he sent on April 5, 1851, a message to Common Council recommending "the purchase and laying out of a park on a scale which will be worthy of the city... which would be at once the pride and ornament of the city." The message began by reiterating the arguments which Bryant and Downing had first outlined, but went on to say,

> Such a park, well laid out, would become the favorite resort of all classes. There are thousands who pass the day of rest among the idle and dissolute, in porter houses, or in places more objectionable who would rejoice in being enabled to breathe the pure air in such a place, while the ride and drive through its avenues, free from the noise, dust and confusion inseparable from all thoroughfares, would hold out strong inducement for the affluent to make it a place of resort.
>
> There is no park on the island deserving the name, and I believe that the expenditure of a sum necessary to procure and

1. Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, op.cit., II, p. 905.

> lay out a park of sufficient magnitude to answer the purposes above noted would be well and wisely appropriated, and would be returned to us fourfold, in the health, happiness and comfort of those whose interests are specially intrusted to our keeping--the poorer classes.
>
> The establishment of such a park would prove a lasting monument to the wisdom, sagacity and forethought of its founders, and would secure the gratitude of thousands yet unborn, for the blessings of pure air, and the opportunity of innocent, healthful enjoyment.[1]

Kingsland recommended no specific site, but his action was most important in making the issue one for official consideration by the Council for action and disposal. The idea of a park as represented by this politician seemed irresistable. Held out as a public panacea, it was now talked of as a device to placate the poor, serve the rich, improve public health and happiness--all the while garnering the plaudits and respect of posterity. The Evening Post naturally gave the mayor's message its full support, and it seemed sure that a proposal of such broad promise would move ahead without opposition. In spite of this fact and the Mayor's optimistic statement that he could not believe that "anyone can be found to advance an objection against the expediency of having such a one in our midst",[2] forceful and bitter opposition did come forth almost immediately. It would not relent until many years later. Led by the Journal of Commerce, a powerful local business newspaper that generally represented the interests of the commercial community, the fight was begun. The cost to the taxpayer for such a scheme would be tremendous argued the editor of this newspaper. The city already owned park lands valued in excess of eight million dollars and besides the

1. Reprinted in Edward Hagaman Hall, "Central Park in the City of New York," Sixteenth Annual Report, 1911, of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Albany, 1911, p. 540.
2. Ibid.

cool waters and green country which surrounded the city made the proposal unnecessary. The Evening Post responded contemptuously. As for cost, like the money spent for other city improvements, it would in the end prove to be an economy. "Every investment of capital that renders the city more healthy, convenient, and beautiful, attracts both strangers and residents, and leads to a liberal patronage of every department of trade. The argument that the city already had eight million dollars worth of parks was labelled as irrelevant for in spite of this fact there were clearly still not enough. And lastly, the fact that New York was near water and open green space was no argument at all, for so were most European cities, and they had broad urban parks that were greatly used and appreciated by their population.[1]

In the midst of this developing controversy, the council, nonetheless, moved resolutely ahead. The mayor's message was referred to the Committee on Lands and Places which shortly recommended that the 160-acre tract on the east side, Jones' Woods--Bryant's originally proposed site--be acquired for the park. The entire Common Council adopted the recommendations of the committee for the Jones' Woods plan, and moved to apply to the State Legislature for the enabling legislation which would permit the city to acquire this site and appoint commissioners to assess the value of the land to be condemned. Furthermore, on June 6, 1851, it authorized the mayor and comptroller to begin negotiation with the owners of the land prior to the formal appointment of the commissioners.[2] On July 11th, less than one hundred days after the mayor's

1. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post, A Century of Journalism, op.cit., p. 197.
2. New York City, Proceedings, Approved by the Mayor, XIX (1851), pp. 241-242, as cited Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5., p. 1834.

message, the State legislature in extra session, approved the city's request by passing the law entitled, "an act relative to the powers and duties of the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York in the matter of taking possession of and laying out certain lands for a public park in the Nineteenth Ward of said city." As passed the Jones' Woods Park Bill authorized the city after certain prescribed estimates, examinations and formalities, to take possession of the territory between the Third Avenue and the East River and Sixty-Sixth and Seventy-Fifth Streets.

The site seemed ideal for the purpose outlined. Long a city landmark because of its beautiful, wild condition, it was covered with a good, full growth of mature oak, chestnut and elm trees. Wildly savage in appearance, and abounding with wildlife, it was a particularly fine example of picturesque scenery. As a park site it was further enhanced by its attractively irregular surface and by its proximity to the river. The views which were permitted there and the possible recreation uses of the water seemed to confirm that the Council's choice had been a wise one.

Yet hardly had the act been published than there arose a strenuous chorus of opposition to the proposed site. Downing led it off, by writing a firey piece entitled, "The New York Park," which was published in the August, 1851 issue of the Horticulturist. Thanking Mayor Kingsland for his proposition, he declared that his only objection was that it was too small. A mere 160 acres, would be "only a child's playground" for the world's fourth largest city. "London has over 6000 acres within its own limits or in the accessible suburbs," he reminded his readers. He went on to castigate those "timid tax-payers, and men nervous in their private

pockets of the municipal expenditures," and then urged,

> Five hundred acres is the smallest area that should be reserved for the future wants of such a city, now, while it might be obtained. Five hundred acres may be selected between Thirty-nineth-street, and the Harlem River, including a varied surface of land, a good deal of which is waste area, so that the whole may be purchased at something like a million dollars. In that area there would be space enough to have broad reaches of park and pleasure grounds, with a real feeling of the breadth and beauty of green fields, the perfume and freshness of nature. In its midst would be located the great distributing reservoirs of the Croton aqueduct, formed into lovely lakes of limpid water covering many acres, and heightening the charm of the sylvan accessories by the finest natural contrast. In such a park, the citizens who would take excursions in carriages or on horseback could have the substantial delights of country roads and country scenery, and forget, for a time, the rattle of the pavements and the glare of brick walls. Pedestrians would find quiet and secluded walks when they wished to be solitary, and broad alleys filled with thousands of happy faces, when they would be gay.[1]

Downing went on to draw a picture of the sort of park he envisioned, with its statues, commemorative monuments, gardens, and artistic adornments. Unknowingly, but with surprising and prophetic accuracy, he had closely outlined the details and picturesque quality of the very park which New York would finally build.

In addition, Downing took the opportunity with this article to reiterate and state his arguments more clearly as to the "social influence" of such a park in New York, which he termed "the most interesting phase of the whole matter." He pointed out that one group of critics of a New York park felt it would be made only "for the 'upper ten', who ride in fine carriages," while another felt that a country park would be "usurped by rowdies and low people." He rejected both criticisms as foolish, and instead developed the argument that a

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1. A. J. Downing, Rural Essays, op.cit., pp. 147-153.

public park would be a place where class and social differences need not exist, for "they enjoy together the same music, breathe the same atmosphere of art, enjoy the same scenery, and grow into social freedom by the very influences of easy intercourse, space and beauty that surround them."[1]

As interesting as the notion was that the environment could have substantial effects on social conditions, it was not this part of the argument that caught the attention of the public and council. It was rather the attractive portrait of the large landscaped park that he had described, and his concern about the east side site's insufficient size, its non-central location and its inability to absorb the new municipal reservoir that had been projected. These comments seemed to summarize the growing feelings of discontent over Jones' Woods. The council was impressed by Downing's arguments, and feeling that it had perhaps acted too hastily in initially designating the East River site, it accordingly retreated on August 5, 1851. The Mayor appointed Aldermen Daniel Dodge, Joseph Britton and William A. Dooley as a committee "to examine and report upon the advantages of the ground designated in the act of the Legislature, and also whether there be not a better locality for such a park, with comparison of size, capacity for rural embellishment, general topographical features and probable cost of each; and also whether it is not advisable to include within the limits of such purchase ground for the new reservoir."

Two days after the committee's appointment on August 7th, the Council again met and advocates of the Jones' Woods site on the Board of Aldermen tried to force action by offering a resolution which would have directed

1. Ibid., p. 151.

the Corporation Counsel to take whatever legal measures were necessary to force the appointment of Commissioners of Estimate and Assessment who could then secure the land immediately. But this move was deferred by the full council when it voted to refer the resolution to the special committee appointed a few days before.[1]

And thus the move was on to find a more suitable site, or at least to give further study to the one which had already been designated. By the autumn of 1851, the main groups in the political controversy were divided according to three major interests.[2] First, there was a large and influential group of businessmen, represented effectively bh the Journal of Commerce, who wanted no park at all. Their main contention was that it simply was not needed within the city and that its cost would be disproportionately borne by them. Secondly, there was a considerable group of citizens who were entirely satisfied with the Jones' Woods proposal, feeling the Council had acted appropriately and wisely in initially designating it. And, lastly, there was a growing group of people who endorsed Downing's criticisms, believing that a larger park which would be carefully laid out in the central portion of the island was more suited to the city's long term needs.

Throughout the fall and winter these contending viewpoints clashed, gaining varying degrees of editorial support in all the local newspapers, while awaiting the report and further recommendations of the Special Committee. Only one event occurred during this time to affect the balance of power. On December first, the supporters of Jones' Woods received a blow to their desires to get on with acquiring the property

1. Edward Hagaman Hall, op.cit., pp. 455-56.
2. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post..., op.cit., p. 198.

quickly when Judge Edmonds of the Supreme Court of the State refused to appoint Commissioners to appraise property values because of what he termed "material errors" in the bill in which the state had authorized the city to proceed on July 11th. This decision effectively deterred the city from proceeding with any action regarding Jones' Woods at this time.[1] This fact placed all interests temporarily at equal advantage.

On January 2, 1852, at the first Council meeting of the year, the long awaited Special Committee report was presented. Following the direction of the resolution which had created it, the committee, in a comprehensive and thorough way, examined the Jones' Woods Tract and sought to establish whether or not there were other more convenient tracts of land on the island. The only other location they felt would be suitable was an approximately 760-acre site situated in the geographic center of the island and to be bounded by 5th and 8th Avenues on the east and west and by Sixtieth and One Hundred and Sixth Streets at the southern and northern limits. Concluding that these were the only two logical sites on the island which seemed suitable for prospective park use, they confined their comparative analysis to these tracts, called for convenience, "Jones' Park" and "Central Park". It was the first time this title was used to describe this alternative site.

The relative advantages of each were analyzed by the Committee members according to four criteria--extent, convenience of locality, availability and probable cost. In terms of extent, they labeled the 160-acre Jones' Park site as "superficial" compared to the Central Park's 760 acres, for even after large portions were deducted for use

1. New York Daily Times, December 2, 1851, p. 1.

as streets, avenues, and reservoirs, the remainder of the site would be four and three quarter times as large. This added size would give substantial advantages to the Central Park site, according to the Committee. First, it would be more likely to accommodate the future population growth of the city which was "destined to all human probability, to equal and perhaps to exceed in population every other." Secondly, because of its greater extent, it was more capable of being laid out with a great network of serpentine roads which would not only take advantage of the startling views of the distant landscape, but also permit the construction of a very long drive through the varied scenery.

The more limited extent of Jones' Park would not permit this at that site, and the imminent extension of 2d Avenue which would bisect the site would make the construction of long serpentine drives there an even more remote possibility. Thirdly, the Committee felt the greater size of the Central Park would provide more sites along its borders for the construction of public buildings such as schools, museums, and scientific institutes. Interestingly the Committee also agreed that the longer five and one half mile border would create so many desirable building sites by its proximity and effect, that the city might sell off from time to time some of the property along the park border.

> These sites being desirable, will command large prices, and reduce the expense of the original cost, and furnish... by sales or by leases, a sufficient sum to pay, if desirable, a portion of the expenses of the keeping and decorating of the park.[1]

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1. This and all other quotations from this report are as stated in New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 83, January 2, 1852, reprinted in Board of Commissioners of Central Park, First Annual Report on the Improvement of Central Pakr, New York, New York, 1857, pp. 137-158.

In regard to the greater number of adjoining building sites at the Central Park, the report also reminded the Council that there would be a greater number of sites benefited and enhanced in value and thus a benefit assessment could be imposed that would "pay one third, one half or even the whole of the purchase money." And furthermore, because of the terrain near the central location, owners of property for a greater distance in all directions, could probably be assessed. In view of all these considerations in regard to the respective size of the two sites, the committee concluded, "that the proposition of Central Park, is greatly to be preferred, as not only the most extensive, but because Jones' Park is not sufficiently extensive for present and future uses."

In the matter of convenience of locality the report held that Jones' Park was at one side of the island, relatively out of the way, and inaccessible to the main body of population. Central Park, on the other hand, located mid-way "about three quarters of a mile on each side of it for ordinary city purposes, leaving a sufficient space for a large population on each side, which the advantage of the proximity of the park would attract, and induce them to build up that part of the city, probably as densely as any other part." And hence, in the matter of location, the committee also concluded that the Central Park was "all that can be desired."

Under the heading of availability, the report compared the capability for rural embellishment and general topographical features of the two sites and again concluded that the Central site had the advantage. Granting that the Jones' Park site commanded a beautiful view out over the river, it was nonetheless, a tract with limited topographic variety. On the other hand, one could see the river from some of the high elevations

at the Central Park site, and its varied and rocky terrain or diversified natural surface made it particularly desirable as a site for picturesque adornment and landscape improvement. Additionally, the committee felt that the rugged topography of the central site would probably make it prohibitively expensive to develop for real estate purposes thus further underscoring that its best use would be as a park. In contrast the Jones' site was easily buildable, and to make it a park would mean that "half a mile of valuable riverfront will thereby be forever abstracted from commercial use. The rapid growth of this city, and its commercial character being its distinctive feature, it would seem to forbid the diminution of the riverfront, which will eventually, and probably very soon, be in demand..."



Under the last section of probable cost, the committee, having prepared tables of cost for each parcel of land at both sites, went through elaborate calculations and arguments, some of which seem hardly objective to conclude that the Central Park should cost $1,407,325 and the Jones' Park, $706,705. Although the cost was nearly double for the central site, the difference in size was more than 600 acres, thus if not cheaper the vastly greater acreage, nonetheless, made it a better buy. This was especially true since it embraced the site for a new reservoir which the city would have to purchase in any event.

The committee was unanimous that the Central Park site was preferable on all counts, and accordingly they recommended that the Jones' Woods Bill be repealed and that a memorial be presented at the next session of the legislature for the enactment of a similar bill authorizing the taking of the Central Park lands.

This committee's report is of critical importance to any history of

the New York park for it was here that a central site was first identified and ably defended. As such it was the basic statement of the arguments which ultimately prevailed in the question of location, and finally led to the designation of the central site. It is important also because it appears to be the last time in which Andrew Jackson Downing was involved in the park controversy. Because of the style of the report and the nature of the arguments presented there is reason to believe that he wrote a portion of the report, was consulted during its preparation, or at the very least permitted his formerly published pieces on a New York Park to be freely drawn upon. In any event, by the following summer, Downing was dead. On his way to Washington to prepare and supervise a landscape plan for the Mall,[1] a project to which he had been appointed by President Fillmore the year before, he was drowned when the steamboat in which he was riding exploded on the Hudson River.[2] Had he lived, it is quite probable that Downing would have been the designer of the Central Park. As it was, his contribution was substantial. By lending his support and national reputation to the idea of a park, at a critical juncture, he very much helped to insure that Bryant's proposal would not wither away or become but a bit of local boosterism. As popular spokesman for rural ideals and landscape embellishment, he also was effective in planting the idea that matters of landscape design were important and that designs in the picturesque mode were the

1. John W. Reps, "Downing and the Washington Mall," Landscape, XVI (Spring, 1967), pp. 9-14. Also see Wilcomb B. Washburn, "Vision of Life for the Mall," American Institute of Architects Journal, XLVII (March, 1967) pp. 52-59.
2. Ian R. Stewart, op.cit., pp. 29-31.

most desirable for an urban park.[1] And lastly, he was important to the movement for being the first to suggest that the paramount reasons for the creation of a park were the sociological imperatives. He predicted that a park could engender a leveling tendency on the contrast of poverty and wealth in evidence within the city, thereby implying that a physical plan would have social effects.

The fact that Downing was no longer on the scene did not seem important, for the Committee report issued at the very beginning of 1852 had in no sense been equivocal. As accepted by the Council, it was first a very strong reaffirmation of the need for a park, and secondly a conclusive endorsement that there was only one proper location for it. But the various interest groups which the controversy had identified, would not let go of the issue, and thus for the next year and one-half while an obstinate and protracted contest began to build to protect what each group felt to be a stake, the Council was effectively prevented from finally settling the issue and proceeding with acquiring and constructing a park.

The issue would often pop up in the form of a brief article or editorial in one of the local newspapers. Such was the one which appeared in a May issue of the New York Times. Beneath a banner which proudly proclaimed a daily circulation of 25,000, the editor of the paper reviewed admirably in "A New Park" all the specific reasons why a park was needed for the city. In addition he reintroduced the theme that what was good for Europe was certainly needed in America, and concluded by urging the city fathers to act now to resolve the issue.

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1. For the general role of Downing in the history of landscape design see, Norman T. Newton, Design on the Land, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 246-266.

> ..New York should have a Park of amplitude and magnificence on a scale corresponding with her position and population, having special reference to the future that awaits. Why should New York be so parsimonious of her land? Is the Western World too small for parks? Can England with her far denser population, and crowded in by the ocean on all sides, set apart in her great Capital, public grounds, sacred to repose, to so much greater extent that the metropolis of the New Continent?
>
> Unless the contemplated park is given us speedily, we shall never have it at all. The growth of the city is so rapid that it will soon overspread every feasible position, and its tenanted blocks will render it impractical to covert the ground on which they will stand into lawn and leafy bower. Every moment enhances the value of land. Every day's delay is of serious detriment to the enterprise. It must be accomplished soon, or abandoned forever.[1]

In spite of the obvious answers the Times expected to its rhetorical questions and its stirring plea for action, during the entire year of 1852, the Council took no formal action in regard to a park until December 27th. Then it but tabled for further consideration a report of its Law Committee which had recommended that in the event that Jones' Park site be acquired the costs of purchase and improvement be borne by the entire city, not just the wards adjacent to this tract.

As the issue was carried into the Spring of 1853, the various interested parties intensified their campaigns as it became certain that by the summer the state legislature would be asked to give approval to one of the sites. The basic positions remained even if the individual arguments seemed to be constantly shifting. One group wanted no park at all, another felt Jones' Woods should be taken, and the last saw Central Park as the obvious and only reasonable choice.

Those who opposed any park were often of the business community, who in one instance were opposed to surrendering any of the island's shoreline to a public pleasure use and in the general case did not approve

1. New York Times, May 21, 1852. p. 2.

of the costs it would involve. One writer explained their position in these terms: "This may be, to a considerable degree, accounted for by the fact that many men of wealth and influence--who through ignorance and lack of mature reflection on the subject, were unable to anticipate any personal advantage from the construction of a park--feared that it would only add to their taxes, and thus were led to form the habit of crying down any hopeful anticipations."[1]

Those who were concerned about a rise in taxes were joined in opposing a park by those few who feared that such spots would become centers of crime or at least coarse behavior. Although there was no proof that the other city parks had become reduced to this state, a lead article in one of the local papers painted this menacing picture of the democratic city:

> It is folly to expect in this country to have parks like those in old aristocratic countries. When we open a public park Sam will air himself in it. He will take his friends whether from Church Street, or elsewhere. He will knock down any better dressed man who remonstrates with him. He will talk and sing, and fill his share of the bench, and flirt with the nursery maids in his own coarse way. Now we ask what chance have William B. Astor and Edward Everett against this fellow citizen of theirs? Can they and he enjoy the same place? Is it not obvious that he will turn them out, and that the great Central Park will be nothing but a great beer garden for the lowest denizens of the city, of which we shall yet pray litanies to be delivered?[2]

In the same article it was argued that a park as so described would depress the value of property in the neighborhood for much of the bordering property would quickly be taken up "by Irish and German liquor dealers as sites for dram-shops and lager beer gardens."

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," reprinted in S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities, Cambridge, 1971, p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 88.

Perhaps a more serious concern, but no less surprising bit of opposition to a park, came from the respected New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. In its first public report issued at the beginning of 1853, after detailing the problems of urban congestion, tenements, and health conditions within the slums, they concluded that appropriating a large space for a public park would be counterproductive to its efforts to improve the condition of the poor. "It is self-evident that the using of so much of the island as is now designed for this purpose, will so diminish the space otherwise available for dwellings, as directly and indirectly to increase the intolerable grievances of high rents and crowded tenements which multitudes now suffer without affording any compensatory advantages that will benefit the great mass of the population. Its general effects...will be decidedly unfavorable."[1]

By May of 1853, it became clear that the idea of having some park had gained too much momentum and public support to enable this small group which took a negative stance against any park to prevail. Thus, the issue was now reduced to fighting out the choice between the two proposed sites. One indication of this was that even the Journal of Commerce, which had hitherto consistently opposed the building of any park, tacitly switched its position to one of modest support. In a May 24th article, it condemned the idea that it had been proposed to charge the entire city with the expense of acquiring and improving the Jones' Park site when in fact the increased value of the surrounding property would only innure to a few land owners. This was an outrage to the general taxpayer, it argued, particularly when it appeared that the Central site was preferable.[2]

1. New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, First Report of a Committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Classes in the City of New York, with Remedial Suggestions, New York, 1853, p. 7.
2. Journal of Commerce, May 24, 1853, p. 3.

If a park had to be, then the Central one was best for it would embrace the site for the reservoir which the city would in any event have to purchase. "However," it worried aloud still hardly enthusiastically, "we do not see the necessity for making it so immensely large."[1]

And thus, the backers of the two sites marshalled their forces for the legislature was in session. The Assembly had passed a bill authorizing the taking of Jones' Woods on April 2, 1853, and now hearings were about to be opened in Albany by the Senate to argue out the merits once again of the respective sites. On June 9, the City gave its official sanction to the central site when the Board of Aldermen voted to request the legislature to authorize the opening of a park, the boundaries of which shall be southerly by Sixty-Third Street, northerly by One Hundredth Street, between Fifth and Eighth Avenues.[2] On June 21st the positions that were argued at the State hearings were made generally known, when the select committee of the Senate that was examining the question released its report.

Noting first that while the real issue before them was whether they should designate Jones' Woods, for this was all the Assembly had passed, it would, because of the Common Council recommendations, also look at the merits of the central site. How fair a hearing the Central Park site received is not clear for the report at the very outset undermined this position by stating:

> It will be sufficient to call the attention of the Senate to the fact that the Common Council of New York, already infamous for its corruption and venality, in Railroads, Russ pavements and contracts, has been repudiated by its constituency at a recent election, by a vote of ten to one; thirty three thousand to three thousand. Any recommendation from such a source may fairly be suspected, and your committee do not attach to it the slightest importance.[3]

1. Journal of Commerce, June 18, 1853, p. 3.
2. First Annual Report..., p. 167.
3. Ibid., p. 185.

The committee had called at least six professional witnesses who were gardeners, nurserymen, botanists or landscape designers, and while there was no firm consensus, there was a numerical preference in favor of the Jones' Woods site. In addition, the Senate had received numerous petitions from groups in New York City. More than ten thousand citizens had signed an endorsement for the east side site. Nine thousand more remonstrants prayed that the Jones' Woods not be taken for it was not sufficiently central. This petition was called into doubt, however, when it was noted that eleven hundred of the signatures were in the same handwriting. And a much smaller group petitioned for no park whatsoever.[1]

Now that it had considered all the positions argued before it, it was clear that the committee was at least in agreement that New York City must have a park and at this point even went so far as to suggest that the acquisition of both sites might indeed be desirable.[2] But, with classic political dexterity, seeing that it might not be wise to intervene in such a controversial local issue--one which had moved so many voters to align themselves in conflicting positions--the committee's final recommendation was to pass the issue back to the Common Council, by permitting it, after the upcoming election, to make the final choice.

This decision hardly satisfied anyone, and one of the committee members, Senator James Cooley, immediately issued a sharp minority report. In it he reviewed all the positive arguments in favor of the Central site, and as well called into question the motives of those many thousands who had endorsed the Jones' Woods site. As he saw it, this move had been spearheaded by a very few who held land near the east side location, who

1. Ibid., pp. 184-185.
2. Ibid., p. 189.

stood to gain greatly by the increase in land values which such a park designation would bring. But even more of those whose lands would be taken had lobbied strongly in its favor, for they could not imagine at this time a more generous customer for their land than the city.[1] Accordingly, Cooley recommended the passage of a law for taking of the Central location. Both reports were distributed to the Senate as a whole, and for the next month they were taken under advisement, as local newspapers kept the controversy boiling by frequent publication of letters on all sides of the issue.[2]

Meanwhile, on the very same day that the Senate made its report public the New York Times introduced a new complication into the controversy. After reviewing the many virtues that both sides had so strongly put forth in favor of the two sites, the Times editor remarked,

> "The friends of each are implacable with anything less than the instant adoption of their favorite competitor. But are not the two perfectly reconcilable? May not both be bought, and the Central Park made to include not only the major part of that embraced within the draft of the Committee, but the whole of Jones' Woods, down to the water's edge?"

Why not squeeze the northern and southern boundaries of the Central Park down to 96th and 66th Streets and extend the western boundary to 9th Avenue thus embracing Manhattan Square? "The eastern shall traverse Fourth Avenue from Ninety-Fourth to Seventy-Fifth Street, where, turning towards the River, it shall follow the lines of Jones' Woods. Here all interests are reconciled. No objection is left. Proportion is recovered. Manhattan, Observatory and Hamilton Squares are brought within the limits of the park....All the recommendations of the Central Park Park are united with those of Jones' Wood, and nothing omitted but the

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1. Ibid., p. 166.
2. New York Daily Times, June 21, 1853.

disadvantages of both."[1]

Two days later, the Times offered a further explanation of their proposal, saying that it was only prudent to buy as much park land as possible in advance of its need while it was cheap, and after all, if it were in excess of what was needed, it could always be sold off, probably at treble the price.[2] Bryant and the Evening Post thought that taking both sites was a capital idea. "There is now ample room and verge enough upon the island for two parks, whereas, if the matter is delayed for a few years, there will hardly be a space left for one."[3] For those opposed to any park at all, this proposal filled them with rage.

During the month of July, the entire issue was kept in the fore, as the newspapers kept printing letters on all sides of controversy.[4] And on July 16th, the opponents of Jones' Woods attempted to gain a last strategic advantage. At the behest of the Committee on Encroachments on the harbor, members of the state legislature, Board of Aldermen, the chamber of commerce, representatives of the Army and Navy, a large number of private citizens, and President Pierce who had been in town to open the Crystal Palace, all boarded the chartered steamboat "Josephine" in order to examine the Jones' Woods site from the waterside. The trip was given heavy coverage in the local newspapers but in itself it was apparently not enough to affect the upcoming vote decisively. On July 21st, the legislature passed an act in favor of a Central Park. The

1. Ibid.
2. New York Daily Times, June 23, 1853, p. 4.
3. As quoted Allan Nevins, The Evening Post..., op.cit., p. 198.
4. For example see New York Daily Times, June 30, 1853 and July 7, 1853.

pending bill on Jones' Woods after a long debate was defeated 12 to 10, but one Senator Beekman, claiming the vote to be a personal affront to his judgment, but failing to mention publicly that he owned considerable property within the neighborhood, managed to have his colleagues reconsider their action and later in the day that bill was passed as well.[1] Probably because the state legislators were concerned about denying the wishes of so large a number of voters on either side of the question, the city was now authorized to take both sites, or at least forced to make the hard decision between them itself.

The prospect of having two parks or one aggregating nearly one thousand acres was now upon the city. For the Journal of Commerce, this was the last straw.

> What is it, in effect, but a law or laws to drive our population more and more over to Brooklyn, Williamsburgh, Staten Island, Jersey City, etc., by creating a barrier half a mile to two miles wide, north and south, and occupying half the island east and west, over which population cannot conveniently pass. If ever these projects should be carried into effect, they will cost our citizens millions of dollars... Small parks would be a public blessing; and might be as numerous as the health and comfort of our citizens would require, but a perpetual edict of desolation against two and one half square miles of this small island might better come from the bitterest enemies of our city than from its friends.[2]

The issue was now out of the hands of the State and for a brief period during the summer of 1853 the political pressure subsided. But in terms of having the issue resolved, the city was no better off. Very few believed that the city needed both parks, and certainly the Common Council's only firm position had been to favor the Central site. Thus, not really interested in pursuing the acquisition of two parks,

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1. Hopper Striker Mott, "Jones' Woods," Valentine's Manual of the City of New York, new series (1917/1918) p. 144. See also New York State Senate, Document No. 47, February r, 1854, p. 6.
2. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post..., op.cit., p. 199.

as the state had authorized it, it still remained for the Council to make the difficult choice between them. Realizing this, the various advocates of the two positions simply shifted the direction of their pressure from Albany back to the City Council. In spite of the pressure the Council remained resolute in its support of the Central site. Accordingly, in the fall of 1853, it made application to the Supreme Court of the First Judicial District for the appointment of Commissioners of Estimate and Assessment as authorized by the State Act, so that they could get on with the acquisition of property. On October 2nd, a hearing was held before Judge William Mitchell to argue out any questions at issue regarding proper procedure of the Commissioners before their appointment. Two questions immediately came to the front. First, upon petition of Messrs. Caleb S. Woodhull and Jonathan I. Coddington, their attorney Samuel B. Ruggles, argued that the State Arsenal, the existing storage reservoir, and the new one proposed by the Croton board, be exempted from acquisition. This was to be done because it would be unfair and illegal to assess adjoining property owners for these lands that clearly are of a use that benefited the entire city. Secondly, the issue was raised as to whether or not it was proper only to have the city nominate commissioners rather than not also granting the affected property owners the right to place into nomination names of their own choice. And lastly, one Mr. Mott appeared requesting that he be appointed as commissioner--a request endorsed by 3 men who owned property in or near the site.[1]

On November 17th, Judge Mitchell ruled on the issues by exempting from consideration the public properties mentioned, and by confirming as

1. New York Daily Times, October 3, 1853, p. 3.

commissioners only those offered forth by the city, namely William Kent, Michael Ulshoeffer, Luther Bradish, Warren Brady and Jeremiah Toule.[1] For the next two and one half years, these men would quietly go about the difficult task of assigning a fair appraised value to the more than 7000 building lots in question.

With all barriers now cleared for the acquisition of the central site, the Common Council had still to settle the pending question of what to do with the Jones' Woods. This was not an easy matter, for shortly after the passage of the state act permitting the acquisition of the east side site, seeing that the council did not wish to move ahead with it, a group of interested taxpayers initiated a suit to compel the corporation counsel to apply to the court for the appointment of commissioners of estimate as the enabling law had stated,--"it shall be the duty of the corporation counsel of the city of New York to cause application to be made..." The point at law was hardly a usual one as Judge Roosevelt immediately took note:

> Such an application on its face, is novel and extraordinary, and until now, I believe unprecedented. It proceeds upon the assumption not only of compelling one party to sell but the other to buy against his will--an exercise of the power of eminent domain, indicating, it must be admitted, very peculiar if not very hasty legislation.
>
> The corporation accordingly have employed other counsel to resist the action "of the corporation counsel;" and the court is placed in the not very comfortable attitude of recognizing both and of being compelled, should it decide in the favor of the "corporation counsel," to decide against the corporation itself.[2]

Roosevelt failed to resolve the complicated question at hand noting rather that a new state legislature and common council were about to be in session, and it was his hope that the obvious ambiguities and

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1. Mitchell's opinion is reprinted in full in First Annual Report..., pp. 99-102.
2. New York State Senate, Document No. 47, February 7, 1854.

unconstitutional features within the law would be taken care of by the action of one of these bodies.

On January 2, 1854, the new Common Council met for the first time, and as was traditional, the new mayor, Jacob A. Westervelt, delivered the annual message. Much to everyone's surprise, the cause of a park in New York received another minor setback, when Westervelt came out firmly against any park in the city by detailing the drawbacks in his mind which both sites evidenced.[1] But in spite of his fears and some lack of support, the whole question had seemed to move too far along to be sidetracked at this point. A request to repeal the Jones' Woods site was now pending in Albany and the Assembly committee reported on it first. Its opinion was split. The first group, calling attention to the fact that city probably did not need both parks, that the site was remote, that the city certainly could not afford both parks, recommended that the bill be repealed.[2] The other half of the committee disagreed saying that in their estimation, especially when the public site and reservoirs were subtracted, the Central Park was not sufficient, and for the good of the city, Jones' Woods ought also to be acquired.[3] With, therefore, no clear consensus from the Assembly, the bill to repeal went before the appropriate Senate committee which favored its repeal.[4] One other factor, not mentioned by either committee, that had a negative effect on the question of maintaining the law intact was the fact that unlike the bill authorizing the taking of Central Park, the original Jones' Woods

1. New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 1, January 2, 1854.
2. New York State Assembly, Document No. 21, January 18, 1854.
3. New York State Assembly, Document No. 18, January 25, 1854.
4. New York State Senate, Document No. 47, February 7, 1854.

bill had no provision for recouping any part of its cost through a benefit assessment. Rather the cost of its acquisition and improvement was to be borne by the city taxpayers as a whole, even though it was clear that the small number of adjoining property owners would profit greatly from its construction.[1] This fact was offensive to a number of residents, and as a result, many of them lobbied earnestly for its defeat. Accordingly, on April 11, 1854, the full legislature voted to repeal the act which had authorized the taking of Jones' Woods, thus finally ending the long struggle regarding the park's location first initiated by Bryant nearly ten years earlier.

With the possibility that it would ever become a public park now gone, this handsome site soon became prey for real estate speculators. For a brief period a resort hotel operated out of an old mansion on the site,[2] and but three years after the state's action, the New York Evening Times would report, "Jones' Woods....fairly comes into market today for City lots...at least 350 lots, scattered over and through the famour 'Woods' are to be offered by Mr. Bleecker today, at the Exchange to the highest bidder."[3] One would think that finally with the elimination of the east side site from consideration that the city could now proceed in an unencumbered fashion to acquire and construct the Central Park. And yet, even before the Jones' Woods site was eliminated, forces were being marshalled for another skirmish.

Encouraged by the reservations which the new mayor, Westervelt, had expressed, those who in the past had opposed a park found their hopes

1. First Annual Report..., pp. 88-97.
2. Hopper Striker Mott, op.cit., pp. 147-148.
3. New York Times, April 21, 1857 as cited Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1868.

reinvigorated. In addition, some of those who in the past had enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a park were beginning to develop cold feet, as it became apparent from the early work of the Commissioners of Estimate that the originally estimated cost of $1.4 million would more than likely be trebled.[1] And lastly, these two groups were joined by a number of concerned residents who owned property within or near the southern boundary of the park. Together in the early part of 1854, they initiated a movement to cut back the boundaries and substantially reduce the size of the park.

Before the Common Council they trooped, presenting a petition with several thousand signatures demanding the dimensions be curtailed. Public hearings were held and on March 13, 1854, the Committee on Lands and Places, to which the matter had been referred, issued their report. Their proposal was to eliminate that portion below 72nd Street and also remove a 400-foot strip from each side.[2] A minority of this Committee issued a separate report urging rather that the northern and southern boundaries remain fixed, but that the 400-foot strips on either side be removed from the site.[3] The opposition, whose chief spokesman was Samuel B. Ruggles, showing its willingness to compromise, urged a less drastic reduction of the park, suggesting that if any alteration must occur, then perhaps the park should extend from Sixth to Eighth, or from Fifth to Seventh, instead of from Fifth to Eighth Avenues.[4] The ubiquitous Bryant, protesting vigorously, showed his usual staunch opposition to any reduction of the park. Reminding his readers that London had more than

1. Edward Dana Durand, The Finances of New York City, op.cit., pp. 99-100.
2. First Annual Report..., p. 128.
3. Ibid., pp. 116-122.
4. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post..., op.cit., p. 200.

1,500 acres of park, which no doubt would command high prices as building lots, why should New York be upset about sparing a mere 700. The people of New York owed it "to the thousands coming after them, who will before many years make this city the first in the world in point of size, to bequeath them pleasure grounds commensurate with its greatness."[1]

In response to these contrary arguments, the Council passed a resolution on April 3, 1854, which in essence agreed with the majority report of their Committee. They would petition the state to allow them to reduce the size of the park by nearly one half. In spite of this position, the Council took no action on the petition during that year. Later in the year a member of the state Senate did introduce a bill that provided for a major reduction in the park's area and for "interspersing the park into suitable squares connecting with each other but on which family edifices may be erected." The only response it received was a blast from Bryant. This scheme would also destroy the park, he argued, and the idea of it with rent-paying brick and mortar was simply absurd.[2]

The year 1854 was an election year and perhaps with the upcoming election nearing, the council did not wish at that time to press the intent of their resolution too zealously. Indeed, the entire issue had in the past proven to be a very volatile one. In addition, electioneering activity slowed the normal legislative pace so that the entire year passed without further action that would have reduced the area of the park.

On Janaury 1, 1855, to the surprise of many New Yorkers, Fernando Wood, the democratic candidate, was inaugurated as the new mayor, superseding Westervelt. He entered office with a history of criminal activity

1. Ibid., pp. 200-201.
2. Ibid., p. 200.

that had just recently come under the scrutiny of a grand jury investigation.[1] His notoriety had been hard earned. In 1840, at age twenty-eight, he had been elected to Congress where he quickly gained a reputation for his ability to make sharp political deals. In 1850, when he unsuccessfully ran for the office of Mayor, it was common knowledge that he had won the nomination by bribing a number of delegates. In the same year, he also was convicted of cheating his business partner, and was forced to pay $15,000 in damages.[2] Thus, he hardly appeared in the 1854 election campaign as an exemplary candidate for the office of mayor. One recent historian has spoken of his role in New York City politics in these revealing terms:

> ...Fernando Wood and his organization were the precursors of the Tweed Ring, and Wood was, in a very real sense, Tweed's mentor....Indeed, it has been said that 'it was in Wood's school that most of the Tammany leaders of the next generation learned their politics.' Wood demonstrated how power could be centralized. As the model of craftiness in government, he was a masterful exponent of applying corrupt practices. His methods were observed by Tweed and he used them later with even more success. Sometimes Tweed learned his lessons the hard way. 'I never yet went to get a corner lot,' he said, ' that I didn't find Wood had got in ahead of me.'"[3]

In spite of the promise of this sort of activity, Wood managed to carry the election narrowly, aided by a strong Tammany organization, an election split between four parties, and a very strong statewide showing by the democrats.[4]

A man with the reputation of Wood deserved to be closely watched, and as his term began, the observers caught an eyefull. Displaying an astounding

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1. Alexander B. Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring, New York, 1965, p. 18ff.
2. Leonard Chalmers, "Fernando Wood and Tammany Hall: the First Phase," New York Historical Society Quarterly, LII (October, 1968) p. 383.
3. Ibid., p. 18.
4. A Citizen of New York, A Model Mayor, New York, 1855, pp. 15-16.

amount of duplicity, even for a talented political thief, Wood began moving against civic wrongs and corruption as if he were a pious, high-minded, reformer. In his inaugural addresss he has proclaimed that it was his intention to end inefficient government, clean the streets, suppress crime and violence, and promised economy in the administration of city government.[1] Much to the wonderment of all, during the first six months in office, he moved to end corruption in the police force, backed the temperance movement by closing saloons on Sundays, cracked down on the operation of brothels, and endorsed the idea of a city university. Laws were being enforced as they have never been enforced for 50 years, and he even went so far as to establish a complaint book in which all citizens could write their grievances so that they could be attended to.[2]

The dismay which had greeted his inauguration turned to praise. Important and reputable people throughout the country sought his acquaintance. "The clergy preached about him and prayed for him. The press lauded him....Men who had clamored, before his inauguration, for his incarceration in prison, took him by the hand, confessed their sins, and wished him God speed....Great religious societies passed him votes of thanks...To a committee who presented him these compliments he said, "I am only doing my duty. New York pays enough to be well governed, and she shall be."[3] George Templeton Strong could not understand the phenomenon he was witnessing, but was very pleased nonetheless.

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1. Leonard Chalmers, op.cit., p. 383.
2. Ibid.; also Diary of George Templeton Strong, op.cit., Vol. 2, p. 217; and Mathew Hale Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York, Hartford, 1868, pp. 269-272.
3. Mathew Hale Smith, op.cit., p. 272.

Summarizing Wood's first two months in office he wrote, "He is the first mayor, for thirty years at least, who has set himself seriously to the work of giving the civic administration a decent appearance of common honesty."[1]

New York had a new civic hero. But in the midst of this quixotic journey in municipal reform, this issue of the park again popped up. The Council resolution to cut back the size of the Central park severely had floundered around without the state taking action since last April 3rd. Accordingly, wishing to settle the matter finally, the Council on March 15, 1855, again passed the resolution which embodied the recommendation to eliminate the area south of 72nd Street and to reduce the remainder by 400 feet on both sides. Eight days later, Wood, very much enjoying his new role as leader and spokesman for progressive reform elements within the city, emphatically vetoed the Council's action:

> Any proposition having for its aim an interference with the work as originally devised,...will, in my opinion jeopardize the success of this most intelligent, philanthropic and patriotic public enterprise...
>
> We will be derelict, if by any narrow or selfish feeling of present saving, we deprive the teeming millions yet to inhabit and toil upon this island, of the one place not given up to mammon, where they can, even if but one day in the year, observe and worship nature, untarnished by conflict by art...
>
> Let us not follow our Dutch ancestors in their views of municipal prudence, who considered cow-paths as proper sites for streets and avenues, inasmuch as they saved the necessary expenses of surveys, etc...
>
> Being inbued with these sentiments, I can never give my consent to any measure that will throw an obstacle in its way, much less to abolish or curtail it.[2]

The mayor's veto on the matter prevailed. There was no effort by the Council to override it nor any concerted effort by the formerly

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1. Diary of George Templeton Strong, op.cit., Vol. 2, pp. 211-212.
2. For full veto message see Xavier Donald MacLeod, Biography of Fernando Wood, New York, 1856, pp. 307-312.

interested parties to reconsider the issue. Indeed, the new mayor, with all his new popularity and strong support for his actions from nearly all quarters was not now a man to be easily opposed or tampered with. The result of this fact and his resolute decision, was that the issue of the park's size was now finally closed and New York was essentially assured of a 770-acre park within the central portion of the island.

Interestingly, shortly after his veto message in support of a full large park, cracks began to appear within Wood's carefully constructed image. Approximately six months after his inauguration, it became clear that his behavior had all been a farce as some of the worse predictions which had preceded his election began to be realized. And while at first it seemed that no aspect of public morality escaped the mayor's vigilance, now and during the additional two terms he would serve as mayor, few opportunities for self-aggrandizement eluded him.[1] As the "pirate posing as the Puritan," he managed effectively "to camouflage his adventures in graft and his cooperation with the criminal world," and in the process he won, for a brief period, the gratitude and support of the city's respectable gentry.[2] Amongst these were many who had strongly backed the preservation of the parks' full proposed area, and while they were now hardly in favor of Wood's present activities, they were thankful for being unwitting benefactors of part of his fanciful charade. The honeymoon was now over, but Fernando Wood, in the near future, would again emerge as a primary actor in the story of the park's development. In later years when Wood's real political personality was even more evident, a more cynical evaluation of his motives held that he had been so moved

1. Leonard Chalmers, op.cit., p. 388ff.
2. Alexander B. Callow, Jr., op.cit., pp. 18-19.

by the prospect of collecting huge sums from the contractors who would develop the park.

Meanwhile, all the time that this aspect of the park question was being resolved, and the political subplot of which it was a part was unfolding, the Commissioners of Estimate and Apportionment had been pursuing the task assigned to them. In spite of comments by Mayor Wood and others about the amount of time it was taking them,[1] they had been progressing reasonably. But their job was not an easy one. The Commissioners had to review, hear, and decide upon the claims relating to more than 7500 lots. This was a long and tedious process that was made even more difficult by the fact that in addition to assigning values to the properties to be taken, a judgment had to be made as to the amount of monetary benefit which would be gained by those properties contiguous to the park. And further, what were the territorial limits over which this benefit assessment would be spread.[2] Nevertheless, after two years the Commissioners reached their decision on these matters and on July 2, 1855, they submitted their completed report.

The next and last step that remained was to have it confirmed by a judge of the State Supreme Court. This seemed simple enough, but as with so many other aspects of the question, it too proved to be a stumbling block. Immediately after the report became public, a group of wealthy citizens banded together to oppose its confirmation. Composed of a few residual individuals who had all along opposed any park,, a few fearful taxpayers, and a large number of property owners who felt that the amounts of money that they would either be offered or assessed were grossly

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1. Xavier Donald MacLeod, op.cit., p. 311.
2. A Citizen of New York [E. Hutchinson], A Model Mayor, New York, 1855, pp. 42-43.

unfair--they boldly declared that there would be no judge in the city who would dare give the necessary approval.[1] Judge Roosevelt, who would normally sit within this district, was certainly not anxious to have the case before him, and besides, he effectively eliminated himself from the case when he improprietously announced in public his agreement with some of the opposition's claims.[2] All the local judges hoped to avoid the volatile matter, and after a bit of behind the scenes political manipulation, State Senator Daniel Sickler, a long-time friend of the park, managed to convince the Governor to reassign Judge Harris of Albany to help cover the work load of the district. The matter soon came before him.

The courtroom was jammed with spectators as hearings on the confirmation got underway. More than forty lawyers appeared in opposition to the matter representing various parties who felt aggrieved by the proposed payments that had been listed. Each had to present his case, and the hearings dragged on for days. Meanwhile, the judge and his family were receiving numerous invitations to social affairs within the city, but when he discovered that most of them had been issued at the instigation of many of the forty-odd lawyers who were appearing before him, he started turning them down. Before such a legal and social onslaught, the hopes of the corporation counsel, Robert Dillon, who had presented the report for confirmation, dwindled. On the last day all he could urge in his closing remarks to the Judge was, "Sign this report, and old age and prattling childhood will thank you."[3]

On the fifth of February, 1856, Judge Harris did indeed sign the report of the Commissioners, thereby confirming in toto the figures at which

1. Edward Hagaman Hall, op.cit., pp. 460-461.
2. Diary of George Templeton Strong, op.cit., Vol. 2, p. 251.
3. Edward Hagaman Hall, op.cit., p. 461.

they had arrived. In the opinion he issued he took note of all the major objections which the battery of lawyers had presented, but found them all to be without essential merit. Since only approximately one in every forty of the owners of the 7500 lots in question had appeared to opppose their appraisal, it was the court's feeling that justice had been done and that the city might now proceed with acquiring and constructing the park.[1]

Accordingly, the comptroller submitted a resolution to the Common Council, for the payment of $5,073,433, of which $1,658,395 was to be paid by owners of the land adjacent to the park in view of the prospective benefit which the park's presence would yield to them.[2] The difference was underwritten by a stock issue of the city at a rate of interest not to exceed 7%.[3]

Thus, finally the Central Park became the possession of the city. The long struggle which had consumed eleven and one half years from the time of its initial public advocacy by the editor of the Evening Post had ended. Bryant took occasion to congratulate the city on its accomplishment and express the hope that the landscaping of Central Park might begin in a few short months.[4] He as much as anyone else could be given credit for the achievement. His campaign on its behalf had been tenacious and his support unswerving.[5] Perhaps equally important had been Downing, who

1. First Annual Report..., pp. 103-111.
2. Edward Dana Durand, The Finances of the City of New York, op.cit., p.100. For a general history of the city's use of the benefit assessment as a means for paying for public improvements see, Ibid., pp. 58-59.
3. First Annual Report..., pp. 112-113.
4. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post..., op.cit., p. 201.
5. In 1900, the city commemorated Bryant's formative role when it erected a statue of him and named the small open space on the western side of the present New York Public Library in his honor.

joined the fray at a critical point and by lending his name to the project, thereby help guarantee a broad base of public support. The politician Kingsland's contribution was to thrust the issue into formal public debate, and of course, Fernando Wood, in his own special ways and for his own unique reasons, redeemed the original concept at a critical juncture. Just as important to the adoption of a park as these easily identifiable personalities were the large number of anonymous citizens, who for a myriad of often conflicting reasons, supported separately and in coalitions, the formal decisions which the elected officials had to make as the park issue ran its political gauntlet.

The opposition to the New York Park had come in essentially three forms. The first was cost, that is, the added tax burden which the city would take on was simply too expensive or at least disproportionate to the anticipated benefits. This was an especially sharp criticism when it became clear that the final cost just for acquisition would be over five million dollars, instead of the 1.6 million dollars estimated early in the controversy. This should have been the most tenable argument for in the representative year of 1854, the total permanent city debt was only $13.9 million, its annual budget $10.1 million, and the annual tax levy to be raised from property assessments was $4.3 million.[1] And two years earlier the total expenditures for public schools and fire protection were $654,000 and $106,000 respectively.[2] There was no precedent for such a comparatively large expenditure for a city improvement, unless it was the Croton Water project, which generated sufficient revenues, however,

1. New York (City) Comptroller's Office, Annual Report of the Comptroller of the City of New York, for the year, 1854, New York, 1855, pp. 1-10.
2. New York City Common Council, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York for 1859, New York, 1860, p. 529.

to retire its own debt. No matter what its present virtues or value, the Central Park must retrospectively be viewed, within its time, as an expensive bit of municipal self-indulgence.

The second major objection, centered around the question of whether the city in fact needed a park. Though often closely tied to the economic argument above, in its pure form it was argued that there were already adequate open spaces within the city, that abundant open space was available near the city, and that its use would be limited exclusively to either the very rich or the very poor.

These arguments seem less compelling than the economic one, for it was more than a matter of record that open space within or near the city relative to the size and density of the population and the cost and time needed to get to it was very limited. In addition, without a reservation of lands to exempt it from the projected onslaught of the trend of urbanization, the future availability and accessibility to such spaces would be even more limited.

The last major question of opposition centered around the question of location. This objection tended to be more narrowly focused, that is it resulted from the belief that their individual property interests were likely to be jeopardized. A few, especially at the Jones' Woods site wanted their property taken believing the city to be the best potential purchaser. Many more sought a change in location because they did not want to be compelled to sell their land at a price they feared would be below what they might soon get in the highly volatile and speculative private real estate market. And lastly, there was a strong group who did not wish to pay the immediate benefit assessment, if a park were located near them.

In spite of these forcefully presented arguments the park's proponents ultimately prevailed. In an historical analysis, it is not always easy to fully discern why this was true. There may always be some large factor of chance and good fortune involved as in having the best argument available to the right people, and at the propitious time. And yet, in addition to this and the ostensible and clearly stated arguments in favor of the park related in this account, there are discernible at least four important underlying motivations that helped animate the backers of the park.

First, the movement for a park coincided with a developing concern for public health reform. The city had repeatedly been visited by yellow fever, cholera and other epidemics and while the exact reasons were not then understood, there seemed a clear relationship to the congested state of the growing city, particularly the teeming tenement districts where many of the impoverished immigrants clustered. As well, in the absence of a well-established germ theory, and with the less than satisfactory results achieved by the common treatments of blood letting, quarantine, electricity and water cures, it was no wonder there might be a willingness to have faith in a more "natural" cure.[1] Simple observation seemed to display that those living in the country were healthier--at any rate rural populations had never been subject to epidemic scourges--and the differences seemed to be wholly environmental. As a result there was a strong feeling that a large park within the city would have a positive effect upon city-wide health. A favorite analogy was that parks would act as "the lungs of the city," helping ventilate the fetid and disease-bearing air of the close congested city, while bringing a bit of the country atmosphere to the urban center.

1. Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, Ithaca, 1967, p. 167.

And thus the park won strong backing by its promise to help open up the city and relieve its unhealthy, congested state.

The second underlying attitude that aided the crusade for a New York park is much more complex and difficult to state briefly. This pertains to a societal concept of nature which at a broad philosophical level meant man's relationship to nature. But at a more concrete and practical level, it refers to the romantic perception of the role of nature.[1] The United States was still dominantly an agrarian nation and its values remained rooted in its rural tradition. Additionally, its best intellectuals had maintained and reinforced the virtues of the simple rural life over the obvious physical dangers and moral evils of the city. Coupled with a general romantic enthusiasm for nature with all its mystical attributes and presumed powers, most people felt that one way to control the "unnatural" creations the cities seemed to be was to bring them under the influence of the rural landscape. As part of a romantic reaction to the effects of intensifying urbanization, many people endorsed the idea of a large rural park as one way to do this. As a result it seems clear that part of the broad based support for the park derived from this romantic impulse and the anti-city feelings they encompassed.

A more pragmatic concern was also evidenced in support of the park. Aware of the fact that the city was expanding at an unprecedented rate and that it lacked the legal instruments to control urban expansion effectively, some New Yorkers saw the park as one way that the developing environment

1. For good full discussions at both levels see Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America, New York, 1967; Peter J. Schmitt, Back to Nature: the Arcadian Myth in Urban America, New York, 1969; Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, New Haven, 1967; Paul Shepard, Man in the Landscape, New York, 1967; Michael H. Cowan, City of the West: Emerson, America and the Urban Metaphor, New Haven, 1967; Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth, New York, 1957.

could be improved or reformed. It was also clear to those concerned with the quality of the urban environment that if some action were not taken shortly to reserve some of the island's land for public use, it would all shortly be consumed by private development. Not to act would jeopardize the possibility of having open space within the city, or at least make it much more expensive and difficult later.

Lastly, the proponents of the park were able to draw upon the public feelings about national destiny and pride. The young country, not yet a world power, but in a developing post-colonial position, was sensitive about its status amongst world nations. In regard to its cities, it knew that they were becoming increasingly urban, but when it compared them to old world cities it was clear that they were much more primitive. Even the city fathers articulated this idea.

> The great metropolis of this continent, priding herself on her wealth and commerce, and on the bright auguries that beckon her in the future, ought not to remain in this particular, so lamentably behind the great cities of the Old World, which, in so many respects, she so vigorously rivals, and confidently hopes to surpass.[1]

Confident of their destiny, but insecure as to their present position, Americans and New Yorkers especially, consciously emulated the fashions, style and civic adornments they saw in European capitals. For if they were to be urban, why not also urbane. They knew that tradition, grand public institutions, and civic attractiveness, could not be had instantly, but as is clear from the arguments for the case at hand, that in adopting improvements like the park, the new world civilization could begin to rival its European ancestors.[2] Just as the exposition of 1851 had been one symbol

1. New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 63, December 27, 1852.
2. For further material on this point see A. J. Downing, Rural Essays, op.cit., p. 139; Amory Mayo, Symbols of the Capital, New York, 1859, pp. 40-44; New York Illustrated, New York, 1869, p. 45; Russell Lynes, The Art Makers, op.cit., p. 162.

of the nation's developing pride in its growth, wealth, and culture, the creation of the park was part of the city's emerging urban consciousness and a new, more cosmopolitan view of itself.

Certainly there were other similar motivations to these, for example, the social purposes Downing predicted it would serve, that aided the passage of the park. Yet it seems it was these four which really had substantial impact on the issue. In any event, the park proponents had won the long political struggle, and the city could now begin to construct its park.

CHAPTER IV

COMMISSIONS AND COMPETITIONS

Following the February confirmation of the Commissioner's report, the city hoped to move ahead quickly with the large task of constructing the park. In mid-April, the entire area within the park's boundaries became public property with the acquisition by condemnation proceedings of the site for the new Central Park reservoir between Fifth and Seventh Avenues and Eighty-fifth and Ninety-sixth Streets. But because the state laws enabling the city to take the park had not designated how or by whom the project would be implemented, the project was temporarily stalled through the spring. Accordingly, in the absence of necessary legislation, the Common Council passed an ordinance on May 19th placing the control of the Central Park in the hands of a board of commissioners consisting of the mayor, Fernando Wood, and the Street Commissioner, Joseph S. Taylor, The commissioners were empowered to adopt a plan to improve the site, employ those persons necessary to execute it, and make provision to appropriate funds to carry out the purposes of the ordinance.

Before proceeding any further with the task before them, and realizing that they would probably require outside advice, the commissioners appointed a group of well-known citizens who were to attend their meetings and function as a consultant board, providing advice in the general matter of how to proceed, and to determine upon the merits of such plans or propositions as might come before them for a permanent design for the improvement of the park. Thus invitations were issued to George Bancroft, Washington Irving, James E. Cooley, James Phalen, Charles A. Dana,

Stewart Brown and Charles F. Briggs.[1] These gentlemen met to organize on May 29, 1856, at which time they elected Washington Irving as President of the Board, and settled in a preliminary way how they were to proceed. A few days later, the commissioners appointed one Egbert L. Viele chief engineer of Central Park at an annual salary of twenty five hundred dollars. Viele had graduated from West Point in 1847, served in the Mexican War and resigned in 1850 to take up the practice of civil engineering in New York. From 1854 to 1856 he had served as state engineer for New Jersey. Viele seemed a logical choice to provide professional advice to the commissioners, for since 1853 he had in his spare time and at his own expense, been preparing a preliminary topographic survey of the park lands and a general plan for its development based on this survey.[2] Both the survey and plan were taken under advisement by the commissioners[3] that summer. They also hired men to begin clearing the seven hundred and seventy five acres of land, sent teams of surveyors into the park, and employed a corps of twenty policemen to keep order within the territory.[4] At the end of the year, the commissioners issued their First Annual Report to which the survey and plan were appended, as well as statements by Viele in regard to the site's physical assets and problems and an explanation of the plan for improvement which he had offered.

1. First Annual Report ..., pp. 8-9.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Theodora Kimball, eds., Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903, Vol. II, New York, 1970, p. 31.
3. For Viele's later contention that the Commissioners had actually adopted his plan and thus owed him compensation, see Ibid., pp. 554-562.
4. New York Times, July 9, 1856, p. 3.

The plan he prepared was a modest attempt to capture the spirit, as he interpreted it, of the picturesque design mode which had been so popularly and successfully employed to ornament the European parks and gardens during the last fifty years. The natural scenery was what was most important, for while it was to be carefully enhanced, it was also to be viewed as left alone, for in landscape matters, as he quoted, "the greatest art is to conceal art".

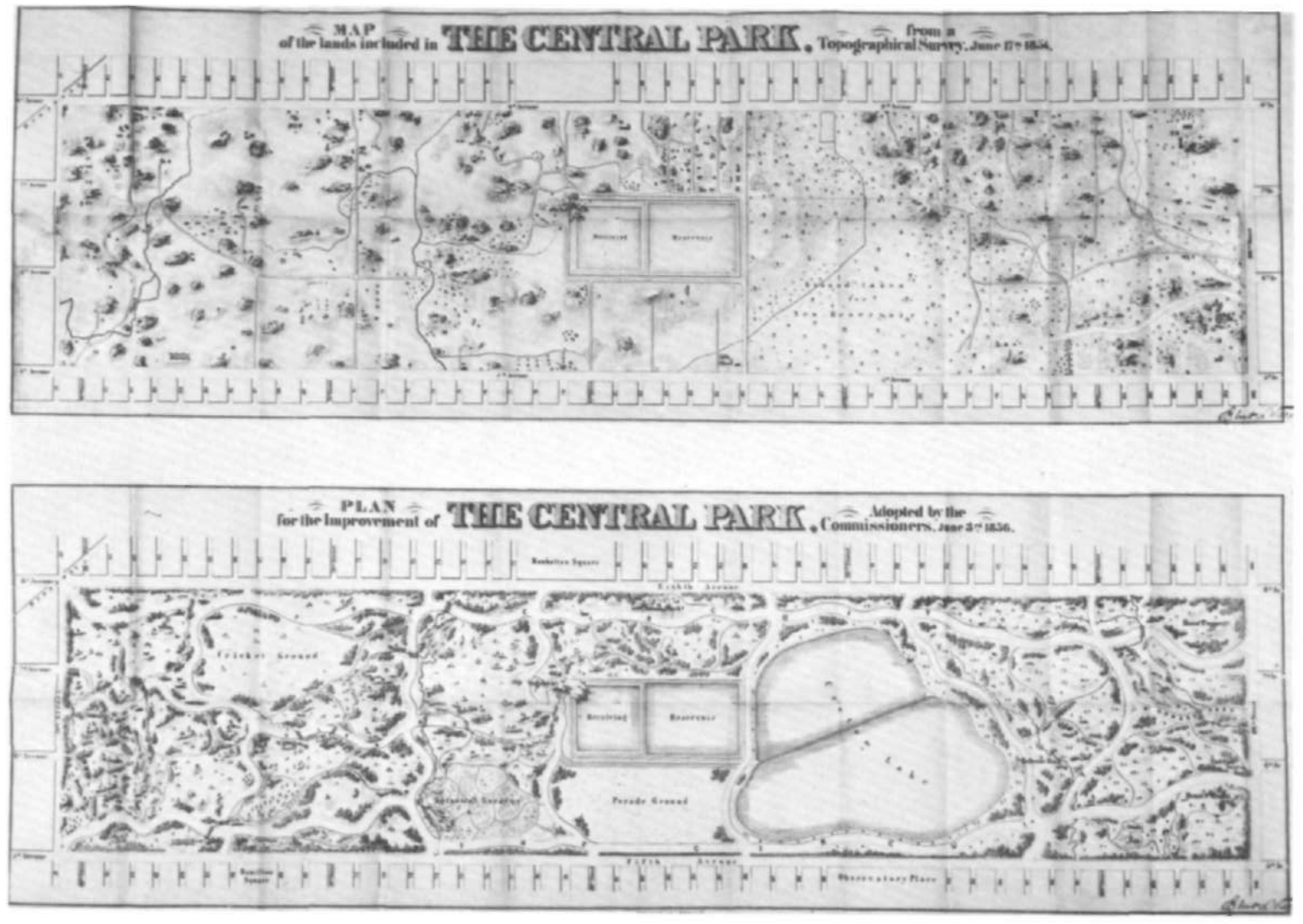
> .... the natural configuration of the surface is the basis of the intended improvements. The hills, the valleys, and the streams, are nature's pencilings on the surface of the earth, rivaling, in their pictured grace, the most beautiful conceptions of the finite mind; to alter them, would be desecration: to erase them, folly.[1]

Within this general framework, Viele suggested his improvements. First, there should be a main drive or "The Circuit" that encircled the entire park. Large enough to be used by a variety of vehicles at the same time, it would "embrace every feature of importance within the limits, and every prominent view without". For the more timid or sedate, a shorter and more secluded carriage drive was included. In addition, there were included separate routes to be used exclusively by pedestrians or equestrians who wished to enjoy the scenery of the park. Lastly, in the way of roads, there were four major surface level roads that traversed the park from east to west, allowing uninterrupted transit across the park "for business and other purposes". Within this network of roads, hoping to leave as much of the scenery undisturbed as possible, Viele proposed only three major areas be set aside for specific functional uses. One was a parade ground for military maneuvers, now occupied in part by the Metropolitan Museum, one a large

1. First Annual Report ..., p. 37.

Figure 2. Viele's Topographical Survey and Plan of Improvement for Central Park, 1856.

Published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, First Annual Report... New York: Chas. W. Baker, 1857.


MAP
of the lands included in THE CENTRAL PARK, from a Topographical Survey. June 17th 1856.
PLAN
for the Improvement of THE CENTRAL PARK, Adopted by the Commissioners, June 3rd 1856.
Cricket Ground
Reservoir
Parade Ground
Fifth Avenue

open meadow which he designated as "the Cricket Ground", and lastly a botanical garden for the display of flowering gardens and related horticultural exhibits.[1] To begin preparatory work on all of these improvements, Viele requested a budget for the next year of two hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

There was not much evident public response to Viele's proposition, but at least one author liked the fact that he had not proposed much in the way of radical alteration.

> Nature has done so much that there is little for the engineer but to beautify and trim its excrescences .... Nature will be allowed her own way wherever she behaves in a decorous and cleanly manner; she will only be interfered with as the most unexceptional belles are, to have her hair combed, her face washed, and her beauties set off to the best advantage.[2]

This observer could think of only one negative possibility, and that was not directly related to Viele's plan. He warned that the corner lots and other desirable sites along Fifth and Eighth Avenues would be quickly bought by the lager beer dealers and keepers of bar rooms, making the park little more ... than a great beer garden, where the drunken will resort to sleep off their liquor, and the tipsy to seek fights ....[3]

Other critics chose to focus their remarks directly on the plan itself. Admittedly writing with full knowledge of the innovative plan which was finally adopted, one historian of the park critically analyzed Viele's plan in these terms:

> To be frank, this plan ..... is just a matter of fact, tasteless affair as is always produced by engineers (begging pardon of the whole useful body), when they attempt anything in the way of ornamental design. No thought was required to make it, and no other knowledge than a mere acquaintance with the

1. Ibid., pp. 39-43.
2. Harper's Weekly, I (November 28, 1857) p. 756.
3. Ibid., p. 757.

> topography of the ground to be worked. There is not a single difficulty overcome, a single advantage improved, a single valuable or striking improvement suggested. The roads follow the natural level as far as possible, the existing water-courses are allowed to remain as they are, except than in two or three places the waters of marshy spots are collected into pools, and this, literally, is the only appearance of any intention to do anything for the sake of beauty or picturesqueness. As for the arrangement of the roads, nothing could be more simple, and, at the same time, nothing could be more interesting.[1]

In spite of the presence of Viele's quickly prepared plan, the commissioner's own feelings in the matter and the glowing visions of what the future park should look like published by the local newspapers,[2] there seemed as yet to be no clear idea of exactly how to proceed on the park. Some unsolicited, but valuable advice was rendered to them by two landscape architects in Boston, Robert Morris Copeland and H. W. S. Cleveland. In a substantive way, however, all they could urge was that there was greater ultimate economy in landscape design if a full and detailed comprehensive plan was first prepared.[3] They did not view Viele's as full and comprehensive.

A degree of momentary indecision and a warning by these two respected men were both warranted when one considers the size of the task before the commissioners and the conditions of the site with which they had been presented. A half mile wide by two and one half miles long, composed of nearly seventy-five hundred standard city building lots, and nearly totally bisected by the two large reservoirs, any plan which hoped to improve and unify the site, would have to be carefully thought out. Fortunately, the site was essentially clear of buildings. Within the

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1. Clarence C. Cook, A Description of the New York Central Park, New York, 1869, pp. 24-25.
2. New York Daily Times, March 5, 1856.
3. Robert Morris Copeland and H. W. S. Cleveland, A Few Words on the Central Park, Boston, 1856.

park area there were only three substantial homes, and three semi-public institutions, an Episcopal Church at Eighth Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street, Mount Vincent Academy at Sixth Avenue and One hundred and fifth Street, and the New York State Arsenal at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-fourth Street. The site of the park was still remote from the built-up city for there was not a single structure on the south side of Fifty-ninth Street, but sixteen homes bordered it on Eighth Avenue and only ten structures faced the park along Fifth Avenue, including James Lenox country estate at Seventy-second Street.[1] The remainder of the site was a desolate place, little changed from the beginning of the century when it was a remote hunting ground,[2] except for some squatters' shacks, pig sties, bone-boiling works, and slaughterhouses added in recent years. One graphic description of the discouraging site described it this way:

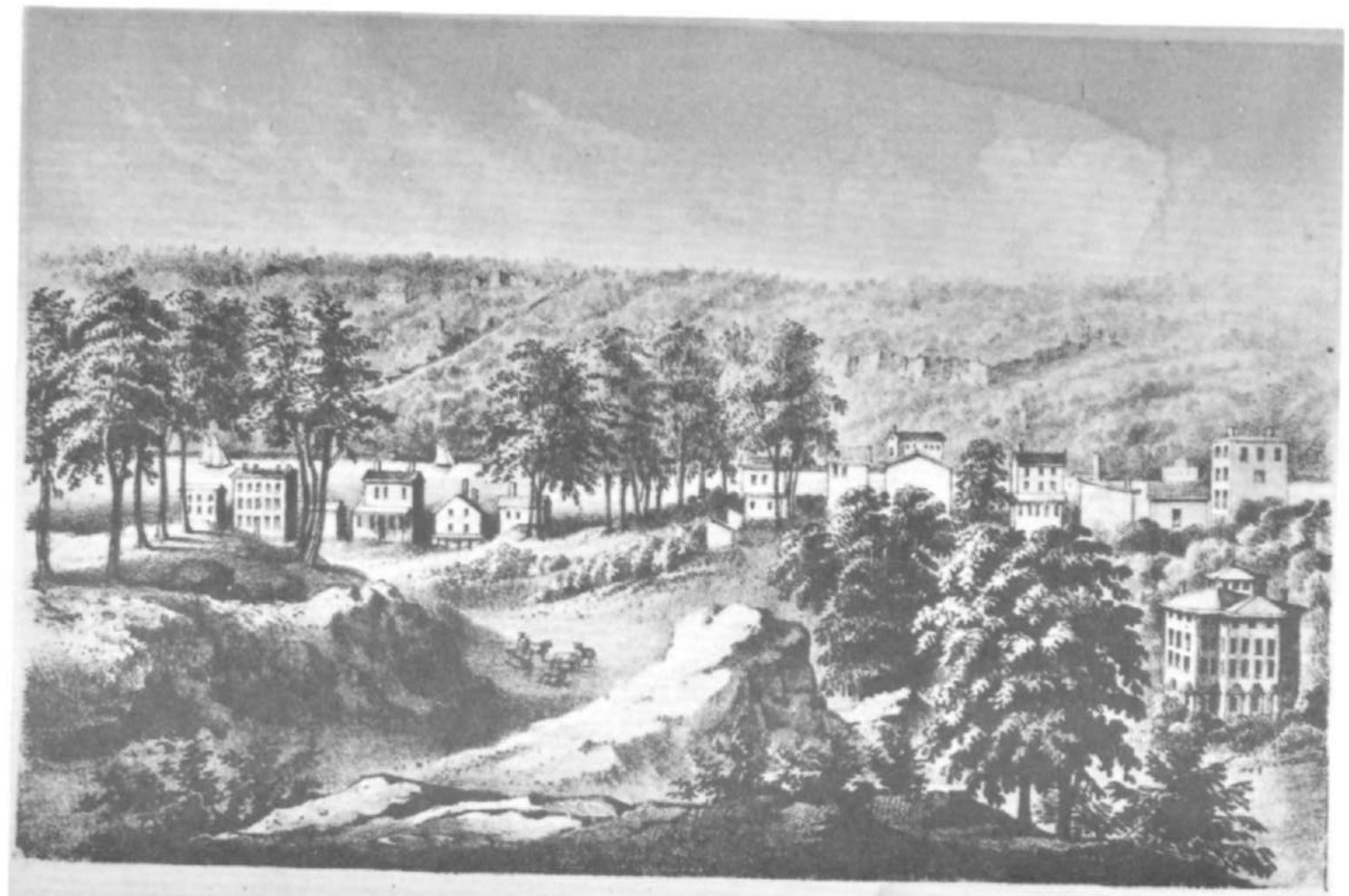
> The physical condition of the Central Park area just prior to its being taken for park purposes was about as repelling as could be imagined. For the most part it was a succession of stone quarries, interspersed with pestiferous swamps and overgrown with tangles and thickets of briars and vines. The ground was so thinly covered with soil that it was almost impossible to find a square rod in which a crowbar would not strike rock; and a menace to health on account of its offensive and unsanitary condition ....
>
> Surprising as it may seem, this forbidding region was the refuge of a population of about 5,000 souls. It was a sort of no-man's land occupied by squatters living in the most abject manner. Their miserable little huts were made of boards rudely nailed together and sometimes covered with sheets of tin made by flattening out old tin cans ....

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1. Map of the City and County of New York North of 50th Street; Surveyed and drawn by R. A. Jones, published by Mr. Dripps, 1851.
2. Charles H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York, 1816-1860, New York, 1896, p. 16.

Figure 3. View of Original Condition of Park, Looking West to the Hudson River and Palisades, 1856.

Published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, First Annual Report... New York: Chas. W. Baker, 1857.



View from Summit Rock, Central Park, looking West.
The Hudson River and Palisades.

> The inhabitants of these squalid quarters represented various nationalities -- white men, negroes and Indians, Americans, Germans, Irishmen, and all degrees of intermixtures. Some were married and some paid no respect to the marriage covenant. Some believed in religion and some did not. Some were honest, deteriorated gentle folk: more were roughs and toughs, living an abandoned life. For food they depended largely on the refuse of the city. This refuse was divided between the human residents of the park and unaccountable numbers of domestic animals, the bones being reserved for the bone boiling establishments within the area. The occupations of some of the inhabitants were illegal nuisances and were carried on under the cover of night. The land was also the 'ominum gatherum' for city rubbish and was diversified by heaps of cinders, brickbats, potsherds, and other rubbish. Horses and cows, dogs and cats, pigs and goats, geese and chickens swarmed everywhere .... The odors from the filthy hovels, pig styes, and decaying organic matter, heightened by those emanating from the bone-boiling, swill milk and hog-feeding establishments, made the air sickening to breathe ....Drainage ... converted the adjacent swamps into reeking pest holes".[1]

In the face of these conditions, the Commission moved cautiously for it was clear that a large amount of time, labor and expense would be required to displace this unfortunate population and properly improve the site.[2] The very sparseness of natural riches required radical treatment, and Viele's plan as outlined, did not promise this. During the fall of 1856, the Commissioners proceeded only to employ men to begin clearing and cleaning the site. As the laborers moved northward, the homeless squatters fled their caves and sheds, most going toward the vicinity of Cochran's Roost near the East River to try to re-establish their abodes. They did not always take their displacement happily, and sometimes even physically resisted the encroachment against their property. As Viele would relate, "Such was the danger of the situation that the designer of the park had to go armed while making

1. Edward Hagaman Hall, "Central Park in the City of New York," Sixteenth Annual Report, 1911, of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Albany, 1911, pp. 438-442.
2. New York Times, July 9, 1856, p. 3.

his studies, and in addition to this, to carry an ample supply of deodorizers".[1]

Furthermore, Wood's attention was diverted from the question of the park momentarily by his fall election campaign. If the scale of the project and the condition of the site seemed impossible, his political difficulties were beginning to appear even greater. Wood had long since ceased his brief romance with reform, finding it not easy to sustain that pace of virtue or as the Herald cryptically observed, "A few months of reform had dulled the Mayor's love of novelty".

In spite of his reputation, the Mayor, counting on strong Tammany backing, was confident of re-election, until there appeared a bombshell in the form of a pamphlet entitled "A Biography of Fernando Wood: A History of the Forgeries, Perjuries and Other Crimes of Our 'Model' Mayor".[3] Though the Mayor attempted to suppress its publication with a bribe of five hundred dollars, its author simply and gratefully pocketed the sum and proceeded to forward it to the printer.

The pamphlet was hardly a new revelation, for it recounted the known episode of his swindling his business partner and his action in buying delegates for his nomination to Congress. Potentially more damming was its contention that Fernando was virulently anti-immigrant and especially anti-Catholic -- two sources of support on which Tammany was particularly dependent.[4] The force of this argument was greatly lessened when Wood

1. Daniel Van Pelt, Leslie's History of the Greater New York, New York, 1898, p. 386.
2. Alfred Connable and Edward Silverfarb, Tigers of Tammany, New York, 1967, p. 126.
3. Abijah Ingraham, A Biography of Fernando Wood: A History of the Forgeries, Perjuries and Other Crimes of Our 'Model' Mayor, New York, 1856.
4. For example see, A Citizen of New York [E. Hutchison], A Model Mayor, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

adroitly surmounted the problems of this stance by arranging to sell the valuable site of St. Patrick's Cathedral to the archbishop of New York for the astonishing sum of eighty-three dollars.[1] To the Catholic hierarchy at least, who were not bashful in making known their feelings from the pulpit, he could only be a close friend. The pamphlet or civic reformers might also have mentioned that Wood, in his two years in office, had been shamelessly involved in selling jobs, contracts and assorted political favors. Showing little prejudice, both his friends and relatives benefited from his largesse.[2] The only criteria for allocation was unswerving political support and a willingness to return a large percent of the profits to Wood himself. In pursuit of re-election, Wood had even reopened all the city's bars on Sunday which in his earlier days of reform zeal, had been closed.

The rest of the city leadership seemed just as tainted. The Board of Aldermen during the past four or five years, by judiciously using their powers to issue transit franchises and street building contracts, had developed a continuing source of personal profit and graft. Popularly referred to as "The Forty Thieves", their activities, though less flamboyantly pursued, rivaled in every other way the chicaneries of the mayor.

In relatively simple terms, this corruption of public officials was the direct result of the sort of individuals which Tammany managed to have elected to public office. Having carefully courted the immigrant vote by an ingenious combination of promise, payoff, patronage, and political appointment, the machine called forth this bedrock of support

1. Alfred Connable and Edward Silverfarb, op. cit., p. 127.
2. Ibid., pp. 127-129.

at election time. And, where the vote of the newcomer was not sufficiently pliable, Wood was not adverse to using his police force, or the muscle of such ward gangs as the "Dead Rabbits" or "Bowery Boys", to insure that his backers won the first fights at the polls or that only the proper ballot boxes were stolen.[1] With these sorts of techniques at his command, Wood had little trouble being re-elected in the fall of 1856. If this corruption had been particular to Wood alone, that would have been one matter, but it in fact pervaded all of city government.

By 1856, an elaborate system of spoilation infected most official actions and public office was viewed as but a vehicle to steal with little risk of punishment. Furthermore, public improvements were often initiated only when they held promise of gain to politicians. Rapid city growth had caused an urgent need, for example, for new transportation facilities, but they loomed on the political horizon not as a public necessity but rather as a lush opportunity for graft in the assignment of the franchise. One fifty-thousand dollar bribe distributed amongst the aldermen for two trolley franchises netted one firm an illegal profit of more than one million dollars. In the words of the most successful operator of them all, "Boss Tweed", "there never was a time you couldn't buy the Board of Aldermen".[2]

The whole question of the emergence of a political machine in New York and the effectiveness of the form of government it forged, is a fascinating and complex subject somewhat beyond the scope of this study. Yet it may be said in general that men like Wood, and the other Tammany

1. Connable and Silverfarb, op. cit., p. 128.
2. Frederick Shaw, The History of the New York City Legislature, New York, 1954, p. 4.

leaders who would follow him, outmaneuvered the old elites by successfully exploiting the growing complexities of urban life.[1] Once in power, though their means might be viewed as illegal or in a moral sense judged to be bad, the political machine did make undeniably positive contributions to the city in societal terms. The machine centralized political power and established an effective and resolute policy-making process for a rapidly growing city very much in need of more efficient government. By organizing at the ward level and showing that government could deal with personal problems, it brought the immigrants and other formerly apathetic voters into the political system. It efficiently provided needed public goods and services for which there was a legitimate demand, such as streets, mass transit and parks. By helping to create jobs for the unemployed and by undertaking civic improvements, some of them long overdo, the needs of diverse subgroups were met which had not been fulfilled by the more culturally approved political structure.[2] Such activities usually served the needs of the city as a whole, and thus the respectable as well as the unrespectable profited from the actions of the machine. And, to the extent that Central Park was part of this milieu, any judgment in regard to the behavior of politicians toward it, must be tempered by this perspective.

The repeated scandals resulting from the "boodling" and embezelment had, nevertheless, raised the city government to its most conspicuous level ever, and nowhere was it more troublingly visible than in Albany. The state legislature had watched what they felt was the rapid decline of government in its largest city with some concern, and after Wood's

1. Alexander Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring., op. cit., p. 5ff.
2. Robert K. Merton, "The Latent Functions of the Machine," Edward C. Banfield, ed., Urban Government, New York, 1969, pp. 223-233.

re-election there was a general feeling that strong action was needed. As early as the spring of 1855, assembly bills to limit the powers of city officials had been stalled only through the intercession of respected men like Horace Greeley, Peter Cooper and William B. Astor who saw any such action as an unwarranted intervention in purely city affairs.[1] But two years later, it was evident to all that New York City was not going to be able to govern itself effectively unless some strong action was taken to limit the corruption. Accordingly, Governor John King in his annual message to the legislature delivered on January 6, 1857, proposed that the state alter the city's charter and radically change the procedures for city administration. And he cryptically concluded,

> Experience renders it quite certain that the Legislature will hesitate to entrust the management of that System to the Mayor alone.[2]

The legislators put forth during that spring a whole host of bills to restrict or otherwise limit the powers of the city administration. By April, most of them had been agreed upon and in combined form the various proposals were issued as a redesigned charter. This new charter made fundamental alterations in the operations of the city government. First, it changed the composition of the Common Council giving more representation to the minority party through a redistricting plan that eliminated the old wards as the electoral unit, and replaced them with newly gerrymanded districts. Secondly, various city officials were now appointed rather than elected at large, and new detailed procedures were placed in effect to regulate the issuance of any city contract. Next a

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1. Leonard Chalmers, "Fernando Wood and Tammany Hall: the First Phase," New York Historical Society Quarterly, LII (October, 1968) p. 386.
2. Samuel Augustus Pleasants, Fernando Wood of New York, New York, 1948, p. 68.

county Board of Supervisors was created which was effectively empowered to usurp functions which the city had formerly carried out. In addition, a new Metropolitan police force was created with jurisdiction over all of New York City, Richmond, Kings and Westchester. It was to be controlled by the Mayors of Brooklyn and New York and five commissioners appointed by the governor. It was expected that this last action would stop the police force from being a main source of patronage positions and prevent the misuse of their influence in elections. And, lastly, the new charter created a number of independent commissioners with exclusive control over specific local functions. The harbor, wharves and piers (Pilot Commissioners), the construction of a new city hall, and the Central Park, would now be under the exclusive jurisdiction of commissioners which were to be appointed by state authorities. Effectively, this turned a number of local offices into state controlled positions.[1]

The state's strong intervention grew from more than a sense of moral outrage over the city's corruption or a desire to restore to it, honest good government. Partly its action reflected the desire by the rural, protestant and essentially upper class state legislature to maintain control of the cities where immigrants were seen as taking over government. There was an additional partisan motive: it was just good politics for a dominantly Republican state legislature to reform democratically controlled local government. Such reform zeal could only enhance the position of the Republicans at both the state and local levels.

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1. For further details on the charter change see, Edward Dana Durand, The Finances of New York City, New York, 1898, pp. 66-88; Alexander Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring, op. cit., p. 78; and Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1868.

But if the motivation of the state was mixed, the local reaction to the reforms was unanimous. The rage of Wood and the "Board of Common Scoundrels" was matched by many honest citizens who felt that the intrusion had been too great on the principles of home rule and local autonomy.[1] At first, the city refused to go along with it, resolving in Common Council session:

"We therefore distinctly protest that no action of ours as members of this Board shall be regarded as accepting ... the aforesaid amended charter or any part thereof as a valid enactment obligatory upon this city or its inhabitants".[2] And with full local support, Wood refused to acknowledge that the police were no longer under his control. This was only resolved after an armed confrontation and fight resulted between the two forces at City Hall. The mayor acceeded to the new charter provision only when the Governor called out the Seventh Regiment of state militia to quell the ensuing riot and enforce the new provisions.[3] George Templeton Strong revealed the partisan overtones of the entire issue when he cynically observed,

> The police bill is to take the power out of the paws of Mayor Wood and get it into the hands of the other scoundrels at Albany ... [I am] waiting with perfect resignation for the Court of Appeals to decide which horde has the legal right to be supported by public plunder.[4]

Defeated at this one turn, Wood continued to oppose the new charter restrictions and in fact initiated a long term movement for the secession of New York City and its formation into a new and independent state.[5]

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1. Harper's Weekly, I, March 28, 1857.
2. New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 10, May 14, 1856.
3. J. T. Headley, The Great Riots of New York, New York, 1873, pp. 129-131.
4. As quoted in Samuel Augustus Pleasants, op. cit., p. 129.
5. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1869; Charles Burr Todd, The Story of the City of New York, New York, 1902, p. 446.

The state rode out the initial acrimony generated on their actions and saw to it that the various provisions of the new charter were vigorously implemented. For many years, local officials would argue with some justification that this intrusion was unwarranted and unfair, for these matters should rightfully fall under local control, as they indeed did in every other city within the state. But their indignation was to no avail. In regard to the specific change in the governance of Central Park, the state wasted no time whatsoever. Within twelve days after the new charter provisions had gone into effect, the state appointed eleven men to a new board to be known as the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park. This change in the control of the park was of critical importance to the future of its development. By placing it under a non-partisan, autonomous board, controlled by essentially honest men, this important city improvement which would require the expenditure of millions of dollars during its first few years, was effectively removed from the influence and effect of political corruption which by this time seemed endemic to the city. Now beyond the reach of Wood and his cronies, the park was free to be developed efficiently and quickly for city use.[1] The success which the Commission would enjoy over the next few years in choosing a plan, improving the site, and quickly opening it up for public use, must in large part be attributed to this new administrative mechanism which the state had forced upon the city. The new commissioners were to be answerable to no one but themselves, or ultimately the state legislature or courts. This lack of accountability

1. Wood had already attempted to misuse the park financially, see New York Times, July 25, 1856.

bothered the city fathers at a later time,[1] but in general the Board functioned fairly and judiciously, and thus this fear was never justified or realized.

One problem did develop, however, in the relationship between the elected officials and this independent Board. The Common Council, under the new charter, retained the power of granting appropriations for the work on the park, but because of the accrued resentment over the very existence of the Board, the Council was frequently disposed to stall or be non-cooperative when requested to honor the Commissioner's request for funding. Ultimately nonetheless, the money was always forthcoming, probably because there were two strong influences working in favor of the Commission. First, there was a great desire on the part of many to see some progress made in improving the property on which the city had already expended five million dollars. Secondly, there was a strong desire by the laboring population to obtain the employment which the improvement of the park was expected to give.[2] The Board of Commissioners' objective posture was aided by the fact that it was composed of "part Republicans, part Wood Democrats, part reform Democrats, part non-descript", and its position was further enhanced, at least in Wood's eyes, when upon its organization it elected Democrats to the positions of president and treasurer, and immediately reappointed Wood's whole engineering corps.[3]

The first Board of Commissioners which the act named was made up of these men, Robert J. Dillon, James E. Cooley, Charles H. Russell, John F. Butterworth, John A. C. Gray, Waldo Hutchins, Thomas E. Field,

1. New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 1, January 2, 1860, p. 14.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, "A Fragment of an Autobiography," reprinted in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, Ithaca, 1965, p. 55.
3. Ibid.

Andrew H. Green, Charles W. Elliott, William K. Strong, and James Hogg. They were to hold their positions for five years and were to receive no compensation for their services. At the very first meeting on April 30, 1857, held at Dillon's law offices, they organized themselves by electing Cooley as president, Gray as vice-president, and Elliott as secretary. A month later, A. H. Green was elected treasurer, and for the very next meeting on May 7th, he was asked to prepare a set of by-laws and give a report on the general condition of the park lands. They then sat down to decide what their exact mandate was. The state law that had brought them into being had empowered them quite unequivocally with the exclusive right to govern, manage, direct or otherwise control all development within the park.[1] The only direct authority they lacked was over the critical issue of finances, which was reserved to the city government. It was required by statute to raise money for the improvement of the park as the commissioners required it, by the issuance of thirty year bonds in an amount on which the interest was not to exceed one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars annually.

To fulfill the mandate, the new commissioners had to begin from scratch, for the accomplishments of the first commission were negligible. A topographic survey of the site existed, some modest clearing of the property had occurred, the squatters had effectively been driven off the land, and of course, Viele's plan was still before them. But very little tangible progress had been made. With little more than enthusiasm, the new commission plunged into their task, meeting at least once a week for the entire next year to establish policy and hire a permanent work force. Almost immediately they reappointed Viele as chief engineer,

1. New York State, Chapter 771 of the Laws of 1857.

instructing him to continue the preliminary work of opening drains, grubbing, clearing rubble, stones and brush from the site, and to establish a nursery area to start trees.[1] At Viele's request, George E. Waring was appointed as Superintendent of Drainage and Agricultural Engineer, to aid him in this work.[2]

In September, another important supervisory position was filled, which later proved to be of critical importance to the history of the park. At the commissioners' meeting of September 11, 1857, Frederick Law Olmsted was appointed as Superintendent of the Park under Viele. He was to act as general foreman and organizer of the large work force which was to be employed on the park. Olmsted, who was thirty five years old at the time, was uninvolved in local affairs, and had taken no part in the protracted battle for the park. He had little relevant work experience which would qualify him for the position, enjoying rather only a substantial reputation in New York literary circles for having published a description of his travels to Europe,[3] and a very well received series of articles in the New York Times describing his impressions of the anti-bellum South and its slave-based economy. In the late summer, at Morris Cove, a seaside inn outside of New Haven, he had by accident encountered Charles W. Elliott, one of the Park Commissioners, who himself had once been a landscape gardener in Cincinnati, but was now in the iron business in New York City. Because Elliott and Olmsted were both close friends of Charles Loring Brace,

1. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, July 13, 1857. Herein after, Minutes.
2. Minutes, August 4, 1857.
3. Frederick Law Olmsted, Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England, Ann Arbor, 1967.

Elliott was familiar with Olmsted's background.[1] Elliott asked if he might be interested in the position. The idea caught Olmsted's fancy, because his recent endeavours as editor and part owner of Putnam's Monthly Magazine had ended in bankruptcy. As a result of the general panic of 1857, he was available. In competition with at least four other men, Olmsted lobbied hard for the job. Calling primarily upon his contacts from the publishing world, Olmsted managed to have generous recommendations submitted on his behalf from Peter Cooper, Horace Greeley, William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, and Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist. The endorsement of these influential men, many long associated with the park, along with strong internal support from Commissioners Elliott and Green, overcame the objections of men like Thomas Field who felt a more 'practical' man ought to be appointed. He was appointed at an annual salary of fifteen hundred dollars.[2]

Also that summer, the Board requested the police commissioners to nominate twenty two men as policemen "to secure the property at the park from depredation and destruction".[3] In addition, day wage rates were established -- for laborers $1.25 per day and for gardeners and policemen, $1.50 per day. Despite this initial flurry of activity very little was going on at the park, for the city, still smarting under the enforced change that had removed the commission from its control, was dragging its feet by steadfastly refusing to authorize any appropriation for the Central Park improvement fund. As a result, work on the park was at a virtual standstill except for the few laborers able to be maintained

1. Charles C. McLaughlin, ed., 'Selected Letters of Frederick Law Olmsted," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1960, p. 31.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, pp. 34-38.
3. Minutes, July 21, 1857.

by residual funds. By October, the Commissioners, about to run out of money, reduced the labor force to one hundred men and in turn reduced their pay to but one dollar per day.[1]

Unable to proceed with immediate tasks, the Board turned to more long range considerations. Apparently not pleased with the proposed treatment of the site that Viele's plan promised, the Board resolved to advertise a competition for new plans for the park.[2] A Committee of Commissioners Gray, Elliott, and Green worked on the specifications and criteria which would guide all submissions, and by the end of October, announcements appeared in all the local newspapers.[3] First prize would be two thousand dollars, second, one thousand dollars, and third and fourth positions would receive premiums of seven hundred and fifty dollars and five hundred dollars respectively. All plans would be due the following April. Shortly after this, hoping perhaps to entice an experienced European designer to submit a plan in the competition, or at least to receive his guidance in establishing what to look for in the submissions, the Board appropriated two thousand dollars to pay the travel expenses of the engineers and others responsible for laying out Paris' Bois de Boulogne and Liverpool's Birkenhead Park. It was hoped that they would,

> share their ideas and experiences, and examine Central Park and to give this Board such aid and information upon the subject as they may require .... No expense should be spared in bringing to our aid the full experience of Europe in the laying out of public grounds.[4]

1. Minutes, October 6, 1857.
2. Minutes, August 4, 1857.
3. New York Herald, October 30, 1857, p. 3.
4. Minutes, December 29, 1857.

Although correspondence was exchanged, no man ever came, and some of the commissioners were sorely disappointed that the competition would not be enriched by the advice or a submission from experienced European landscape designers.

Meanwhile the Board was still badly hampered by the failure of the city to provide them with money to proceed. The world-wide depression of 1857 had set in and economic activity within this commercial city had been greatly affected.[1] By the end of the year, nearly one thousand business failures had occurred within the city, involving liabilities of more than one hundred and twenty million dollars. Enterprises of all sorts came to a standstill, industries were paralyzed, and more than twenty-five thousand men were unemployed.[2] No one was in a mood to spend money. Hundreds of destitute people besieged the Common Council calling for bread and work. Some attempt was made to send the needy, unemployed poor to the country and to find them jobs in the western states, but when this proved impossible, it was clear that the city would have to act to help its own.[3] At Mayor Wood's request, the city began handing out free flour. Furthermore, seeing the necessity as well as the political advantage in doing so, the council swallowed its pride and authorized two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to be issued to the commissioners so that work could start on the improvement of the park.[4]

The commissioners were elated, for work could finally begin. At a special meeting they authorized Olmsted to hire a work force of up to

1. Douglas C. North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1861, pp. 212-214.
2. Mrs. Martha J. Lamb. History of the City of New York, Vol. II, New York, 1880, pp. 768-769.
3. Kate Claghorn, op.cit., p. 463.
4. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1870.

one thousand men, "to be selected proportionately and regularly from actual residents of each ward."[1] The intention of this directive, of course, was to further the ideal of non-partisanship which the Board of Commissioners had carefully nurtured during its short existence. As careful as the Board had been, the patina of objectivity had shown some thin spots. First of all Commissioner Hogg was censured by his colleagues for supposedly calling together a group of workmen within the park and strongly suggesting that it would be in their best interest to vote for the republican mayoralty nominee, Tiemann, in the November election.[2] Secondly, the Board of Aldermen debated whether or not to withdraw the Central Park funds, because in their estimation, political criteria were being used to hire men for the park. In particular, they felt that men they themselves recommended never seemed to get appointed.[3]

Also political activity was going on within the Board regarding the relative positions of Olmsted and Viele, each of whom had developed his own allies. Olmsted wrote his father,

> There is a good deal of a row among the Commissioners, the difference being chiefly referable to a greater or less degree of confidence in Viele. Those who are jealous of Viele strive to advance me -- withdraw responsibility from him and confer it on me.[4]

Viele's strengths and weaknesses derived from the fact that he was closely associated in the minds of many with Fernando Wood, who had first hired him to work on the park.

These small instances of internal turmoil were nothing more than a reflection of the fact that the Board was functioning in a highly

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1. Minutes, November 10, 1857.
2. Minutes, December 15, 1857.
3. New York Times, December 8, 1857.
4. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to John Olmsted, October 9, 1857, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 3.

political context. They were hardly indications that their non-partisan position had been compromised. Certainly Commissioner Hogg had been indiscreet, but this fact and the other actions mentioned involved no corruption or specific favoritism to one party or another. No matter what the commissioners did, their actions and decisions were sure to be perceived as having some potential negative implication for one party or the other, and invariably, it would scream unfair. Accusations of politically motivated behavior and favoritism would be leveled at the commission for a long time. Usually they were without foundation, for it was never proven that there was a conscious attempt to do anything but build the park.

With these considerations aside and a large work force available, the preliminary work on the park that winter and early spring moved ahead quickly. Olmsted wrote,

> I have got the park into capital discipline, a perfect system, working like a machine ... 1000 men now at work. The confidence of the Commission in me has constantly increased and my salary raised to $2000.[1]

In spite of Olmsted's optimism, not everyone was pleased with the progress being made on the park. One writer observed,

> The truth of the matter is, that the Park is in the same condition as that proverbial broth which is always spoiled by having too many cooks to attend to it. It is two years since the first Board of Commissioners were appointed to improve the Park, and it cannot yet be said to be even in an inchoative condition. Though there has been a considerable number of stones broken on the ground, and some draining done, yet it is as far from being a park as it was in the days of Hendrik Hudson. And the reason is, that the gentlemen who have the work in charge, excellent and well intentioned as they unquestionably are, do not know what to do, nor where to begin. They have appointed a superintendent, an engineer,

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1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 43.

> and an agriculturist; but, unless these officers are instructed what to do, they cannot do anything beyond setting men to work breaking stones and digging promiscuous ditches. The Commissioners have advertised for plans for laying out the Park, and the competitors are to hand them in next month. When they are handed in, then will come the grand struggle for a choice of plans, and, as each competitor will have his friends and agents wire-pulling for him, the prospect of any plan being chosen during the present year is not very flattering.[1]

This writer then went on to chide the commissioners for having sought European advice, when it appeared that there was sufficient native talent available who according to his reasoning could understand our needs and requirements better. With this sort of prodding and visible discontent present, the Board of Commissioners looked forward with special anticipation to receiving the contest submissions.

Each contestant, according to the ground rules, had to meet certain conditions in his plan. First, he had to keep the total cost of the proposed improvements within 1.5 million dollars. In addition, he had to allow for four or more east-west crossings of the two and one half mile park, a parade ground of twenty to forty acres, three ten-acre playgrounds, and a space with flowing water for a skating ground. And lastly, he had to designate specific sites for a flower garden, a major fountain, a prospect tower, and an exhibition and concert hall to be built at a future date. Designs were to be prepared at a scale of one hundred feet to the inch (ten feet by two feet), submitted anonymously, and accompanied by a written description of what had been proposed. A short time before the plans were due, the commissioners amended the rules and asked that the submissions also include plans for fencing, lighting, draining, planting, filling, the mode of building roads, and other

1. New York Times, March 23, 1858.

specifications, including detailed cost estimates. To provide extra time for this, the initial deadline of March 1st was extended to April 1st.[1]

By that date, the commissioners had received thirty-five plans,[2] which were put on exhibit for the benefit of the Board, in a room specially rented for the purpose at 636 Broadway. For the next four weeks the commissioners closely examined all the plans on display, and read the accompanying reports that defined them. By April 28th, they were prepared to make a decision and they gathered in the rented room at six o'clock that night. For the next four and one half hours, they argued the relative merits of the various designs before them. The choice was not an easy one, for there was no consensus amongst the commissioners that one plan was clearly superior. At least four of the Board members did not like any of the plans submitted. Early in the meeting Commissioner Dillon, formerly the city's Corporation Counsel, moved that the award of prizes be confined to the three lowest, for "it appearing to the Board that no plan presented for competition is by reason of its marked superiority, entitled to the first prize."[3] Three members agreed with Dillon but the other seven commissioners voted against his motion. Next, Commissioner Fields argued that plan number 33, submitted under the title of "Greensward", be eliminated from competition for, according to him, it had been submitted one day after the deadline and had no right to be before the Board. By a vote of seven

1. Minutes, February 2, 1858.
2. Two of them, numbers 34 and 35, were not submitted competitively and thus only thirty-three of them were being considered for the prize.
3. Minutes, April 28, 1858.

to two, this protest was tabled. Next, Andrew Green submitted a resolution suggesting that a formal vote be put off until the Board had the opportunity to solicit the opinion of the press, people of taste within the city, and perhaps listen to a criticism of the various plans by the competing artists themselves. This also, the Board denied.[1]

Finally, after four and one half hours of debate, they agreed to vote. On the first ballot, the earlier challenged 'Greensward" plan, number 33, received seven first place votes, number 30 received three and number 26, one vote. And thus the winner had been determined. On subsequent balloting the second prize was awarded to plan number 30, prepared by Samuel I. Gustin, the park's Superintendent of Planting, third place went to Messrs. Miller and McIntosh, two employees in the office of the Superintendent who had prepared plan number 27. Fourth prize was given to design number 26, submitted by a local architect, Howard Daniels.[2] The winning plan, it turned out had been prepared by Frederick Olmsted in collaboration with Calvert Vaux, a New York architect. Before adjourning, the Board voted to put all the plans on public display during the first two weeks of May, charging a twenty-five cent admission fee with the proceeds divided amongst the losers to help cover their costs and to underwrite a printing of the descriptive brochures which had accompanied each plan.[3]

Most all of the competition drawings were either reclaimed by the original designers, or over time, disappeared from the records of the park department. Thus any full comparison of the various designs

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1. Ibid.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., I, p. 123.
3. Minutes, April 28, 1858.

and their relative merits, is not now possible.[1] And because all the plans were initially submitted anonymously or used code names, we do not even know the names of all the participants. In the absence of the actual design submissions, the only extant record we have that tells us anything about the nature of the competition is the volume of brochures which the Board voted to have printed. Of special help is one copy, owned by Commissioner Robert Dillon who made careful marginal notes about the authorship of most of the plans and some comments about the proposals they put forth.[2] With the aid of this specific volume, most of the authors are able to be identified as follows:

1. Richard Dolben, Garden Architect and Horticulturist, Alleghany City, Pennsylvania.
2. _____.
3. William Rogers, Cleveland, Ohio.
4. John Joseph Rink, formerly of the Central Park, New York.
5. J. Lauchame, Landscape Gardener, Yonkers, New York.
6. John B. Deutch, New York.
7. Adam Gigrich, 100 Walker Street, New York.
8. H. Houry, New York.
9. Augustus Fitch, New York.
10. _____.
11. Augustus Hepp and Charles Vogel, Landscape Gardeners, New York.
12. Pliney Miles and William Davidson, Landscape Gardeners and Civil Engineers.
13. _____.
14. _____, Engineer.
15. Robert Morris Copeland, Boston.
16. Mrs. Parish.[3]
17. Charles Follen, Boston.
18. Lewis Masquerier, Brooklyn.
19. _____.
20. P. Schultze, Boston.
21. _____.
22. Graham and Bagley, New York, formerly of the Central Park.

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1. Actually two of the plans, number 29 and 25 are listed as in the possession of the New York Historical Society. One is presently not able to be reproduced because it is nearly twelve feet long. Photostatic copies of both are in the library of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.
2. Description of Plans for the Improvement of Central Park. Annotated copy in the New York Public Library.
3. Identified in Minutes, September 9, 1858.

23. _____.
24. Charles Lyon, Tarrytown, New York.
25. R. Graves, formerly of the Central Park.
26. Howard Daniels, New York.
27. McIntosh and Miller, Central Park, New York.
28. Egbert Viele, Jr., Central Park, New York.
29. George Waring, Central Park, New York.
30. Samuel I. Gustin, Central Park, New York.
31. H. Hoffman and C. Wehle, Architects and Landscape Gardeners, New York.
32. _____Warner, New York.
33. F. L. Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, New York.
34. Ignaz Pilat, New York.
35. W. Bengue and Charles Rawolle.

Thus all but seven of those who entered the design competition can be identified. It is interesting to note that twenty of them were from New York City or its immediate vicinity; eight claimed some recent or present association with work going on at the park, and surprisingly for the time, one contestant was a woman. Apparently the Board received no foreign entries as they had hoped, for the most distant plans came only from as far as Boston, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The fact that they had directly contacted William Kemp, the designer of Liverpool's successful Birkenhead Park, had apparently been to no avail.[1]

In addition to helping identify the source of the various entries, the descriptive brochures are also important in helping to show the general thinking and approach which the designers employed in solving the common problem. First, most all of the entrants seemed aware that the required minimum of four tranverse roads would greatly disturb the tranquility of the park and function so as to deny the designer the opportunity of easily laying out the area as a single, integrated entity. But once having noted the disruptive potential of such roads, many, nevertheless, failed to treat this problem adequately within their designs. The transverse roads were often laid down so as to cut blithely and

1. New York Times, March 23, 1858.

directly across and interrupt the drives, paths and walks. Others simply allowed the transverse roads to go straight across the park without deviation and the resulting rectangular segments were then laid out essentially separately. The most extreme in this regard was Plan number 4 by Joseph Pink, who provided seven separate transverse crossings through the park.

A similarly divisive element within the given area was the old and proposed Croton reservoirs. There were several complaints about the fact that so much of the choice, flat, open land on the site had been reserved for this purpose and that they would effectively prevent a single integrated design from being achieved. The ability of the designers to cope effectively with these two divisive elements -- the transverse roads and reservoirs -- was to a substantial extent the measure of how well-received their plans were. Yet not even the winning design overcame the impossible fact of the reservoirs' presence. Mr. Moury, in his plan number 8, suggested that they be relocated, while William Rogers of Cleveland suggested constructing artificial islands within the new reservoir to prevent monotony for

> ... islands, when varied in their shapes, have the same effect as groups of trees on lawns, if judiciously placed.

The use of water as part of the basic design, other than where it had been mandated, was a commonly suggested part of most of the plans. Many suggested an occasional waterfall, or pond in sylvan setting, but Adam Gigrich (number 7) suggested using water as the primary element in the park's design. Though he proposed "at least four major fountains", both allegorical and patriotic in design, his main interest was in hydraulic engineering ...

> Although I have travelled a great deal in many countries of both hemispheres, with the special view of examining hydraulic works, I never yet have met with such a complete and original system of fountains as the ones proposed in my design.

Another basic problem which each of the designers faced, was how to treat or utilize the large, rough areas of rock outcropping that were a predominant part of the park's basic topography. The majority seemed to welcome their presence seeing them as an asset to the design effect they wished to achieve. Fitch argued that "the rocks are the jewels of the park; but, in order for its embellishment, they must be fitly set." It was advocated, therefore, by many of the designers, that the ground be designed so that they be brought out in bold relief. In this regard the authors of plan 12 suggested,

> ... The lines of roads are generally so arranged as to make the boldest projecting rocks serve as the obstacles or motives which dictate the curves, and frequently, they are made use of to form substantial separations between two converging roads. It is intended to expose the precipitous bluffs, sides and angles of the most important masses.

This represented the predominant view, but a few like Lauchaume, suggested covering them and planting trees upon them. Others like the designers of plan 11 were simply not satisfied to accept a plan which in large part had already been determined by nature.

> The rule which many entertain in regard to the laying out of grounds, that everything which nature might have happened to put there, should remain in its original state, does not hold in most instances; it does not in this.

The specific attitude toward the rocks which the various designers held, was related to their general opinion of how the landscape surface was to be treated. It is clear from their frequent comments and allusions that most of the contestants had travelled to Europe, and that

they had a substantial familiarity with the new European parks. Furthermore, in addition to being practical designers and engineers, a large number displayed a degree of scholarship evident from their frequent references and familiarity with the works of Price, Repton and Downing. As a result, the majority of the contestants prepared plans that were derived from the popular picturesque principles visible in the European parks or thoroughly articulated by these spokesmen. Only Graham and Bagley, it appears, offered a formal symmetrical design for the park, for they took the opportunity within their brochure of derisively labelling the modern landscape gardening movement as "the clump and belt school". While there nonetheless was a general preference for the picturesque school, there was manifested some minor disagreement about the exact approach. Some favored a horticultural emphasis where interesting specimen plants could be featured, while the more traditional picturesque advocates saw individual bushes and trees as but part of the broad landscape scenery. In spite of this minor disagreement, the preference amongst most of the entries was for the informal, picturesque mode, and formal elements, if they appeared at all, would have to be integrated into this basic informal structure.

Two other considerations commonly occupied the attention of the designers. The first was in selecting the route of the main drive. This almost always was located close to the borders, a fact dictated by the park's general topography and the need ultimately to skirt the broad reservoir. Secondly, the matter of selecting and placing a focal point for the park had to be settled. Sometimes a fountain or the site of the exhibition hall, it was most often the large forty-acre parade

ground that had been required by the Board of Commissioners. Only the author of plan 13 directly rejected this viewpoint, for the Parade Ground, he said, is 'certain to be a place for frightening horses and ladies, attracting a constant mob, and annoying just that class most fitted by education to enjoy the beautiful in art and nature."

The last interesting aspect of the plans entered in the competition is how the various designers veiwed the use of buildings and other decorative elements within the natural scenery. In this regard, there was absolutely no consensus or dominant preference. All the designs, because of the initial conditions, included some provision for at least a fountain, an exhibition hall, and space for concerts. Beyond that, further decoration or functional uses were left to the imagination of the designers. While some frankly avowed their primary interest to be only horticulture and landscape design and disavowed any competence in the field of architecture, others gave much more attention to architecture and other decoration of the park, filling their designs with buildings or schemes of all sorts. In the aggregate, they are so varied and imaginative to at times nearly border on the bizarre. For example, many suggested that the park be peppered with decorative arches (number 1), gateways, and allegorical statues (number 8). The designer of plan 5 suggested that "a few Doric or Corinthian columns would look well in the middle of the dales ... there is no animation in a park deprived of them". He felt as well that his hall for industrial exhibits would be adequately served if surrounded by four elaborate fountains located at the cardinal points of the compass. In keeping with the romantic ethos that animated most of the designs, proposals were made for creating grottos (28), cascading waterfalls spewing forth

from the end of a new aqueduct (11), and "a swiss dairy for the supplying of fresh milk to the visitors" (30).

Nor were instructional functions ignored. An observatory and geological and zoological exhibits (19) were proposed as well as arboreta (9) and five observation towers to be erected on the highest points within the park (21). One contestant, concerned with the divisive effect of the roads and reservoirs suggested it could be overcome by extensive decoration, making the park "so beautiful and so much encircled by works of art that no one will care or think whether the park be large or small" (13). No doubt the most unique treatment and form of instruction suggested was that embodied in plan number 18. The designer, Lewis Nasquerier, wrote the following:

> I have planned purposely to effect a double object, not only to give a pleasing landscape, but also an instructive one for amusement and instruction combined, certainly intensify each other ... I propose to lay off the southern half of the park into a miniature representation of the continents of the earth.

Each continent was to be planted with its own indiginous plants, and the rock outcroppings were to be utilized as mountains when appropriate.

> This plan of representing the geography of the earth will, no doubt, stimulate a great deal of presents in curiosities and art from public spirited men. There will be artists, perhaps, who will sculpture some favorite city in a solid block of marble and plant it on its appropriate spot as a free gift to the city.

Finally, of course, the oceans between the continents were to be filled with water.

It is, indeed, unfortunate that the actual plans submitted in the competition are not available to us, and that we are left only with an impressionistic picture distilled from the descriptive brochures that accompanied the plans. Some degree of relative merit, nonetheless, can

be gleaned from a careful reading, and in a limited way we can draw some conclusions. First, it is clear that despite the lack of any real experience in landscape design in America, there were a surprisingly large number of individuals with enough talent and interest to prepare a fully developed plan. Most all showed a full awareness of both the classic and current works on landscape design, and though they often looked to Europe for their actual models, it is clear that indiginous talent in this field was beginning to emerge.[1] Though there were a few strange, even bizarre suggestions, most of the designers acquitted themselves very well in offering their interpretations of how this large and difficult site should be laid out. A further indication that the general quality of the plans was high comes from the remarks of one of the few first hand criticisms of the competition we have. A New York Times reporter, assigned to review the plans when they were publicly exhibited during the first two weeks of May, offered the opinion that, "Ten, at least of these designs, however inadequate they may appear on a flat piece of paper, would make Central Park a beautiful and creditable work; and any one of them would improve greatly in its execution".[2] The reporter went on to urge that perhaps the optimal solution might result from the combination of the best elements of each -- a suggestion which the commissioners seriously debated during the next few months.

The public and almost all of the city's newspapers were in agreement that Olmsted and Vaux's plan was not only an acceptable and in some respects a unique way to improve the park, but they also felt sure

1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., I, pp. 124-127.
2. W. B. Van Ingen, "Central Park As It Was in the Beginning," New York Times Magazine, December 24, 1922, p. 14.

that the Board had in fact chosen the most imaginative and thorough design that had come forth in the competition. "There can be little doubt that in its essential features", wrote the editor of the New York Times, "The plan of Messrs. Olmsted and Vaux embraces all the leading requisites of a great park, specifically adapted not alone to the nature of the particular grounds in question, but to the prospective wants of our city also." The Evening Post editor was particularly struck by the manner in which this design had solved the matter of the transverse roads, the originality of the layout of the promenade or mall, and "lastly, the bold, picturesque, and peculiarly successful treatment of the water".[1] Only the New York Herald came forth with a dissenting voice, saying that in their estimation, "it is impossible to make head nor tail of it".[2] Nothing came of the few negative comments such as this, and though there would later be some further challenges and changes, it was this basic plan which was used to guide the building of the park.

While it has been difficult to analyze each design submission completely because of the small amount of evidence available, no such problem exists regarding the winner of the two thousand dollar first prize. A great deal of original information about it has survived, and of course, since it was the "Greensward" plan that was constructed, it is still possible to evaluate it closely. Although the design and its authors have received much critical commentary over time, it is important to examine it again in more detail and within the context established here.

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

GREENSWARD - THE DESIGNERS AND THE DESIGN

Up until the time of the design competition, the names of Olmsted and Vaux had not in any way been associated with the long struggle for the park. Olmsted had a few months earlier taken the job as Superintendent of the Park where he was generally in charge of the planting and construction work forces. He had sought the job not because of any evident background in landscape design, but mostly because it appeared to be an interesting task, and one which would give him an opportunity to pay off the substantial debt he had incurred in his recent, unsuccessful publishing endeavor with Putnams. Not until Calvert Vaux, an architect, approached him in the fall of 1857, with the suggestion that they might collaborate, had Olmsted given any thought to what might be an appropriate plan for the large 775-acre urban park. He was at first very reluctant even to consider working with Vaux on the project, because of his difficult and subordinate relationship to Viele. It seemed only discreet not to become involved in a contest which was in itself a tacit rejection of the plan which Viele had put before the Commissioners for consideration. Besides, from the very beginning things had not gone well between the two men. Naturally brusque and testy, and growing embittered by his rejection, Viele had from the outset acted in a hostile manner toward Olmsted.[1] Rather than exacerbate this already bad situation, Olmsted felt that he should turn down Vaux's offer for collaboration. When asked directly

1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, pp. 38-40.

however, Viele, resentful at the turn of events and no doubt his pride hurt, contemptuously announced to Olmsted that he did not care in the least who might enter the contest. Accordingly, Olmsted accepted Vaux's proposition, and for the next six months, mostly in his spare time on Sundays and at night, the two men worked on their submission in Vaux's home at 136 East Eighteenth Street.[1]

A brief look at Olmsted's early background and work experience would not suggest his successful involvement in this large scale design endeavor. Born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1822, Olmsted was the son of a prosperous merchant. He received his early education from a series of local protestant ministers with whom he was boarded and later he was privately tutored in religion, art, surveying and topographical engineering. Advised to forego college because of weakened eyes which were the result of a severe case of poison sumac he had contracted, he nonetheless lived in New Haven for intermittent periods where he often attended lectures at Yale with his brother John. In 1843 and 1844, anxious for adventure and somewhat uncertain as to what he wished to do, he sailed before the mast for Canton on the bark, "Ronaldson." Upon his return, he spent much of his time living and working at the farms of relatives and family friends. He lived for most of the year of 1846 at "Fairmount," the large farm of George Geddes near Syracuse, New York. Geddes was a well respected and successful gentleman farmer, and during his stay at this prize-winning farm, Olmsted had the opportunity to observe carefully the results of new agricultural techniques and the principles of scientific management.[2]

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1. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, Central Park: A History and a Guide, New York, 1972, p. 23.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., I, pp. 3-5.

We know also that during these early years, Olmsted took the opportunity to become thoroughly familiar with such basic works as Price's The Picturesque, Zimmerman's Solitude, Gilpin's Forest Scenery, and the general works of Ruskin, Carlyle, and Downing.[1] In 1848, Frederick's father bought the Ackerly farm for him at South Side, Staten Island where for the next six years he attempted to put into practice the successful farming principles he had recently observed. His success was moderate at best. In early 1850 when his brother suggested that they travel to Europe, he eagerly accepted, seeing it as a further opportunity to learn more about advanced agricultural methods. Joined by a childhood friend, Charles Loring Brace, they sailed for Liverpool on April 30, 1850. Two years later, Olmsted related the impressions of his travels by publishing a wide ranging travel book, he entitled, Walks and Talks of An American Farmer in England. It was a much more perceptive and intelligent account of English customs and society than might be expected from a bright, enthusiastic, young man on his first trip abroad. Very little seemed to have escaped his eye, and he brought a refreshing degree of insight to his descriptions of the English landscape, its cities, landmarks, growing industrial prowess, and the burdens of its laboring classes. Yet of greater importance to his later work, the book displays Olmsted's growing interest in how the large English industrial centers provided civic amenities for its citizens. In particular he was fascinated by the large urban parks which had recently been constructed near many of the English cities.

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1. Charles Eliot Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted: the Formative Years, 1822-1865," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1967, pp. 1-102; also Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., I, pp. 70-74.

When he, his brother and Brace visited Birkenhead, outside of Liverpool, he was moved to lavishly record,

> ...we passed through another light iron gate into a thick, luxuriant garden. Five minutes of admiration, and a few more spent in studying the manner in which art had been employed to obtain from nature so much beauty, and I was ready to admit that in democratic America there was nothing to be thought of as comparable with this People's Garden. Indeed, gardening had here reached a perfection that I had never before dreamed of. I cannot undertake to describe the effect of so much taste and skill as had evidently been employed. I will only tell you that we passed by winding paths, over acres and acres, with a constant varying surface, where on all sides were growing every variety of shrubs and flowers, with more than natural grace, all set in borders of greenest, closest turf, and all kept with consummate neatness.[1]

When Olmsted finished his lingering tour of Birkenhead Park, he rushed off to interview the head-gardener to find out every detail of how the park had come into being, how it was designed and constructed, and now kept in such perfect maintenance. He was further impressed not only that this magnificient and seemingly royal creation had been built by general taxation, but also that it was entirely open to and served the needs of even the most common classes within the town. All these facts he carefully noted, and was finally moved to conclude,

> The consequence of all these sorts of things is that all about the town, lands which a few years ago were almost worthless wastes, have become of priceless value....Certainly it is a model town, and may be held up as an example, not only to philanthropists and men of taste, but to speculators and men of business.[2]

Throughout the rest of the book, Olmsted records numerous other instances during his English tour of both natural and artificial landscape which impressed him. Both the statements in the book and a short article he anonymously authored about Birkenhead in the May 1851 issue of

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, Walks and Talks of An American Farmer in England, Ann Arbor, 1967, p. 52.
2. Ibid., p. 55.

Downing's Horticulturist, displayed his enthusiastic reaction to the English parks and made it clear that he felt they were worthy models for America to consider.

From an analysis of Walks and Talks it is not surprising in retrospect that Frederick Law Olmsted might shortly emerge as one of the successful designers of New York's Central Park. It is quite clear from the book that he carefully reflected on the social effects of English industrialism and the increased urbanization that accompanied it, and that he was coming to realize that environmental reform such as the English parks represented, and the effect it had on man's well being, could also have a profound influence on the shape and human destiny of American cities. Olmsted still thought of himself as a farmer "with no more idea that I should ever be a professional landscape-designer than that I should command a fleet." But another passage from his travel volume displayed why his later emergence to lead that profession was so logical:

> What artist so noble as he, with far reaching conception of beauty and designing power, sketches the outlines, writes the colors, and directs the shadows, of a picture so great that Nature shall be employed upon it for generations, before the work he has arranged for her shall realize his intentions.[1]

Olmsted's book was well received by the public and especially within New York's critical literary circles. On the basis of his new-found reputation, he was approached in 1852 by Henry Raymond, the co-founder and editor of a small local newspaper, the New York Daily Times. Raymond wanted Olmsted to visit the uneasy South and report on the conditions of

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted,"The Spoils of the Park: With a Few Leaves from the Deep-laden Note-books of a 'Wholly Unpractical Man'," in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, Ithaca, 1967, p. 427.

life within its slave based economy. It was Raymond's hope that a thorough and objective view of Southern life and manners at this time would serve the useful purpose of better informing the public of the conditions that were beginning to divide the country,and perhaps counteract the very extreme image of the south which abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe had drawn. As irreconcilable as the differences later proved, many reformers at this early point still believed that sectional differences and conflicts could still be mitigated by educational efforts such as these.

Olmsted accpeted Raymond's proposal, and accordingly set off on horseback from Washington, D. C. on December 11, 1852. For the next three months he travelled through the seaboard Atlantic states until he finally arrived in New Orleans. He wrote fifty installment articles in the Times under the signature of "Yeoman," which were run usually in prominent locations on the editorial page from February 16, 1853 to February 13, 1854. Raymond was quite delighted by the work of his correspondent and had no reason to retreat from the editorial send-off he gave Olmsted when the first article appeared,..."an intelligent gentleman, of decided ability, large experience, practical habits of action and speculation, known already to the world by his published works."[1] The public also found the articles illuminating, and Olmsted was encouraged to bring them together in the form of a book. He reworked and edited this material, and it was put out under the title of A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy (New York, 1856). Again, under

1. New York Times, February 16, 1853, quoted in Laura Wood Roper, "Frederick Law Olmsted in the 'Literary Republic'," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (December, 1952) p. 462.

the auspices of the Times, he and his brother, John, set out on another trip in 1853-1854, again largely on horseback from New Orleans through Texas, which resulted in a second book entitled, A Journey Through Texas or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier (New York, 1857). His third and last journey through the South made three years later from Bayou Sara in Louisiana through the interior to Richmond, he recorded in A Journey in the Back Country (New York, 1860).

The response in the North at least to Olmsted's writings, amounted to a very substantial, respectful, and positive acclaim. The books were very favorably reviewed by Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, James Russell Lowell, and many others of similar stature. He became a welcome member of a small inner circle of American intellectual and literary leaders with whom he quickly developed close and lasting relationships. Amongst the many to whom his writing had given him access and friendship were Longfellow, Asa Gray, Mrs. Stowe, Emerson, Lowell, Charles Dana, Parke Godwin and Washington Irving.[1] It was some of these friendships that served him so well when he decided to seek his first position with the Central Park Commissioners.

What was it in his writing that had so caught the attention and respect of this influential group of people and the public at large? First of all, Olmsted's books displayed genuine literary ability. He could construct revealing dialogue out of his numerous conversations, interviews and observations with slaves and slave-holders, and he could realistically capture regional attitudes. His descriptions of social and economic conditions, southern life, attitudes and manners, the natural

1. Roper, op.cit., pp. 468-470.

scenery and the impact of slavery on the regional economy were nothing less than rich, thorough, penetrating sketches, which revealed, particularly to the northern European readers, a society which had long been romanticized and overly chastised to the point of misleading obscurity. Olmsted's work was a candid and realistic picture of pre-Civil War South and was really the first reliable and generally objective account of the region which was available to the era. This was particularly true, in that most of the material for his books was drawn from the regions away from its major commercial cities. All of his readers were impressed with the balanced analysis and fairness of his accounts, with one commentator going so far as to say that it was so objective and free of bitterness and the usual rancor, that his books "might be safely transmitted by mail through the most inflammable Carolina Post-office, and read, without oaths, by the most irascible Alabama planter."[1]

Although the books were used by many to support and defend rather diverse feelings about the South and slavery, Olmsted's own position was quite clear. Sympathetic with free-soil sentiment he strongly believed that slavery ought not be permitted to expand into any of the new territory being settled in the west. But on the issue of outright abolition, he was much less resolute. Uncertain as to the impact, need or possible benefits of immediate abolition, he defined a gradualist position, preferring first to see Negroes given education and training, so that they could better provide for themselves in freedom.

Of more direct interest to his later affiliation with Central Park and work within the profession of landscape architecture are the attitudes we might identify from the books in regard to the landscape and urban places.

1. Putnam's Monthly, IX (March, 1857) p. 274.

These subjects were a pervasive part of Olmsted's descriptions and analysis. It is clear that Olmsted was concerned with the effect of slavery on both races, for he viewed it as an institution equally debilitating and dehumanizing to poor whites as well as to blacks. The slave economy as he saw it, helped perpetuate the conditions of frontier life, with its crudeness, inconvenience, unelevated life and primitive conditions, and as such retarded the natural progress of the South. By exhausting the soil and driving away "free labor and democratic institutions, it held back many southern communities to a primitive frontier level socially and culturally and it coarsened or brutalized the slaveowner's character."[1] He returned from his rural southern excursions more than ever convinced that America's future was going to be acted out in its urban centers. Furthermore, in observing the raw, unimproved frontier of the rural South and the attitude of its inhabitants, he noted that the low standard of living and repressive social conditions often contributed to the development of an "undesirable environment." The slave economy was carelessly depleting the soil and wasting the area's natural resources, and so he was further convinced of the country's need to preserve its natural landscape.[2]

And thus by 1857, at age thirty-five, when Olmsted decided to collaborate on the park design, he had established himself as a literary man and social critic. His experiences and more than five thousand miles

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, The Slave States, edited, with an Introduction by Harvey Wish, New York, 1959, p. 19.
2. For a full analysis of Olmsted's literary career see, Albert Fein, ed., op.cit., pp. 15-26; Broadus Mitchell, "Frederick Law Olmsted, Critic of the Old South," Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science Series, XLII, 1924; Laura Wood Roper, op.cit.

of travel in the South and in Europe had helped him define his major interests and societal concerns. These experiences, captured in literary form, permitted him to transfer his displayed interest in scientific agricultural methods and management to the related matters of landscape design and environmental reform. Throughout all his early writings, there are unmistakable indications of his developing fascination with landscape matters. Man's relationship to his surroundings and the impact of the visual environment on social well being, were also common themes present in these early works. For Olmsted, the public park was one way both to improve the nature of the urban centers that he viewed as increasingly important, and at the same time do something positive about preserving the natural landscape.

Viewed in this context, Olmsted's preparation for the profession of landscape architecture, though essentially unconscious and often unrecognized, was as thorough as could be expected at the time. Whatever immediate practical knowledge or technical skills he may have lacked, were apparently quickly learned during what amounted to a six-month apprenticeship working with Vaux on the Central Park plans.[1]

It is much easier to understand why Calvert Vaux, the other half of the design partnership could become involved in the design of the park. Both his formal training and recent work experience were closely related to the skills needed to design the park. Where Olmsted was a man of cultivated mind and literary interests, and an articulate and respected student of social and economic conditions, Vaux was a more diffident, taciturn, and less reform-minded individual. This, along with the fact

1. For more information on Olmsted's attitudes and general intellectual background see the excellent study, Charles Eliot Beveridge, op.cit.

that Olmsted's frequent writing, both then and later in his career, often focused much of the limelight directly on Olmsted, made Vaux the less visible and publicly recognized half of what appears to have been an equal partnership. These facts left Vaux somewhat embittered later in life,[1] feeling he had not received a full share of the credit due him as the co-designer of the park and the many other projects on which they later worked together.

Vaux, born in London in 1824, was apprenticed as a young man to a leading architectural firm headed by L. N. Cottingham, an office best known for its restoration of medieval buildings.[2] During his early training Vaux acquired personal familiarity with many of the English and other European landscape designed parks. As well, he had made in the company of other artists, long sketching tours on foot and had developed more than ordinary amateur skill in landscape-painting.[3]

In 1850, Andrew Jackson Downing travelled to Europe to examine various parks first hand and to find a person suited to assist him in his practice of architecture and landscape gardening. Recommended by the Secretary of the Architectural Association, Vaux was discovered by Downing working in the respected architectural firm of George Truefitt. They quickly won each others' respect, concluded an agreement, and in September of 1850, they sailed together from Liverpool. Vaux soon became a full partner in the busy practice in Newburgh, and worked closely with Downing on his various commissions.[4]

1. New York Tribune, February 19, 1878, and February 21, 1878.
2. Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, introduction by George Taum, New York, 1968, p. xvi.
3. Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Spoils of the Park...," op.cit., p. 424.
4. "Calvert Vaux, Designer of Parks," Parks International, I (September, 1920) pp. 139-141.

Upon Downing's sudden death in 1852, Vaux succeeded to the large and profitable clientage. He took over the business, and completed its commissions, continued the practice in Newburgh and married a local girl. Interestingly, it seems highly probable that had Downing lived, it would have been he who designed Central Park. His national reputation, his close involvement in the park controversy, and the fact that he had already been asked by President Fillmore to lay out the grounds of the National Capitol and the Smithsonian Institution, would have made him the obvious and logical choice. But it was not to be so, and in effect it fell to his deputy.

During the next few years, Vaux continued to manage the operation begun by Downing, and began writing a book on domestic architecture which finally appeared in 1857 under the title of Villas and Cottages. It was dedicated to Downing and his wife, Caroline. A series of residential designs, very much patterned after Downing's earlier books on the same subject, and showing that they very much held similar views and aspirations, this volume managed to keep many of Downing's ideals alive, while reflecting the common attitude that their buildings must be set in some harmonious relationship to the land onto which they intruded.

It is not clear what brought Vaux to New York City in 1857 to consider preparing a design for the Central Park, other than the fact that his background was appropriate and it must have seemed an interesting challenge. It is even less clear why he solicited Olmsted's aid in the project but one can provide conjecture. Vaux was not yet a naturalized citizen, and perhaps he felt affiliation with a native-born American would enhance his chances. He did know that Olmsted, as Superintendent of the Park, was thoroughly familiar with its grounds and had intimate knowledge

of its unusual terrain. Furthermore, he knew that Olmsted was a creative man, who like his mentor, Downing, understood public taste and current fashion. For whatever reasons, nevertheless, he did ask him to collaborate - a collaboration which would continue for many years and later become highly successful.[1]

In the spring of 1858, the two men worked feverishly to finish their plan for the April 1st deadline. They explored the unusual terrain of the site together, and Olmsted stealing time from his duties with the superintendency and working after hours, joined Vaux at his residence where they translated their on-site observations into a plan for the park's improvement. We do not know much about the actual mechanics of the collaboration other than this pleasant observation by Vaux's son:

> When the drawing of the plan of Central Park to go into the competition was being made at my father's house in 18th Street, there was a great deal of grass to be put in by the usual small dots and dashes, and it became the frinedly thing for callers to help on the work by joining in and adding some grass to Central Park.[2]

Out of this process, and from the talent, interest and experience of both the men emerged the plan for the park.

The descriptive brochure they submitted with their plan is a logical place to begin in analyzing the intention of their proposal.[3] The designers

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1. After the Civil War, the two men worked in partnership on Brooklyn's Prospect Park (1866); the original campus for the new College at Berkeley (1867); and one at Orono, Maine (1867); the suburb of Riverside, Illinois (1868); and parks in Albany (1868), Newark (1868), Chicago (1871), and Riverside (1868) and Morningside Parks (1873) in New York. After 1872, the formal partnership was dissolved although they continued in close relationship until Olmsted moved his office to Brookline, Massachusetts in 1883. Vaux continued in landscape practice after 1872 in New York City, and in addition designed in the city the American Museum of Natural History, and ironically the first building to encroach on the park, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
2. As quoted, Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 43.
3. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Description of a Plan for the Improvement of Central Park: 'Greensward'", reprinted in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, pp. 214-232.

Figure 4. Survey of Lands Taken for Central Park and the Original 'Greensward' Plan for Improvement, 1858.

Published in A. J. Downing, A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening. With a Supplement by Henry Winthrop Sargent. New York: Orange Judd & Company, 8th ed., 1859.

FIG 98. PLAN OF CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK.

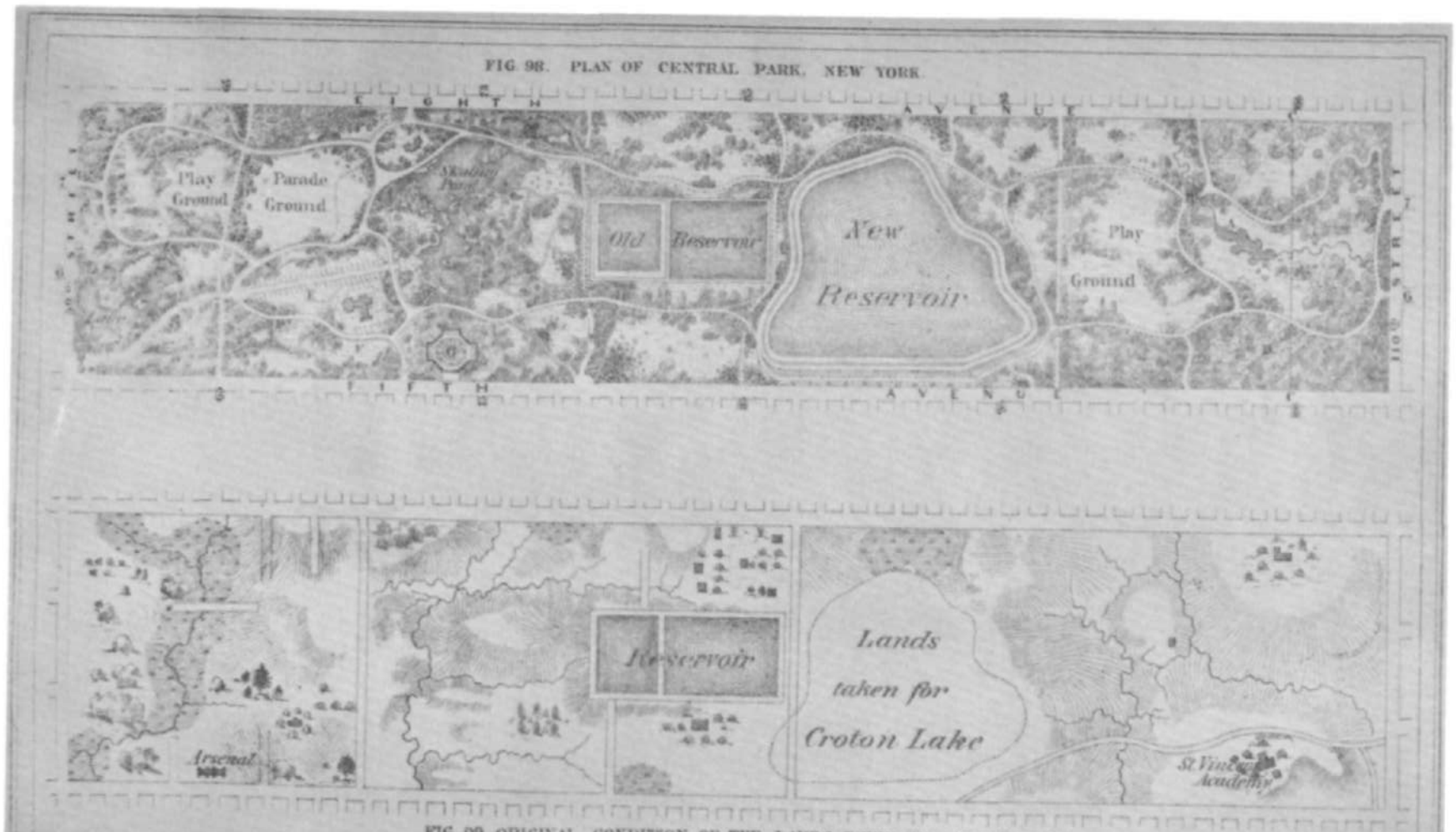


FIG 99. ORIGINAL CONDITION OF THE LANDS TAKEN FOR CENTRAL PARK.

began their report by noting that in their estimation the park was considered to be divided into two distinctly separate portions which they called the upper and lower parks. This was a logical conclusion for not only did the proposed reservoir in fact essentially bisect the site, but also the two halves which were created seemed to have far different characters. The upper park was made up of broad and sweeping slopes and meadow land that offered the opportunity for a most decided contrast to the formal and confined lines of the city plan that surrounded it. The designers' opinion was, therefore, that this section of the park should be interferred with as little as possible. "Formal planting and architectural effects....must be avoided"so that that the unity of this landscape effect might be preserved.

The lower park was something quite different, and it deserved a much more varied treatment. The southern section of the park between Fifty-ninth and Eighty-sixth Streets, contained hillsides and valleys, woodland and meadows, bold rocky bluffs, rugged outcroppings of the underlying ledge of gneiss rock, and a low-lying depression which while functioning to help drain the area could be turned into an artificial lake. Within this naturally more diverse portion of the overall composition, Olmsted and Vaux felt that the majority of the man-made or artificial improvements would be appropriate in order to alter or enhance the more varied terrain. And so within this general framework established from their surveys of the site, the designers began to lay out the various requirements put forth by the Commissioners.

First, they attacked perhaps the most troublesome and difficult requirement, the transverse roads. Predicting that the park would quickly come to act as a magnet accelerating the already rapid occupation of the

surrounding land, they correctly foresaw that the territory at the boundaries of the park would be "no longer an open suburb, our ground will have around it a continuous wall of brick, stone, and marble. The adjoining shores will be lined with commercial docks and warehouses, steamboats and ferry landings, railroad stations, hotels, theaters, factories, will be on all sides of it and above it; all of which our park must be made to fit." And the roads across the park linking such intense development would, therefore, have to be "constantly open to all the legitimate traffic of the city to coal carts and butchers' carts, dust carts and dung carts; engine companies will use them, those on one side of the park rushing their machines across it with frantic zeal at every alarm from the other; ladies and invalids will need special police escort for crossing them....eight times in a single circuit of the park will they oblige a pleasure drive or stroll to encounter a turgid stream of coarse traffic, constantly moving at right angles to the line of the park movement."[1]

Though perhaps exaggerated, this colorful projection, nonetheless, led the designers to proposed probably the most radical and innovative part of their design scheme. The prospect of heavy commercial traffic in constant motion across the park, interfering with both its unity of design and its function as a recreational and social gathering spot promised an unacceptable degree of disfigurement to the proposed landscape treatment Olmsted and Vaux had in mind. As a result they proposed the simple but brilliant solution of depressing or sinking the transverse routes below the general level of the park. This meant that the necessary crosstown

1. Ibid., pp. 216-217.

Figure 5. View of Transverse Road in Central Park, 1860.

Published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Third Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1860.



ARCHWAY UNDER CARRIAGE DRIVE

movement could be accommodated adequatehly without in any way disrupting the park and its frequent foot, horse and carriage crossings. By channeling the through vehicles under bridges and placing heavy plantings on the borders to screen the depressions, the traffic and other activities within the park could proceed without concern or even awareness of the east-west movement. Since all the other competitors designed the transverse roads at surface level, which in essence had to divide the park into at least five discrete segments, this single unique suggestion by Olmsted and Vaux must have made their plan substantially more prominent in the eyes of the Commissioners. It certainly answered the transportation needs of the park while accomodating it to the city plan.

The treatment of the boundary of the park was also an important concern, and in this regard the designers had two suggestions. First, because it was not anticipated that the park would be lighted for use at night, they recommended that in addition to the planned sidewalks, an extra fifteen foot strip of land be reserved around the entire periphery. This, according to the designers, would create a broad, well-lit, pedestrian promenade adjacent to the park and usable at all times of the day. Secondary, within that strip between the road and sidewalk, they recommended the planting of a continuous line of trees that would provide "an umbrageous horizon line" and from the park conceal the houses on the opposite side of the street.

The descriptive brochure prepared to accompany the design now turned its attention to specific proposals for improvement within the park. The main roadway or avenue into the park was to be from the entrance at Fifty-ninth Steet and Fifth Avenue. Penetrating diagonally toward the center of the lower park, it led to the base of the single formal element

in the design, the promenade or mall where it was joined by another route from the southwest corner, from which point it was to split into a series of routes wandering along the natural contours of the site, by the edges of the reservoir and up through the entire reaches of the park. The main carriage route that was outlined in this fashion became known as the circuit. This, along with the rest of the network of paths and roads, was to be the primary means by which the park scenery was to be experienced.

> The roads of the Park are planned and formed for pleasure travel, for the accommodation of which neither directness or levelness are requisite or desirable....
> The roads or walks are not arranged with reference to facilitating the passage of visitor by the most direct route by one part of the grounds to another, but so as to lead the visitor through the varieties of landscape and the more pleasing scenery. The lawns, the woods, the water, are all features that interest and gratify the eye of the visitor as he moves along and are objects to which it is especially desirable that he be introduced in his walk.
> The park....is to be enjoyed not only upon reaching particular centers or places but at the very entrance and at each succeeding step.[1]

For those who did not intend to travel through the park and experience its scenery by walking, on horseback or by carriage, the designers suggested a promenade placed in a prominent position which would act as the central feature in the design of the lower park. This promenade, later known as the mall, was really the only major formal design element within the entire plan, and it was conceived of as the major point of reference and organizing element within the otherwise informal and loosely organized plan. The mall was to function as a gathering spot for those who wished to socialize within the park or otherwise passively enjoy

1. Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park for the Year ending with December 31, 1863, New York, 1864, p. 10.

the park's environment.[1] This long formal avenue, as the designers saw it, was to be laid down into the natural landscape in as unobtrusive a manner as possible, "for we conceive that all such architectural structures should be confessed subservient to the main idea and that nothing artificial should be obtruded on the view as an ultimatum of interest. The idea of the park itself should always be uppermost in the eye of the beholder."[2] In accordance with this general principle, its northern perspective was actually carefully terminated on the lake and wild, rough terrain beyond it, not by the apparent terrace and planned Bethesda fountain, which had been carefully depressed below eye level. The planned colonaded archway of American elms to be planted along the edge of the mall, were also to help soften the straight edges of this design element by blending it into the natural areas of the park.

The high outcropping at the northern terminus of the mall above the skating pond, called Vista Rock, presented an unusual challenge to Olmsted and Vaux. Densely covered with a wide variety of shrubs, this steep hillside also displayed frequent places where large masses of underlying rock protruded through the natural growth. The other competition plans simply ignored or left alone this piece of land, rightfully seeing it as very difficult to bring, in a functional way, into the general scheme of the park. The successful designers, however, thought differently. They proposed that much of its heavy undergrowth be thinned out, new plantings placed, and that an elaborate maze of pathways be laid

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," reprinted in S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities, Cambrdige, 1971, p. 31.
2. Olmsted and Vaux, "Description of a Plan for Central Park," op.cit., p. 222.

down throughout the area along the steep contours of the rugged terrain. In such a way, the place could be made "very charming. Where the hillside approaches the lake, sufficient openings are proposed to be left for occasional glimpses, or more open views, of the water; and the glades of fine turf are intended to occur at favorable intervals, so as to offer pleasant spots for rest and recreation."[1] The result of this suggestion was "The Ramble." It was the park's most wilderness-like area, standing in especially sharp contrast to the more sylvan and pastoral areas of landscape nearby. This well contrived wilderness area is the easily identifiable portion of the plan delineated by the rather confusing tangle of pathways which were necessary to negotiate the rugged area, and establish the intended effect.

The use of water within the site was also an important consideration for the designers. The receiving reservoir, and the proposed new reservoir to be shortly created just north of it, were clearly the greatest existing impediments to both the functional and aesthetic design of the park. They did, nonetheless, as the authors pointed out, offer large sheets of water to view and provide unbroken open expanses within the site's otherwise green and rolling landscape. To make further aesthetic use of water, and also solve a major drainage problem within the site, Olmsted and Vaux proposed the creation of two artificial lakes. One, the lower lake, near the southeast corner of the park, was irregular in shape and had an area of eight to nine acres. The other, the skating pond, located between the north end of the mall and Vista Rock, was also irregular in form and occupied more than fourteen acres. Both were at

1. Ibid., p. 227.

the time somewhat swampy areas, and by deciding to augment and utilize these low-lying areas rather than drain them, they were able to introduce additional ornamental sheets of water while at the same time providing an all-season function for the park. The picturesque effect created by the bold bluffs running down to and overhanging the water's edge would be greatly increased, according to the designers, and these rocky sections of the park "will be rendered more retired and attractive as a pleasant walk or lounge."[1]

Two last artificial embellishments were included by the designers in their original plan. One of the proposals was for a tall observation tower to be erected on the crest of Bogardus Hill in the far northwest corner of the park, from which one could have a view of the Rivers, Harlem Heights and beyond, or back down across the park. Secondly, at the Fifth Avenue boundary, opposite Seventy-fourth Street, they proposed a flower garden where various horticultural specimens could be on view. The plan of the garden itself was to be geometrical, surrounded by a less formal plantation of shrubs. In the center of this arrangement they placed a large fountain spurting high jets of water drawn from the nearby ponds and reservoir.

The remainder of the elements included in the plan and described in the brochure were less imaginative or of lesser importance than those just described, or simply involved the placement or general outline of those few requirements which the Commissioners asked be included in every submission. These included three playgrounds of ten to fifteen acres apiece all located on relatively flat sites and carefully distributed to the upper, lower and central sections of the park.

1. Ibid., p. 224.

Secondly, a twenty-five acre parade ground was located just west of the mall on an open plain of well kept grass. In the northeast quadrant of the park just above the new reservoir, the designers proposed to locate a forty acre arboretum. Not only would this provide the park with a large, well-wooded tract within its boundaries, but also by planting here an extensive variety of American shrubs and trees, it would act as an outdoor botanical exhibit. In terms of buildings, it was suggested that the music hall be located just east and adjacent to the mall, with ready access to the proposed flower garden. Additionally, it was suggested that on a slope to the northwest of the mall was an appropriate site for a summer house, and further to the west, near Eighth Avenue, was a stretch of table land well suited for a Casino or refreshment house. And on the narrow strip of land between the two reservoirs, a central site was designated for a park police station, certain service buildings, and stables. One existing building, the New York State arsenal at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-fourth Street, was to remain and be used as a museum, but because the designers thought it an unattractive building, it was to be heavily screened from view by a thick planting of forest trees. And lastly, this report of the designers made some general recommendations about the treatment of boundaries, edges between various elements within the design, and the appropriate nature of the entrances and gateways.

All of these leading features described here were presented to the Commissioners by Olmsted and Vaux in the form of a plan outlining the location of the various elements; a printed brochure explaining their function and anticipated use; a set of carefully prepared and logically

reasoned construction cost estimates;[1] a descriptive guide to the trees to be planted, listed by their latin names with their specific growth characteristics;[2] and lastly, a portfolio of twelve sketches in both oil and pencil, which graphically contrasted scenes in parts of the park as it was then with the same scene as it would appear if the Olmsted and Vaux suggestions were implemented.[3] The plan, the various brochures, and the sketches each in their particular way outlined the intended proposals of the designers. Each represented an ambitious amount of work especially considering the limited time that had been available. In the aggregate, they reflected a degree of confidence and experience not common in the other submissions, and along with the intrinsic merits of the design were sufficient to convince the Commissioners that it was the best set of proposals to be submitted for the park's improvement.

By themselves, nevertheless, they are hardly adequate to display or capture the full implications, intent and later achievement of the design. For what the Commissioners had placed before them was but a broad outline of the leading features of the design which generally allocated functional spaces within the park site, established the various routes of access through and across the park, showed the location, relationships and setting of the major elements of the design, and outlined the form of improvements. From the documents submitted one does not get an entirely clear idea of the actual design or effect of elements such as the mall, the terrace, or the many other architectural adornments

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1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 278.
2. Ibid,.pp. 335-336.
3. For example see, Ibid., p. 224. It is probably reasonable to conclude that these drawings were prepared by Vaux because of his training, although Olmsted was not entirely inept or amateur in this regard. Now in very poor condition, the originals are on loan to the Museum of the City of New York.

Figure 6. View of the Existing Condition and Proposed Effect in Central Park, 1858.

Published in A. J. Downing, A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening. With a Supplement by Henry Winthrop Sargent. New York: Orange Judd & Company, 8th ed., 1859.



FIG. 10 .—A View in Central Park, showing the original condition of the land.



FIG. 102.—The proposed effect.

or structures which were projected to be part of the park. And because so much of the ultimate effect of the design was premised on what would be created or contrived by both the massive shifting of land forms and by the enormous amount of planting which would only come to maturity in future decades, the design as represented by the submission documents is not a full or adequate description of the richness, complexity, and impressive subtlety of Olmsted and Vaux's suggested improvements. This would really only become evident after the park became a three-dimensional fact with mature landscaping that could be both observed and experienced. As the park took shape, the landscaping and planting matured, the minor adjustments and modifications made, and architectural elements added, there emerged from the basic layout what is still considered to be America's pre-eminent example of public landscape design. Thus, it is imperative that the park's design be analyzed and evaluated on the basis of the ultimate effect that was achieved rather than on the basis of the submission documents, which may not have mentioned or articulated all that was later accomplished.

In reality, in many essential respects the Greensward plan was not much different in intent from a number of the other submissions that had been placed before the Commissioners, especially those which had advocated that it be given a broad picturesque treatment. Certainly, the Olmsted and Vaux plan did, however, display a higher degree of technical competence especially in the way in which the various elements of the design were related to one another. And, as well as being a consistent and well-integrated design, each of the singular elements were by and large more imaginatively handled. Beyond these two important facts, the aspect of their design which most distinguished it was the

fact that it called for the most extensive treatment and radical alteration of the site itself. Interestingly, while the designers' objective was to create a swath of scenery within the urban center which would closely resemble a bit of untouched nature, this was only possible through a very substantial man-made effort. This ironic fact was dictated by the site itself which Olmsted described at the time of its taking as having "less desirable characteristics for a park," than any other eight hundred acres on the island.[1] Certainly a more unpromising locality would have been hard to imagine if the following contemporary account is anywhere near accurate:

> No spot could be more dreary and forbidding than was the site of our Park....The southern portion, says one of the reports of the Board of Commissioners, was already part of the straggling suburbs of the city--and a suburb more filthy, squalid, and disgusting can hardly be imagined. A considerable number of its inhabitants were engaged in occupations which are nuisances in the eye of the law: and consequently were followed at night in wretched hovels, half hidden among the rocks, where also heaps of cinders, brick-bats, potsherds, and other rubbish were deposited. The grading of streets through and across it had been commenced and the rude embankments and ragged rock excavations thus created added much to the natural irregularities of its surface. Large reaches of stagnant water made the aspect more repulsive; and so ubiquitous were the rocks that, it is said, not a square rod could be found throughout which a crow-bar could be thrust its length into the ground without encountering them. To complete the miseries of the scene, the wretched squatters had, in the process of time, ruthlessly denuded it of all its vegetation, except a miserable tangled underbrush.[2]

The physicial features of the terrain, indeed, appeared discouraging, dominated as it was by ledges, unsightly and unmanageable rock, stagnant pools, swamps, and mountains of refuse. This denuded region was sacred

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1. John C. Van Dyke, The New New York, New York, 1909, p. 347.
2. T. Addision Richards, "The Central Park," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, CXXXV (August, 1861) pp. 293-294.

only to the squatters, cinder-sifters, rag-pickers, swill men, and herds of swine who were its present occupants.[1]

And yet as much as the site seemed to offer little in the way of acceptable natural beauty, Olmsted and Vaux did perceive that many of its apparent detriments might be turned into a positive part of its finished state. For though the ragged and difficult site might appear an overwhelming detriment to its easy transformation to a useful, public recreational ground, by carefully utilizing and enhancing certain of its natural elements, an unusually desirable, picturesque effect might be achieved. On a less difficult and rugged site this would have been impossible.[2] Granted the refuse and unnecessary natural growth would have to be cleared, and the topography shifted or even radically altered with undulating areas such as at the mall and parade ground made flat, level areas made rolling, and massive stretches of lawn planted and hundreds of thousands of trees carefully placed. Yet it was not the designers' intention to try to tear away or cover all of the rock, to drain away all of the water, nor entirely or indiscriminately level its many steep hills and valleys. Rather it was their objective to try to embrace and integrate those aspects of the site's natural physical distinctiveness which would enhance the picturesque effect they wished to achieve. And thus the broken, rocky and essentially wild terrain of the site was taken upon its own terms, used and enhanced where possible, modified or eliminated where necessary. The value and importance of maintaining and utilizing the basic terrain was explained by the Commissioners in these terms:

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1. Clay Lancaster, "Central Park, 1851-1951," Magazine of Art, XXXXIV (April, 1951) pp. 123-125.
2. Calvert Vaux and Samuel Parsons, Jr., Concerning Lawn Planting, New York, 1881, p. 24.

> Casual observers have been apt to think the selection of the site an unfortunate one, its general ruggedness being rather forbidding, than expressive either of dignity or grace. But this was due very much to the absence of soil and foliage. As these are supplied, the quality of picturesqueness becomes agreeably prominent. Grass and shrubbery can be found anywhere, but rocks, and those salient forms of earth-surface which are only found in nature where rock exists can never be imitated on a large scale, with perfect success. Although, therefore, it will require a heavy expenditure to make the park complete, the final artistic effect should be much finer than could have been expected upon a tract of the richest and most easily worked soil, the natural outlines of which were invariably graceful.[1]

The designers' intention was to create their own interpretation of nature according to the picturesque principles of landscape design, with the basic site viewed only as the backdrop for their artistic embellishment and improvement. And thus during the first year and one half alone to achieve an impression of natural beauty and wonder, more than 1.1 million cubic yards of earth were excavated and moved on the site, nearly two hundred thousand cubic yards of stone were blasted or otherwise rearranged, and approximately fourteen thousand barrels of cement were used to construct various improvements. And to accomplish these substantial tasks during this period, more than ten thousand five hundred laborers had been employed.[2] The intended result of this massive activity which continued on a similar scale for the next few years, was "to present to the eye a charming rural landscape, such as, unless produced by art, is never found within the limits of a large town...."[3] Both the irony and intent of the design was that a host of man-made, well-contrived and artificial actions were utilized to achieve the effect of a wholly rural and natural bit of landscape.

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1. Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park, New York, 1860, pp. 36-37.
2. Ibid., p. 62.
3. Ibid., p. 36.

Figure 7. View of Construction of the Mall, June, 1858.

Published in D. T. Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York. New York: Chas. W. Baker, 1859.



View in Central Park.
Promenade looking South June 1858.

The result was almost an entirely artificial creation, competently contrived to make it appear as untouched nature. The whole idea was to take the original endowment, augment it by means of the art of landscape design, such that a stranger would not know where nature leaves off and art begins. Apparently, Horace Greeley was fooled, for after an early visit to the site, he said with some sense of relief, "Well, they've left it alone better than I thought they would."[1]

The motives of the Greensward design embraced much more than the manner in which the terrain of the original site should be handled. For example, one of the designers' additional considerations was how the park was to relate to the rest of the city. About this they were quite clear and explicit, for they correctly perceived that the city would shortly extend along all sides of the park, leaving it no longer a remote site at the upper edge of the developed city. It in fact would be in or near the very center of the future population and would be surrounded on all sides by a wall of urban development. In this context, Olmsted and Vaux through their design hoped to provide something quite the antithesis of the city---a design which would contrast as strongly as possible with the monotony and congestion of the rectilinear street pattern. While serving both as a contrast and relief from the developed city, it would also function to preserve the varied contours and natural surface which had characterized the topography of the island before the urban innundation. They felt it should have "an aspect of spaciousness and tranquillity, with variety and intricacy of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and

1. Calvert Vaux and Samuel Parsons, Jr., op.cit., pp. 35-36.

monotonous street division of the city."[1] And thus while it was their purpose to introduce nature into the urban environment, it was to be imposed, and then sheltered as a distinct and singular entity, not integrated into the city as a whole, but separately maintained. The park was conceived to effect,

> ...the greatest possible contrast with the restraining and confining conditions of the town, those conditions which compel us to look closely upon others without sympathy. Practically, what we want is a simple, broad, open space of clean greensward, with sufficient play of surface and a sufficient number of trees about it to supply a variety of light and shade.[2]

Besides the desire of the designers to utilize carefully and build upon the site's original endowment, and to seek to create an alternative rural environment which would be separate, distinct, and stand in sharp contrast to the surrounding city, what was the further intent of their plan? The purpose of the park as often related was ostensibly quite simple--to create an environment where the masses would be able to retreat from the increasingly pernicious effects of the city, and find pure wholesome air, recreation and relaxation. For as Olmsted would write, "It is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost to those in easier circumstances."[3]

To achieve this broad end, the laying out of the park had to involve, according to the designers, something more than would be provided by

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1. Third Annual Report..., op.cit., p. 36.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns, Cambridge, 1870, p. 22.
3. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 5, May 31, 1858, p. 6; Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 239.

divine chance, or the provision of a few open or well planted recreation grounds. By condensing into one site the widest variety of wood, meadow, water, and rock, one could array the full panorama of nature into a highly stylized form of art that used natural elements and materials, and the result, albeit a closely studied and contrived artistic creation, could nonetheless be the apothesis of all outdoors. Olmsted and Vaux explained the need for this extensive treatment and its relationship to the art of landscape design in this way:

> A mere imitation of nature, however successful, is not art, and the purpose to imitate nature, or to produce an effect which shall seem to be natural and interesting, is not sufficient for the duty before us.
>
> A scene in nature is made up of various parts; each part has its individual character and its possible ideal. It is unlikely that accident should bring together the best possible ideals of each separate part...and it is still more unlikely that accident should group a number of these possible ideals in such a way that not only one or two but that all should be harmoniously related one to the other. It is evident, however, that an attempt to accomplish this artificially is not impossible.
>
> The result would be a work of art, and the combination of the art thus defined, with the art of architecture in the production of landscape compositions, is what we denominate landscape architecture.[1]

The result of the conscious efforts of the landscape architect, this idealized bit of nature was to be an amalgam of the English deer park and of pastoral New England. As one recent critic has summarized so well, this landscape was to be "an under inhabited landscape of undulating lawns, groves of trees cleared of undergrowth, massive rocks, clear streams, wide and placid views; one that conformed to Winkelmann's

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn, New York: Being a Consideration of Circumstances of Site and Other Conditions Affecting the Design of Public Pleasure Grounds (1866)," reprinted in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, op.cit., pp. 104-105.

definition of the classic as possessing a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur."[1] Noble and grand, simple and quiet, this image of nature, a pictorial representation, was in fact an attempt to capture part of nature's spiritual impact in visual form.[2] More than a decorated or attractive piece of scenery, more than a functional urban playground, more than a place of respite from the surrounding city, the park was to be a work of art and like all works of art its purpose was to have an effect which was sensory, psychological, or emotionally evocative As the designers would later in their careers explain:

> When entirely freed from extraneous considerations, the central idea of a large public Park is manifestly that of a work of art, of a peculiar character undoubtedly, but nonetheless, designed at the outset, as all other works of art are designed, with the intention of producing through the exercise of the natural perceptions, a certain effect upon the mind and the character of those who approach it.[3]

For the designers, the response which their created environment would evoke from those who would visit or view the park, was most important. Certainly it had been part of their objective to utilize, enhance and perfect carefully the given natural site. It had also been important to provide a place of detachment away from the bustle of city life and thus an escape from the chaos, alienation and confinement which the urban environment connoted. In addition, it was their intention to use art to create with nature an example of the full

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1. J. B. Jackson, American Space, New York, 1972, pp. 217-218.
2. For the obvious analogy which some scholars have attempted to draw between this sort of landscape design and the then popular landscape painting of the Hudson River School, see Russell Lynes, The Art Makers, New York, 1970, p. 163; 213; also Clay Lancaster, Prospect Park Handbook, New York, 1967, p. 20.
3. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, "Architect's Report" in Newark, New Jersey Park Commissioners, Report of the Park Commissioners appointed by an Act of the Legislature, Trenton, 1868, p. 10.

panorama of a rural environment. At the root of this aesthetic endeavor, and the purpose to which all these other objectives contributed, was their intent to create an effect or overall experience derived from the environment, which would provide a vision that was ennobling. Such an effect would be constructed for a visitor going through the park by a set of sequential and quickly changing experiences which drew on memory and association, and relied on surprise. This effect which the designers sought to achieve is most important to an understanding of the plan, for in many ways it explains some of their particular proposals, and in general is at the heart of their general aesthetic premises. What the designers had in mind was an environment which, in their own words, would... "act remedially, by impressions on the mind and suggestions to the imagination."[1] Or even more abstractly, "a place in which to enjoy...the harmony, melody, the poetry of actual nature...every great park is valuable in proportion as it is the realization of an idyllic poem."[2] In less metaphysical terms, it was the intention of the overall design to create an environment which would suggest freedom, repose, simplicity, tranquillity and solitude,[3] for if a rural park were to have real meaning and purpose for the crowded urban center, then it had to establish this impression and thus be the source of the curative, soothing and therapeutic powers which this era all too willingly attributed to nature. Through the combination of the

1. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters to the President on Recent Changes and Projected Changes in the Central Park, New York, 1872, p. 15.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, The Park for Detroit, printed for the author, 1882, p. 32.
3. Olmsted and Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn...,"op.cit., pp. 108-109.

broad sweeps of lawn and meadow of seemingly undefined limits, the umbraceous cover of trees, the wild intricacy of low growing foliage, the broken and rocky surfaces, long open vistas, and the series of landscape passages strongly contrasting with the pastoral and high wood districts, it was the hope of the designers that a thoroughly rural aspect, in fact, an escape, would be brought into being.[1]

In terms of aesthetic doctrine, it was also felt that as with any work of art there must be a unity and harmony within the total design. Of this, Olmsted and Vaux wrote,

> ...the Park itself is a single work of art, and as such subject to the primary law of every work of art, namely, that it shall be named upon a single noble motive to which the design of all its parts, in some more or less subtle way, shall be confluent and helpful.[2]

It is clear that the single noble motive which they had in mind for the park was the achievement of the natural landscape effect which would create the environment of openness, tranquillity, and repose. To this end, and within a general framework of cohesion, all the single details of the design were to be subordinated. Within this overall unity, as carefully outlined by the designers, there was to be a variety and full range of rural scenery. Nevertheless, each was seen as reinforcing the other, never so singlular or prominent as to be distracting, for it was their aggregate contribution which would create the dominant effect. This final effect, as the designers of course knew, would not be

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1. For an intelligent and witty dissent as to the appropriateness of utilizing these picturesque principles for the design of a large urban park see, Elbert Peets, "Central Park,"The American Mercury, IV (March, 1925) pp. 339-341.
2. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters..., op.cit., p. 14; also Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op.cit., p. xiii.

immediately obtainable as so much of it was dependent on the maturing of the plantings:

> ...in the study of the design for Central Park, we agreed to treat nothing of essential consequence except with reference to results which might be looked for, at nearest, forty years ahead.[1]

The idea that nothing should detract or dilute the overall experience was later carefully translated into the way in which architectural objects or ornamentation were integrated into the design. They would be limited in number, unimposing in size and style, and be of compatible natural materials such as wood or native stone.

> The objection, then, to monumental and architectural objects in works of landscape gardening is that, as a rule, they are not adapted to contribute to any concerted effect, but are likely to demand attention to themselves in particular, distracting the mind from the contemplation of the landscape as such, and disturbing its suggestions to the imagination.[2]

In this regard, even the placement of single trees occupied their attention for "we desire every tree to be made subordinate to more interesting and beautiful effects of foliage..."[3]

One of the best examples of subordination and in their own right an imaginative contribution to the overall success of the plan, was the elaborate system of roads and walkways that were conceived by the designers. The depressed transverse roads, already described, are excellent examples of accommodating the functional requirement of permitting easy movement of commercial traffic across the park, while not violating the primary idea of the park. These main roads cut below eye level, were carefully

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Spoils of the Park...," op.cit., pp. 421-422.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Mr. Olmsted on Landscape Gardening," The Garden, X (August 12, 1876) p. 149.
3. Letter from Olmsted, Vaux and Company to E. E. Childs, 1869, Olmsted MSS Collection, Library of Congress.

routed so not to break up any important landscape features, and were to be carefully hidden by shrubbery and embankments along their edges. Even the bridges spanning the transverse roads carried soil and were to be planted so that when passing over them one would see only a continuous margin of foliage and be protected from any glimpse of the raw world of commerce outside. And thus the effect for which the park was designed was not disrupted by these major cross roads.

Of course, a very extensive network of roadways was also necessary to provide access to the park and the opportunity to view and enjoy its scenery. These were laid out along those lines which would best exhibit the park's landscape variety and conversely direct one's attention away from any of its shortcomings. Seeing to it that the main entrances, roadways and routes were laid out so as to direct the visitor's primary vistas away from the park's boundaries, the designers further reinforced the aesthetic premises they had established. Where the roads necessarily had to be near the park's margins, as where they passed the reservoirs, they were depressed down into close passageways from which one had no view or distraction from the city that was in fact but a few feet away.

But perhaps the most important part of the genius of the road network was the ease with which pedestrians, equestrians and drivers were able to traverse the miles of walk, bridle and carriage ways without interfering with one another or even encountering the dangers and inconveniences of intersections. The reason for this was the establishment by Olmsted and Vaux of a hierarchical system of roads that while helping open the park to the greatest potential variety of users, at the same time kept them sufficiently separate to insure their compatibility. This

Figure 8. View of Hierarchical Path System for Pedestrians, Equestrians, and Carriages.
Drawn by J. W. Orr and Published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Seventh Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1864.



ARCHWAY UNDER DRIVE FOR BRIDLE-ROAD AND WALK, NORTH-WEST OF THE RAMBLE

objective led them to

> ...the planning of a system of independent ways: 1st for carriages; 2nd, for horsemen, wishing to gallop; 3rd for footmen; and 4th, for common street traffic requiring to cross the Park. By this means it was made possible, even for the most timid and nervous, to go on foot, to any district of the Park designed to be visited, without crossing a line of wheels on the same level, and, consequently without occasion for anxiety or hesitation.[1]

An early example of the contemporary notion of functional traffic separation, this movement and communication along separate routes, was made possible by the construction of innumerable bridges and archways that allowed each mode of travel to proceed uninterfered with by always passing either over or under one another.[2],

> ...There is no part of the drive, no part of the ride, and but a little of the walk system which is not studiously adjusted to the arches and planned in respect to course, breath, curves and grades, with a constant purpose to avoid leading people on foot to wish to occupy ground on which others have a right to drive horses.[3]

Although each level of roadway was carefully laid out along its own route, many of the footpaths were placed closely parallel to the carriage ways, for the purpose the designers said of allowing the pedestrians "ample opportunity to look at the equipages and their inmates."[4]

Not one of the roads or pathways within the park was straight, and in fact the entire system, though carefully laid out, most closely approximates an elaborate maze upon cursory glance. The explicit and interesting reason given for this fact, was outlined at the very end of

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1. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters..., op.cit., pp. 29-30; also Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park, p. 40.
2. For a full description of the roadway system see, Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 11, September 9, 1858.
3. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters..., op.cit., p. 33.
4. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 232.

the brochure submitted with the plan:

> It will be perceived that no long straight drive has been provided on the plan: this feature has been studiously avoided, because it would offer opportunities for trotting matches. The popular idea of the park is a beautiful open space, in which quiet drives, rides and strolls may be had. This can not be preserved if a race course, or a road that can be readily used as a race course, is made one of its leading attractions.[1]

The fear which convinced the designers to reach this conclusion was real, for it was a common sport of the day for young men of the city to race their carriages gaily along the upper reaches of Broadway, Fifth Avenue and the Bloomingdale Road. Yet, though unstated at this time, there were more accurate and compelling reasons to explain why the various elements of the park were tied together with a winding network of roads. First, it is clear that it was easier and more convenient, given this rugged and uneven terrain to run them along the natural contours. And secondly, it was entirely consistent with broad aesthetic precepts of the landscape art they advocated. Current artistic taste or dogma dictated that the curved line was more beautiful than the straight. And winding roads and paths by first holding the mind in expectancy and then opening up a succession of vistas and thus revealing a new aspect of the landscape composition, permitted a more full experiencing of the range of scenery available in the park. And while by such arrangement it might take much longer to traverse the park than if the roads were more direct and straight, after all the park was a place to be experienced, and a spot in which to linger and relax, not to move directly through or across.[2]

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1. Ibid
2. Edward Hagaman Hall, op. cit., p. 473.

One last important element of the plan's design has to be singled out for discussion, not because it too contributed to the picturesque effect, but because it was so much a central part of the designers' intention in creating the park. The mall, along with the flower garden which was never built, was the only part of the Greensward scheme that could be labeled as formal. It deviated from the overall concept, in order to serve a particular function. Patterning it no doubt after the similar examples of promenades or allees of Europe, the designers established a long walkway flanked on either side by rustic seats and sheltered from the sun by the four rows of parallel American elms which in a panoplied fashion formed a continuous natural gothic archway. It was more than twelve hundred feet long and two hundred feet wide, with a paved central walkway thirty five feet wide down the center. In many respects it is the keystone of the entire design and a carefully located point of reference within the otherwise informal landscape effect. Laid out so as to avoid too great an impression of symmetry, it was intentionally not made parallel to any of the park's borders, but rather placed diagonally within the scheme to give a greater sense of depth on each side. Also, conceived of as a wholly separate entity, it was designed to be well away from the two main roadways which encircle it, so that it is a discreet and safe distance from this moving traffic. And yet, in spite of its discreet and separate function, its main axis was carefully aimed to look over the terrace and plaza with its bronze Bethesda fountain, and in fact terminated on the lake and craggy side of Vista Rock beyond. And thus, this was at least a subtle reminder that one was still a part of the broader park beyond.

In addition to this relation to the total design of the park, the mall must also be viewed as the social oasis of the entire plan. It was at this spot, the designers believed, that people in large numbers, and of all occupations and social backgrounds, could come together and commonly share the park's scenery. Like the esplanades of Europe with which both Olmsted and Vaux were familiar, the designers' intention was that the mall function as a mechanism for greater democratization, that is, that there people from all parts of the city meet and mingle without being hindered by the constraints of differing social class or other such artificial distinctions.[1]

The designers were, of course, aware that the full use of an outdoor park was severely limited by harsh seasonal weather that was part of New York City's climate. With some forethought to this matter, their plan included along the west edge of the park, near the reservoir, a mile and one-half winter drive where sleighs could maneuver through a landscape and set of plantings dominated by evergreen trees and shrubs. This pathway, along with the skating which would become so popular on the park's lakes, helped insure to the extent possible, that the park would be available for use during all seasons.

It is a fair and important question to ask where Olmsted and Vaux derived the ideas and aesthetic principles which underlaid the design for the park. The answer in regard to the origin of specific elements within their plan is difficult and probably not important. Yet as to the derivation of the general picturesque ideal and naturalistic landscape treatment they chose to employ, the source is quite evident. For ever since the beginning of the eighteenth century in Europe and particularly

1. Charles C. MacLaughlin, op. cit., p. 37.

Great Britain, there had been evolving a new movement in art and particularly landscape design that has subsequently become labeled the English Landscape Garden School. And it was from this well-developed, tested and known group of designers and writers, from which they drew their inspiration.

Up until the early seventeen hundreds, garden or landscape design, entirely concerned with the expansive grounds of private, royal, aristocratic, or clerical estates, was very much in harmony with the classic and rationalistic doctrines of the time. Gardens, such as those at Versailles, were seen as the logical extension and complement to the estate buildings themselves, and were laid out in a grand baroque manner. Often rectilinear in form, the various elements within were carefully placed in a formal, rational and geometric fashion. Reflecting complete mastery over natural forms, these late vestiges of the Renaissance were in fact viewed as outdoor decorative murals, rooms or museums, which men could observe, or in which they could wander, talk or conspire. Even in America, these formal gardens had their analogue as one writer has reminded us, for during "the colonial period, formal gardens served as architectural devices extending floor plans into an intermediate zone where geometric patterns symbolized the humanization of nature. Symmetrical mazes of shrubbery and decorative walkways offered Tidewater aristocracy and New England gentry a defense against barbarism."[1]

But conditions and modes of thought were quickly changing in the colonies and especially in Europe, and this would greatly affect the field of landscape design. The change which would so greatly affect landscape design, emanated interestingly not from the gardeners and landscape

1. Peter J. Schmitt, Back to Nature, New York (Oxford University Press), 1969, p. 56-57.

men, but with artists, poets, and other literary men. And in a simplified, yet essentially accurate way, it might be summarized in the term romanticism. Simply stated there had begun an erosion of the formalism and rationalism which had characterized the thinking of the Enlightenment. Man was reacting to this earlier world view and the restraints he believed it imposed on him. Life must now be perceived in a more personal and sensory manner than the old order had permitted. In attempting to animate a mechanical and rationalistic world view, romantic spokesmen urged that one strive for understanding through feeling and intuition, not just reason. The romantics saw themselves as innovators who could prefer sentiment to reason, and indeed the sentimentality of their feelings could often degenerate into melancholy. They preferred the country and wild nature to the life of urban society and the glories of lake, mountain, forest and meadow were revered for their rustic simplicity and wild beauty. And just as important they celebrated the virtues of a natural free life of which the primitive and savage man became the admirable symbol. Nature in its most pastoral, bucolic sense, the romantics believed, could provide man with an inexhaustible resource in which respite and inspiration could be found. With many strong advocates including those of the stature of Pope, Wadsworth, Keats, Rosseau, Blake, Browning, and Tennyson, romantic doctrine had wide circulation and enjoyed nearly total acceptance through Europe, and especially England, from the mid seventeen hundreds well through the nineteenth century.

This sort of philosophical framework was expounded by artists and intellectuals of all sorts, as well as literary men who had clearly outlined a new way in which to perceive nature, define its role, and

understand man's relationship to it. All this was not lost on those concerned with landscape design, and as the romantic definition of nature evolved across these one hundred and fifty years, it was translated into the sort of landscape designs which seemed best to reflect these new perceptions and values. During the early eighteenth century, Addison, Steele, and Pope all wrote numerous effective essays criticizing the formal design of gardens,[1] and urging the rejection of the false and formal representation of nature and the extreme embellishment of the Baroque garden. Instead, the stylistic innovation they urged, and one that the gardeners would soon attempt, was that grounds should be laid out and designed in conformity and harmony with nature as it is or might be in a more wilderness scene. In general, the terrain should be gently sloping, the uneven, undulating surface covered by broad expanses of turf, clumps of forest-like scenery were to be present, views across the broad landscape were to be devised in an open and tranquil manner, the area of the park should seem unbounded, and movement through the landscape should be by curvilinear paths that followed along the natural topography. It took a number of decades for these concepts to emerge clearly and develop fully, and it was through the early work of landscape gardeners such as William Kent, Stephen Switzer, Humphrey Repton, and "Capability" Brown, that they became well established and achieved a high level of popular acceptance during the balance of the eighteenth century.[2]

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1. See Norman T. Newton, Design on the Land, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 207-211.
2. For a discussion of the particular contribution and individual role within the movement of each of these men see, Ibid, pp. 211-219. It is interesting to note that so fashionable had the English style of gardening become in Europe that many of the great, formal parks of France were replanned in this manner.

Near the very end of this century an important set of essays were published by one Sir Uvedale Price, entitled, On the Picturesque, which led to an important reinterpretation of the exact form these new aesthetic doctrines should take. Highly critical of the work of Brown and other advocates of this naturalistic mode of design, Price said that their landscape effects of smoothness, roundness, gradual variation and gentle serenity was really a misinterpretation of what nature really was. The hand of man was too evident in their arrangements of nature. Instead, Price advocated that landscape designers should take as their model the landscape pictures of the time, which portrayed nature in its full bounty and fury -- rough, varied, wild and savagely dramatic. The designers' inspiration was no longer to be nature as observed, but nature as an encapsulation and summation, as pictorially represented by the popular painters of the day, such as Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain.[1] Thus the picturesque as it became known was to approximate this interpretation of nature and no longer be just a realistic representation. A short time after Price propounded his theory it received strong reinforcement from William Gilpin's Forest Scenery and a later book he entitled, Practical Hints Upon Landscape Gardening.[2] Others joined with them and for at least the first half of the nineteenth century, this doctrine reigned supreme.

A last variation to this bit of romantic aestheticism developed in the 1840's, which would fill out the full definition of the English landscape school. This was called the "gardenesque" whose major

1. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op. cit., p. 7.
2. For a further interpretation see, Elizabeth Barlow, Frederick Law Olmsted's New York New York, 1972, pp. 10-16.

proponent was John Claudius Loudon. It was his belief that while the pastoral and picturesque ideal was fine, a large landscape garden ought primarily to be a setting for the display of single specimen trees, exotic plants and beds of rare flowers. Reflecting the growing interest in the horticultural and botanical sciences, the focus of this suggestion was on the quantitative representation of a large variety of plant species.

While this controversy raged in Europe regarding the precise form which the English Garden tradition should take, in America very little attention was paid to changing ideals of the romantic aesthetic, even though many of the ideas were current and fashionable for nearly a century. There are some modest examples, that some designers were beginning to be influenced by these new ideas. Joseph Jacques Ramee's plan for the grounds at Union College (1813) reflect a tentative gesture in this direction;[1] the layout of first rural cemeteries such as Mt. Auburn and Greenwood, particularly in their road and path systems display a growing awareness of the new aesthetic principles; and certainly Downing's work on numerous small Huson River country estates and Alexander Davis' suburban design for Llewellyn Park begun in 1853, were part of a more fully developing acceptance of the English landscape garden tradition.[2] And yet in 1858, when the Olmsted and Vaux plan was made public it appeared a radical departure from any landscape design that was then familiar to Americans. The proposed picturesque treatment, especially at such a large public scale, for America was indeed pioneering. In a less parochial context, however, the basic design of Central Park has to

1. Christopher Tunnard "Joseph Jacques Ramee and Union College," Union Worthies, XIX (1964) pp. 5-15.
2. John W. Reps, The Making of Urban America, Princeton, 1965, pp. 325-339.

be viewed as a much more conventional, and even as a belated product of its time. For although such landscape planning and design were innovative for America, its derivation and origin as has been shown, were clearly from a well established and often-practiced tradition.

Vaux and Olmsted were fully aware of these facts, and made no claim that the sort of design they produced was original with them. And, in fact, as can be recalled, many of their competitors also submitted designs in the picturesque mode. That they were aware of and able to draw upon the extensive European experience is not surprising. In the case of Vaux, his design training and much of his early experience had been in England, where the picturesque ideal had long been popular. With Olmsted, the influence may have been less direct, but was no less strong. His travels throughout Europe and his displayed interest in their public parks, as well as the fact that at an early age he had read all of the major works which had come out of the English movement,[1] show adequately the source of his general design ideas for the park.

As to the specific or relative contribution of each of the designers to the "Greensward Plan", it has normally been considered that Olmsted provided most of the ideas in regard to generally composing the scenery while Vaux's major contributions were in the area of architectural accent or decoration, engineering and draftsmanship. There is, however, no definite proof of this matter, and in fact Olmsted would later say in regard to this, that their roles were "mutual, equal, and indivisible."[2] It appears to be impossible now to identify the specific contribution of either one to the joint effort. We must accept their own statement

1. Charles Eliot Beveridge, op. cit., pp. 31, 58, 70; and New American Cyclopedia, XII (1861) pp. 763-777.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 78.

that they equally shared in its creation.

The Central Park Commissioners were not concerned at this point, however, with the details of their designers' collaboration. Pleased now to have an acceptable plan based on established and popular aesthetic doctrines, they were anxious only to fulfill their mandate by beginning to improve the park site.

CHAPTER VI

BUILDING THE PARK

Finding the best possible plan for the laying out of the park was of course a most important aspect of its total history, for the design would to a large extent determine its future success. As critical as the design would prove to be, however, it would be only one more link in the very long chain of events involved in bringing the public park into being. It appeared that all of the hard decisions had been made, and all the difficult issues settled, around which so much political maneuvering had centered. So at this point all that remained for the Commissioners to do was simply to proceed with the hard work of constructing the park. And yet, as with so much of the rest of the process of developing the park, this, too, would prove to be more difficult and time consuming than anticipated.

Just as eight years were consumed between the time when a public park for the city was first officially advocated and a plan adopted for it, another eight to ten years would pass before it could be declared essentially complete. The reasons for this were many, but perhaps foremost was the size and extent of the proposed project. The elaborate design that covered nearly 800 acres required the excavation of lakes, the grading by hand of hundreds of acres, the planting of hundreds of thousands of trees and shrubs, the building of more than forty miles of roads, bridlepaths and walks, the design and construction of forty-three bridges and archways, and the design and placement of a large number of architectural structures and ornaments which would help fill out the full intent of the plan. But if the task itself were large, the secondary

impediments were, in the aggregate, just as great. The recruitment and efficient management of the massive untrained work force necessary to accomplish the above tasks would involve a great deal of time and effort. The Civil War would soon intercede and effectively drain away the manpower, energy, and resources needed to complete the park. Political interference would continue with various local politicians seeking to use the park for profit and patronage. Furthermore, the Common Council was still very much piqued at having had the park removed from its direct control by the new charter. It offered constant criticism of the Commissioners' actions and as a body showed official reluctance to appropriating the necessary construction funds to which the park board felt it was legally entitled. And lastly, the Board of Commissioners itself was often split and in disagreement about exactly how it ought to proceed. It did not take long for this internal dissention to manifest itself.

The Olmsted and Vaux plan had been approved on April 28, 1858. Just one week later the Commissioners again met. It was their annual organizational meeting and the time at which it was necessary to elect a new slate of officers for the coming year. The leading candidate for President of the Board was Commissioner Andrew Haswell Green. His nomination was sustained through eight ballots during the course of the meeting, but he was not able to achieve a clear majority. Bitterly split, the Board voted to table the election of officers until their next meeting.[1] And at the same time, a committee was established to confer with the Superintendent, Olmsted, as to what modifications or parts of the other plans might desirably be integrated into plan 33.

1. Minutes, May 4, 1858.

On the following Monday the Board again met, and after eleven separate ballots, Green finally received a bare majority vote of six of his fellow members. Strangely, he was then also elected treasurer of the Board. Commissioner Gray was elected vice-president. Thomas Fields, outraged at the result of the election, was even more adamant at the thought that Green would be permitted to hold two of the elected posts simultaneously. Green offered to resign as treasurer, but the Board voted not to accept. Fields responded by offering a host of resolutions to alter what he saw as the developing direction of the Board. First, he moved that Viele be retained and be given full supervisory authority over the construction of the park. This was defeated 9 to 1. Secondly, he moved that Olmsted be fired and replaced as Superintendent by Samuel Gustin, the designer of plan number 30. He then also moved that the designers of plans number 26 and 27 be retained to help Olmsted implement the plan, thus barring Vaux from having any role in this activity. The Board voted down these two motions by the same 9 to 1 majority. Lastly, Fields recommended that the drainage work on the park be let out to contract and not accomplished by the park's own workers as had been contemplated. This rather bald attempt to open up and make more susceptible to favor and patronage part of the park's construction, the Board also denied by a 7-3 vote.[1]

The immediate result of all this maneuvering by Fields was negligible but it indicated that this supposedly non-political board was inescapably being touched by partisan considerations. Fields was a rising star in the Tammany organization and Commissioner Dillon had been Wood's corporation counsel. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that many of their proposals to the board primarily reflected the interests of Tammany. A

1. Minutes, May 10, 1858.

more lasting and important result of this difficult meeting, which would have positive impact on the future of the park, was Green's election as President and Treasurer. Green, who was already serving the city as a member of the Board of Education, was the law partner of Samuel J. Tilden.[1] Appointed as one of the original Commissioners, apparently when Tilden refused to serve,[2] Green would serve for the next thirteen years under various titles as the executive director of the park, directing its construction, administering its development, and providing continuous leadership and reconciliation of the political demands made upon the park. More than any other individual, it would be this man who would be largely responsible for the successful development of the park.

At this same meeting at which Green had been elected to head the Board of Commissioners the committee authorized the week before to suggest alterations to the plan, presented its report. Six recommendations were forthcoming. The committee suggested, first, adding a carriage way entrance opposite Seventh Avenue on Fifty-Ninth Street, and for the sake of symmetry, another one opposite Sixth Avenue. Next they recommended that the carriage drive be pulled back away from the boundary between Sixty-Fifth and Seventy-First Streets near Eighth Avenue, for it would be "more agreeable if carried in a single sweep." Also the width of the carriage drives seemed to them too wide, and they asked why they should not be made narrower. Next, they made the helpful suggestion that all the drives be laid out in a way compatible with the desirable possibility that the park might be extended at its northern boundary from One Hundred and Sixth to One Hundred and Tenth Street. In this regard, they asked

1. Edward Hagaman Hall, "A Short Biography of Andrew Haswell Green," Ninth Annual Report, 1904, of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Albany, 1904, pp. 135-136.
2. Ibid., p. 148.

Olmsted to prepare a sketch plan of this area and how it might reasonably be connected to the existing design. And lastly, the committee gave its further endorsement to plan 33, by recommending that it remain as the basis for improvements, and with the changes just suggested, that it be implemented as quickly as possible.[1]

This report accurately reflected the opinion of the public at the time. Many residents were tired of the interminable squabbles that seemed to surround the park, and were anxious that the Commissioners implement their plan and get on with the task of opening the park for public use. Probably few people could be found who at this late stage would agree with a New York Herald editorial that labeled Olmsted and Vaux's plan as "incomprehensible" and warned that, if it were built, Fifth Avenue would be lined with grog shops, and that the park would become a haven for drunks to "sleep off the effects of their debaucheries." Against this sort of criticism, Olmsted remained resolute, defending the various proposals put forth within the original plan. In regard to the rather minor changes the Committee had suggested, he readily concurred saying that it was natural and anticipated that changes in some of the details of the plan would be needed. In response to the Commissioners' specific request that he consider adding or integrating into "Greensward" some of the better elements of the other designs in the competition, Olmsted was much more rigid, for he saw this as involving an encroachment on the whole general idea of their plan for the park. This was neither desirable nor tolerable, and so he wrote them:

> Many very interesting and artistic conceptions that are not introduced in plan 33, are, without doubt to be found

1. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 2, May 10, 1858.

> in the other plans exhibited, but they do not, it is believed, contain any desirable feature of prominent importance that is not already provided for in plan 33.[1]

With Olmsted's response, the Board was at a point of momentary detente between the feelings of some of its members that the plan as outlined should be improved through substantial modification, and the artist's confident defense of the sanctity of his original creation.

While taking under consideration these opposing positions, the Board moved on with its work. Meeting formally eight times during the month of May, the Board sought to establish a credible framework for getting on with the building of the park. First, they voted to amend their by-laws to create the position of Architect-in-Chief which was then offered to Olmsted at the annual salary of $2500. This action combined in one job the duties of the Chief Engineer and Superintendent, and gave him full executive power to nominate all subordinate officers and responsibility for all activities relating to the park's construction or execution of the plan.[2] Furthermore, Vaux was appointed as his assistant and he was authorized to appoint other assistants, not to exceed six in number, to expedite the work ahead. Two important results came of this action. First, the successful designers of the park were further rewarded and the execution and management of the park's construction was placed in the hands of someone dedicated to its careful implementation. And secondly, by eliminating Viele's job the Board rid itself of its now thoroughly embittered Chief-Engineer who not only had had his plan rejected twice, but now also spoke of his belief that Olmsted and Vaux had actually stolen many of his basic ideas.[3] In addition to the new authority vested

1. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 3, May 17, 1858.
2. Minutes, May 17, 1858.
3. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, pp. 554-562.

in Olmsted and Vaux, the Board authorized the hiring of up to 2000 men.[1]

With all this forward motion it appeared that the Board was finally on the right track. But at the same time all this was happening, there were indications of continued dissention during the May meetings. In the middle of the month, Fields charged that the Board's elections had not been in accordance with the by-laws and demanded that they be declared void. He was ruled out of order.[2] A few days later, he joined with others in an attempt to dump plan 33 completely. This also failed.[3] Fields and some other members of the Board felt increasingly frustrated. For whatever reasons--continued loyalty to Viele and his scheme, the belief that one of the other competition plans was superior, a sincere belief that "Greensward" could be improved through modification, a dislike for the strong willed Olmsted, or some unknown reason for political maneuvering--some of the Commissioners thought it was imperative that the plan for the park still be changed. This feeling crystalized in the form of a strongly worded motion offered by Commissioner Robert J. Dillon at the meeting of May 24th.

Dillon, who had from the start opposed the Olmsted and Vaux plan, and voted against its acceptance, put forth seventeen proposed amendments to alter the plan. These were quickly seconded by August Belmont. The proposed revisions were sweeping in their intent, calling for the relocation or removal of many of the main roads, the shifting around of various lakes, and the temporary elimination of pedestrian paths, preferring instead to leave "to the observation of actual use their final location."

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1. Minutes, May 31, 1858.
2. Minutes, May 14, 1858.
3. Minutes, May 18, 1858.

Dillon's seventeen point motion also urged the outright removal of the flower garden, four of the main entrances, the parade ground, the playgrounds, the Music Hall, the Arcade and the Casino. The sunken, transverse roads, in addition, would be replaced by two surface level routes at Eighty-Sixth and Ninety-Sixth Streets. But the primary alteration offered forth by Dillon was contained in his first two points. And here, was a truly astounding proposal. Starting at Fifty-Ninth Street somewhere between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, Dillon wanted laid out "one grand Cathedral avenue," perhaps resembling the Champs-Elysee. Sixty feet wide, and bordered by rows of trees, it was to shoot off in a direct line toward Vista Rock, where by means of a grand suspension bridge, it would span the lake and continue directly onward to the south wall of the old square reservoir. The walk was to be continued on to the top of the wall of the old reservoir cross Eighty-Sixth Street by bridges, and go on to the top of the embankment of the new reservoir. From here the walk would split and continue along each edge of the new reservoir until these avenues would again converge "into another grand avenue, to run in the direction of Observatory Hill, spanning the ravine by a wire suspension bridge; this will be its termination. The entire line to be called 'the Walk' and to be devoted to pedestrians solely, separately and exclusively."[1]

In his second point, Dillon suggested how this grand avenue might be further embellished. Where the walk reached the south wall of the old reservoir, "built a platform along the base...410 feet along that wall, and extending 100 feet in front...erect on this platform a flight of steps... 205 feet in length leading to the top of the wall." All of this should be

1. Minutes, May 24, 1858.

in shimmering white marble," the whole to form the introduction or entrance to the artificial lakes or basins beyond, thus becoming one of the objects of "the Walk."[1]

The sum effect of Dillon's proposed modifications was sheer destruction, if one accepted the value of Olmsted and Vaux's plan and agreed with the rationale of the picturesque mode which they had adopted and carefully explained. But if one were not fully convinced of the value of the accepted plan, as some of the Commissioners must not have been, then at worst this scheme represented but a substantial formalizing of the park's design. By making the broad, straight walk the single dominant element within the park, and by setting off the small square reservoir like a jewel mounted on a marble pedestal, the park would be made to take on a wholly different, and more artificial aspect. The Board, uncertain as to how exactly to react, thinking perhaps that some of the proposals might have merit, deferred any immediate or formal action, and instead requested that the Architect-in-Chief prepare a written response to the proposals. On May 31st, Olmsted submitted a long letter to the Board outlining his feelings which, not surprisingly, firmly opposed most of Dillon's modifications. He correctly perceived that the proposals were of two sorts, "one to modify plan 33, and one to supercede that plan by another of an opposite character in its general conception and detailed effect."[2] In regard to the first, those that seemed simple modification, he agreed that a few of them might have merit, such as the possibility of eliminating the flower garden, casino, or music hall. But for most of them, he carefully laid out the reasons why he believed they were inferior solutions to problems at hand.

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1. Ibid.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 235.

In regard to the latter category of changes, those that would fundamentally change the basic picturesque ideal, Olmsted was unalterably opposed, for, as he had explained before, his idea of a park was that it be a place of contrast, diversity, and escape from the expanding city. "The time will come," he wrote, "when New York will be built up, when all the grading and filling will be done, and when the picturesquely varied, rocky formations of the Island will have been converted into foundations for rows of monotonous straight streets, and piles of erect, angular buildings. There will be no suggestion left of its present varied surface, with the single exception of the few acres contained in the Park. Then the priceless value of the present picturesque outlines of the ground will be more distinctly perceived, and its adaptability for its purposes more fully recognized. It therefore seems desirable to interfere with its easy, undulating outlines, and picturesque, rocky scenery as little as possible, and, on the other hand, to endeavor rapidly, and by every legitimate means to increase and judiciously develop these particularly individual and characteristic sources of landscape effects."[1]

The Board was generally inclined to agree with their Architect-in-Chief or were at least at this point unwilling to contemplate such massive changes. Thus the Dillon proposal received no support from the other members of the Board. Unhappy with their associates' response and feeling this serious matter was being treated in too cavalier a manner, Dillon and Belmont released their proposals to the newspapers along with a statement of their discontent. This broke the long standing policy of the Board to hold their meetings and keep their deliberations private, but the two

1. Ibid., p. 239.

Commissioners realized that if they were to have their way, then they must win strong editorial and public support.

Having issued a public challenge and further claiming that their amendments would save the public more than $300,000, they sat back and awaited the response. The Tribune, which had just a month earlier endorsed the Olmsted and Vaux plan,[1] now changed its mind, calling the Dillon scheme, "the perfection of common sense."[2] As a way of responding, Olmsted invited Charles A. Dana, the editor of the Tribune, and his good friend Henry Raymond of the Times, to have breakfast with him in the park one morning. Later in life Olmsted would explain, "I seated them at a table in a tent set on a grand rock in the ramble right on the line of the proposed avenue. When they were smoking I asked them to look southward and consider what destruction even of existing natural beauty; what excessive belittling of the already too petty scenery, the proposition meant. They at once both confessed that they had not realized its import, and if they did not both come out against it publicly, they at least ceased to favor it. It was a case of natural eloquence versus grandiloquence."[3]

This clever maneuver on the part of Olmsted along with the very strong support of Green[4] effectively cooled any hoped for support from the public or other board members, and Dillon's grant seventeen-point program was allowed to die quietly within committee. Although it had no long term impact on the pack it did cause some immediate trouble for the Board.

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1. New York Daily Tribune, May 8, 1858.
2. Ibid., June 9, 1858.
3. As quoted Elizabeth Barlow, Frederick Law Olmsted's New York, New York, 1972, pp. 23-24. See also Charles C. MacLaughlin, op.cit., pp. 38-39, 443.
4. John Foord, The Life and Public Services of Andrew Haswell Green, Garden City, New York, 1913, p. 55.

At the very time this controversy became public, the Common Council had under consideration and Board's request for a $300,000 appropriation to continue the improvement of the park. Relations between the two groups had always been poor, but now further excited by Dillon and Belmont's statements, they seemed hopelessly deteriorated. At its June 9th meeting, the Common Council's Finance Committee refused to report favorably on the requested appropriation. Instead, they accused the Board of acting with unnecessary secrecy and failing to adequately permit public discussion of their actions.[1]

In spite of these accusations the issue was finally resolved by the end of the month, and Green could report to the Commissioners that the Common Council had reluctantly authorized the $300,000 appropriation.[2] Apparently disgruntled over his inability to influence the policies of the Board, Dillon resigned from the Commission in early fall. As an indication of the enmity which he had generated, the Board argued for a prolonged period about whether or not to send him the customary letter expressing regret over his resignation and thanking him for his time and faithful service. They did not.[3]

The uncertainty created by Dillon and Belmont and the reluctance of the city fathers to grant money for its improvement had, of course, slowed down construction activity on the park. Nevertheless, by early summer Olmsted could report that nearly one thousand men were now at work.

> It is not possible to give an exact return of their employment, the excessive duty imposed upon the clerks having

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1. New York Times, June 10, 1858.
2. Minutes, June 24, 1858.
3. Minutes, October 21, 1858.

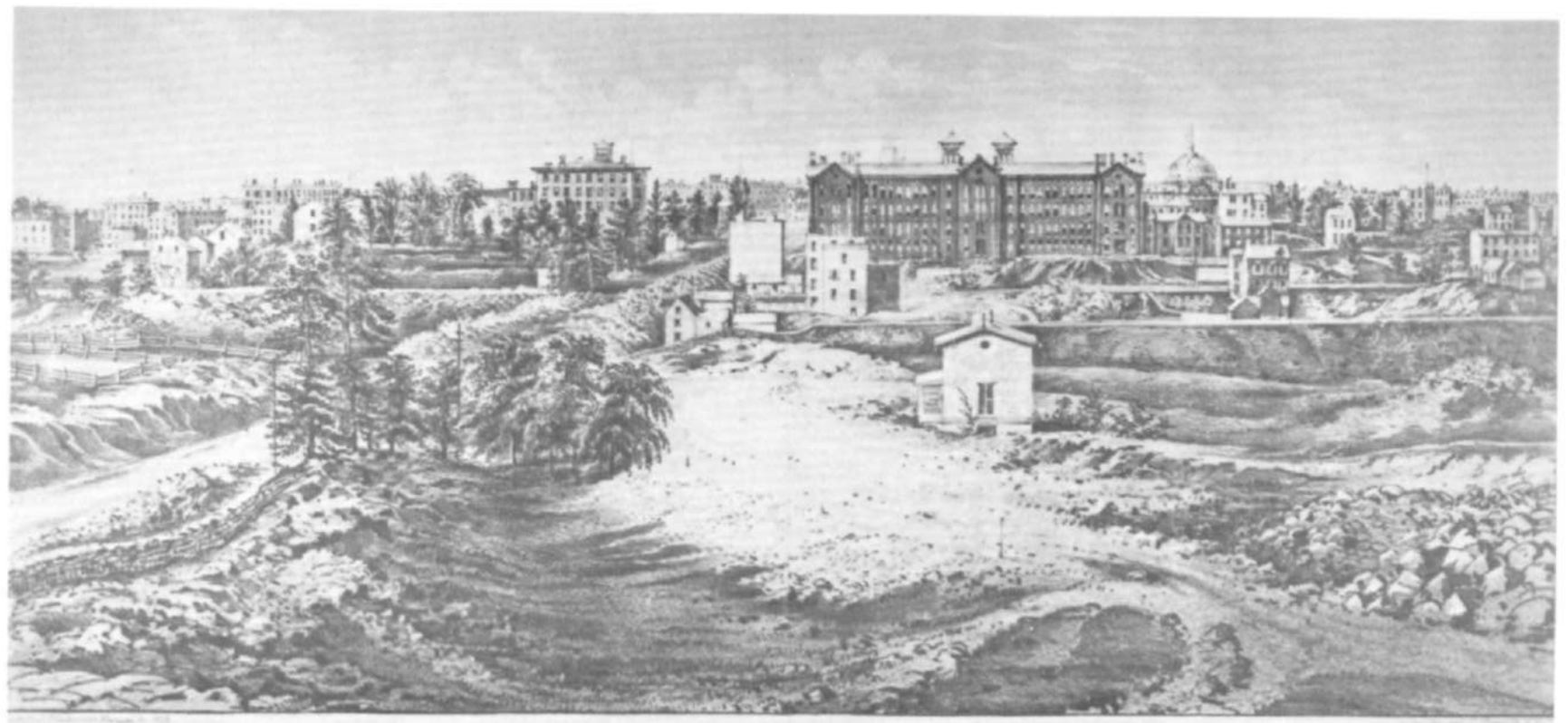
> prevented the usual record during the last three weeks. Between four and five hundred men are engaged in excavation and filling for the entrance drive and the promenade, about four hundred in draining and pond excavation, and seventy in grubbing and tillage of the nursery. The work is organized in divisions, Mr. Fiedler, with two general foremen, the draining and pond excavation. Mr. Pilat, general foreman, has charge of the grubbing and nursery work, Mr. Grant, is employed as my principal assistant over all.[1]

In late July, 1500 would be reported at work[2] and by September there was a daily average of 2300 men employed on the park.[3] At the beginning of the summer, paths and roadways had been staked out and their grading begun, drainage of the swampy areas started, blasting and excavation of rock commenced, and filling and leveling of meadowland was undertaken. In addition, the remaining few structures and shanties were removed from the grounds,[4] and 12,000 loads of manure were gathered from the city streets and piers and brought in to fertilize the soil.[5] But as the winter approached even more tangible progress was visible. Around the entire perimeter of the park, a stone wall had been erected, fifteen miles of drainage pipe laid, the massive excavations for the lower lake beds stood as gaping, rocky holes, and most of the planned landscape effects at the lower end of the park were clearly taking shape as outlined. The mall area, now cleared and level, was obviously visible. One of the most impressive feats to watch, well underway that summer, was the planting of the giant rows of elms along this promenade. One hundred and fifty of them were set in place during this period. Brought in by six-wheel carts from Westchester County, each of the trees exceeded nine

1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 51.
2. New York Times, July 26, 1858.
3. Minutes, September 9, 1858.
4. New York Times, July 26, 1858.
5. Minutes, October 27, 1858.

Figure 9. The Condition of Central Park, at the Time Construction Was Initiated, June, 1858.

Published in D. T. Valentine, Manual of The Corporation of the City of New York. New York: Chas. W. Baker, 1859.



View in Central Park.
Southward from the Arsenal 5th Avenue & 64th St. June, 1856.

inches in diameter, and for each that survived more than three years, the contractor received 30 dollars apiece.[1]

In the six-month period before the winter weather set in, a great deal had been accomplished, and already the public was beginning to enjoy the use of the park. Four miles of carriage ways were opened to the public, skating was possible on the lakes that were slowly filling up over the winter, the First Battalion requested the use of a portion of the parade ground, and the Caledonia Curling Club formally petitioned the Board for use of certain portions of the park to practice their sport.[2] There were also petitions for use of the park by baseball clubs and for the development of an observatory.[3] In anticipation of the growing crowds the Board requested that the city pave Fifth and Eighth Avenues as soon as possible.[4]

The work to put the park grounds in shape involved hard manual labor. The hours for work were from 6 A.M. to 5 P.M. with a one hour lunch period at noon.[5] One young man who worked all summer in 1859 helping to grade and form one of the paths in the ramble recalled:

> I received the daily wage of $1.10; the dollar being for my work and the ten cents for the payment of my fare back to town. I was expected to find my own fare for the morning journey. At the close of the day's work, the labourers could, if they chose to pay ten cents, go back to town by some old mule-driven stages which had been secured for the purpose, and which made the trip from the gateway of the old Arsenal building. It was in this building also that we received our weekly wage.[6]

In addition to the broad accomplishments outlined, a host of small problems arose which demanded decisions be made during the last half of

1. New York Times, November 11, 1858.
2. Minutes, October 7, 1858.
3. Minutes, December 23, 1858.
4. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 12, Sept. 16, 1858.
5. New York Times, November 8, 1858.
6. George Haven Putnam, Memories of My Youth, New York, 1914, pp. 87-88.

1858. From April 28th, when the plan was adopted, there were twenty-four formal meetings to set policy and generally decide how to proceed. Many of the issues were not by themselves of extreme significance, but in the aggregate give a better sense of the enormity of the task they faced, as well as the tempo of the activity necessary to get the park's construction moving. For example, the Board continued to grapple with the suggestion of some of its members that the work on the park would be better carried out by letting it out to contract to private firms instead of retaining it as a fully internal operation to be accomplished by their own labor force under their own supervision. The "day work" or internal plan was maintained except in rare instances because the majority feared the inherent possibilities of political payoff with private contracts. Using only their own work force appeared to be cheaper, for detailed work specifications would not have to be prepared for each task and there would be no profits for a middle man.[1]

Furthermore, the ubiquitous Mr. Viele, again occupied their attention, first by a motion of Commissioner Fields to hire him as a park engineer, to which the full Board would not consent,[2] and secondly when it was announced that Viele had initiated a suit against one of the Commissioners, John Gray, to recover damages on account of words he was alleged to have spoken about Viele's qualifications when this question of his reappointment was under discussion.[3]

The decisions faced by the Board, both large and small, the large labor force at work and the quick progress made on the improvement of the park in these early months, are all important parts of the park's development. But perhaps the most demanding and difficult aspect of this portion

1. Minutes, June 8, 1858; see also Second Annual Report..., pp. 1-7.
2. Minutes, September 9, 1858.
3. Minutes, November 16, 1858.

of its history centered around the recruitment, hiring and supervision of the park workers. This task was entirely Olmsted's responsibility as Architect-in-Chief. From the very moment that a plan was approved and it was public knowledge that a construction force of thousands would be required, Olmsted was literally besieged by the hordes of men thrown out of work by the recent economic crisis. These ranks were swollen further by the arrival daily of jobless and poorly trained immigrants.

Many in this large group had been part of the constituency which had earlier lent its support to the proposal that the city should purchase a park. They now appeared at the door step of the park to collect their debt with substantial support from the elected officials who perceived that this was an opportunity to consolidate their power by means of wholesale patronage. Even before Olmsted was fully in charge of the park's construction and before there was need to have a massive work force on hand, he recognized the problems inherent to the present political context. For on the first day on the job as superintendent in the Fall of 1857, Olmsted would observe:

> As I stood in the office I had not been able to observe that the slightest consideration was given to the apparent strength or activity of the laborers. Each man undoubtedly supposed that he owed the fact of his preference over others, often much abler than himself to do a good day;s work, to the fact that a member of the Common Council had asked his appointment. He also knew that the request of his patron was made not because of his supposed special fitness to serve the city on the park, but because of service he was expected to render at primary meetings and otherwise with a view to the approaching election. He knew, too, that he was for an indefinite period to receive no pay for his work, but only a promise to pay which he must turn to account by selling it at a discount.[1]

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," reprinted in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape Into Cityscape, Ithaca, 1967, pp. 60-61.

When during the following year Olmsted had been elevated to the position of Architect-in-Chief and was in charge of quickly putting more than 2000 men on the payroll, the pressure became increasingly intense. Nearly twenty-five years later he could vividly recall the harassment which he had to endure in this regard during his entire tenure with the park. Particularly, he recounted the many threats and filthy caricatures of which he was the object, the fact that in one week he received more than 7000 written requests for positions, and that reprobates of all sorts were often forced upon him.[1] A qualified surgeon once declared that at least a quarter of the entire work force was physically incapacitated for active labor, indicating that the park was being used as an "asylum for aggravated cases of hernia, varicose veins, rheumatism, partial blindness, and other infirmities compelling sedentary occupations."[2] And on reflection Olmsted could say that he never once remembered going to his office when there was not a poster up saying "no laborers wanted," and yet it was still his judgment that nine-tenths of the Commissioners' intellectual force and nervous energy was given over to recruiting duty.[3]

Not only was it time-consuming and unpleasant, but on many occasions threat, physical force and intimidation were involved. Early one morning just after another large financial allocation had been authorized by Council, Olmsted found his home surrounded by twenty office seekers, four of whom had forced their way into his house. And upon reaching his office he found it surrounded by an angry mob which one newspaper estimated

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Spoils of the Park...," reprinted in Ibid., pp. 391-440.
2. Ibid., p. 409.
3. Ibid., p. 417.

to be over five thousand. Most were laborers, but a few were politicians impressing these potential constituents by exhorting them to demand their rightful positions.

> As I worked my way through the crowd, no one recognizing me, I saw and heard a man, then a candidate for election as a local magistrate, addressing it from a wagon. He urged that those before him had a right to live; he assumed that they could live only through wages to be paid by the city; and to obtain these he advised that they should demand employment of me. If I should be backward in yielding it--here he held up a rope and pointed to a tree, and the crowd cheered. Men pushed letters at me wherever I went, stuffed them into my pockets, set themselves to waylay me, tossed letters through windows to me; I fully believe that some thought that if they could hit me with a letter, I should be magically made their benefactor.[1]

The constant pressure for appointments from political officials could never be fully satisfied, for not only were there never enough jobs for all those who were recommended, but also both Olmsted and Green were committed to hiring only those who would competently perform the jobs. These facts were a constant source of continuing irritation and they helped reinforce the already poor relations between the Common Council and those responsible for constructing the park. Furthermore, Olmsted had to deal with requests from the Governor of the state seeking appointments for his friends,[2] and as often as not from his own Commissioners. Mr. Butterworth was particularly persistent in this regard, constantly seeking favors with demanding notes to Olmsted such as this,

> ...is an American and capable of making an excellent foreman in any department...you will please make a memorandum of his name so that when appointments are made he may have a place.[3]

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Influence," c. 1880, unpublished typescript, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 40.
2. Letter, Governor Bradish to Frederick Law Olmsted, June 27, 1859, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 28.
3. Letter, J. F. Butterworth to Frederick Law Olmsted, March 19, 1860, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 28. For the suggested issue regarding the nativist feeling that too many immigrants were being hired to the exclusion of American citizens, see, New York Times, April 15, 1858.

With such pressure, both from external and internal sources,[1] establishing and keeping control over the large work force was hardly an easy task. Nor was it limited to a single instance or period of time but rather it continued as long as work on the park was on-going. The fact that the park did get built under these circumstances, with a fair amount of speed, an acdeptable degree of economy, and a surprising degree of efficiency, was no small wonder. And to a substantial extent, credit for this must be given to Olmsted. Through a rigid system of discipline and a tight hierarchy of loyal supervisors,[2] he managed to get close control over the potentially chaotic situation. Furthermore, he threw himself bodily and unsparingly into the work, acting as full-time, on-site, supervisor, virtually involved in every aspect of the construction. Olmsted unrelentingly drove himself, virtually lived with every aspect of its development, and forged essentially a personal command.

> ...nothing should be done upon the work, except under my instructions; that no man should be employed or retained in employment, except by me; no payment made except on my certificate; no reports from the work received that I did not sign or countersign. The work was...driven with all practical speed.[3]

Olmsted became very proud, later in life, of how he organized and managed the work force which he saw as just as important to the success of the park as had been the plan he and Vaux had put together. In a letter to his boyhood friend, Charles Loring Brace, in late 1860, he described how it had been achieved:

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Spoils of the Park...," reprinted in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape Into Cityscape, op.cit., pp. 405-407.
2. Fourth Annual Report..., pp. 87-91.
3. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to Ariel Lathrop, July 7, 1890, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 36.

> ...my office was for several days regularly surrounded by an organized mob carrying a banner inscribed Bread or Blood. This mob sent in to me a list of 10,000 names of men alleged to have starving families demanding that they should be immediately put at work. I had almost no assistance, but within a week I had a thousand men economically employed and rigidly discharged any man who failed to work industriously and to behave in a quiet and orderly manner. Since the plan was adopted from two to four thousand men have been generally at work besides those employed by contractors. With a single exception, when a thousand workmen on an adjoining work[1] struck for higher wages and two gangs on the park joined them and were immediately discharged, there has been the most perfect order, peace and good feeling preserved, notwithstanding the fact that the laborers are mainly from the poorest or what is generally considered the most dangerous class of the great city's population.[2]

Despite numerous attempts or events that might have destroyed discipline, and the general harassment and political influence he had to bear, Olmsted, much to his credit, managed to keep tight control over the entire construction process. He even, it appears, managed to instill a spirit of pride or esprit de corps in the work force. In August 1858 a portion of the work crew, dressed in their hats, marched smartly in squads of four in a parade celebrating the laying of the transatlantic cable. Carrying banners with their names and that of their boss, the Tribune would describe the scene:

> In the line of the procession were several four-horse teams drawing wagons in which were the workmen in the engineer's department. On the sides of the vehicles were muslim banners with the words: ENGINEER CORPS....The procession filled Broadway from Union Square to the Park, and, as it was altogether unexpected, it created no little excitement and inquiry. If all the men and teams in this turnout are kept at the city's work we shall soon see great improvement in the new park...[3]

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1. The new Croton Reservoir.
2. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, December 9, 1860, reprinted in Charles C. MacLaughlin, op.cit., pp. 245-246.
3. As quoted Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, Central Park: A History and Guide, New York, 1967, p. 20.

But in addition to being a stern boss, Olmsted had an humanitarian side, for soon after taking charge of the work force, he instituted a sick-fund society to take care of any worker who fell ill during his time of employment.[1]

Olmsted's close, constant and intimate involvement with all the details of construction was also important for another reason. In a letter to Andrew Green he explained that the Greensward plan had really to be taken as a broad outline of intent, while the real details and final determinations of landscape form were being decided by him as each phase of construction continued. The development of the park would come out of a creative evolutionary process, part of which was his careful superintending and continual evaluation.

> ...the work of design necessarily supposes a gallery of mental pictures, and in all parts of the park I constantly have before me, more or less distinctly, more or less vaguely, a picture which as Superintendent I am constantly laboring to realize. Necessarily the crude maps which are laid before you are but the merest hints of the more rigid outlines of these pictures, these plans.
>
> I shall venture to assume to myself the title of artist... and to add that no sculptor, painter or architect can have anything like the difficulty in sketching and convehing a knowledge of his design to those who employ him which must attend upon an artist employed for such a king of designing as is required of me. The design must be exclusively in my imagination.[2]

The task of managing the work force and keeping it as free as possible from politics was also a paramount objective of Green, the President of the Board. Under his guidance and with the willing assent of Olmsted, the Board promulgated a series of work rules and workers' rights designed to protect the large work force under their direction from political influence and supervisory autocracy. Posted on the outside of every tool

1. Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 2, p. 381.
2. As quoted Elizabeth Barlow, op.cit., p. 25.

box and read fortnightly by the foremen for the benefit of those who could not read were statements of this policy which included the following:

> Every man should understand that he is employed solely to work, on the Park, for his regular wages and for no other consideration whatsoever. Nothing but his labor, compliance with the rules of the Park, and a civil behavior to all engaged on it, can be required of him.
>
> No one has a right to receive a payment, in any form, for having procured any man's employment, or for retaining any man on the work...
>
> It is entirely contrary to the intention of employing men on the Park that any influence of any sort should be brought to bear upon their political opinions or actions. Officers and foremen on the Park...are forbidden to solicit their votes for any person or measure, on any pretence whatever.[1]

Contrary to most other similar municipal endeavors at this time, it was also made clear that all hiring and promotions were on the basis of merit, and that rigorous work safety rules were in force.[2] If any of these general regulations regarding political interference, bribes or work rules were broken, it was grounds for immediate dismissal. It was also made clear to the men that if they felt unjustly treated, aggrieved or had any complaints whatsoever, that they could report this or have a hearing at the office of the Superintendent between noon and two o'clock each day.[3]

In retrospect, Green, Olmsted and the Commissioners had managed to accomplish in the approximately one half year since the adoption of the plan a great deal of progress and establish significant momentum. With the harsh winter weather upon them, there was little actual work going on in the park. And yet the Board continued to meet at least weekly to settle the host of questions which the completion of the park would require.

1. Fourth Annual Report..., p. 95.
2. John Foord, op.cit., pp. 67-68.
3. Fourth Annual Report..., pp. 93-94.

At their first meeting of 1859, the Board received from Olmsted a plan and set of sketches they had earlier requested for the acquisition and improvement of the territory adjoining the northern border of the park between 106th and 110th Streets. Convinced that this was a desirable eventuality, and having received concurrence the month before from the Common Council, they voted unanimously to authorize Green to memorialize the State legislature for the necessary enabling laws.[1] The desirability of adding this piece of land to the park had long been recognized because of the impracticality of cutting the normal city gridiron street pattern through this very uneven and rocky terrain. Green had been an early advocate of acquiring this additional land, for as early as January, 1858, he urged the Commissioners to appoint a committee to investigate the ownership and possibility of acquiring this additional land. In August he prepared a report for Common Council stating the reasons for the proposed enlargement.[2] He pointed out that the terrain was such that it was not suitable for residential development, but mostly he stressed the valuable scenic enhancement which it would give to the park.

> The piece of land between One Hundred and Sixth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets is mainly a ledge of rocks, the surface of which rising from the former towards the latter street, there abruptly terminates by a descent of about forty feet to the plain that extends over a mile and a half to the Harlem River. If it is permitted to owners of property to build houses on the north side of One Hundred and Sixth Street at the present level, it must be at the exclusion of the most extended view commanded from the Park, including the High Bridge, the lower part of Westchester County, the Highlands of the Hudson, the East River and its islands, the Bay, Staten and Long Islands, and the shores of New Jersey.[3]

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1. Minutes, January 6, 1859.
2. Edward Hagaman Hall, "Central Park in the City of New York," op.cit., p. 462.
3. As quoted Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, pp. 52-53. For similar description see also Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 12, September 16, 1858, pp. 6-7.

With surprisingly little dissent the Common Council agreed with Green and the Commissioners' position.[1] Armed with this backing he went to the State legislature which on April 2, 1859 passed the necessary bill (Chapter 101) enabling the Board to acquire the title to the land. Shortly thereafter, on July 13, 1859, the Supreme Court appointed Hawley D. Clapp, Anthony Bleeker, and Richard Kelley as Commissioners of Estimate and Assessment. Nearly a year and one half later, they made their report valuing the property at $1,499,438 and presenting a bill for their expenses of more than $73,000.[2] The Board was astounded at the figure estimating the value of the land, and no less outraged at the expense incurred to arrive at the amount. By resolution, of December 26, 1860, the Commissioners, discontinued proceedings to acquire the property on the grounds that the valuation was excessive,[3] and they even voted to hire counsel to appear in Supreme Court in opposition to any confirmation of the estimate.[4] Shortly thereafter, many of the property owners in the area, apparently quite satisfied with the prospective offer, countered by informing the Board of their intention to institute legal proceedings to compel the purchase of the land as outlined by the enabling statute.[5] The court delayed, none of the parties carried through with their threat of legal action, and somehow no formal decision was then made. On February 28, 1862, the Board reopened the matter by managing to have three men appointed again to have the value of the property assessed. Samuel B. Ruggles, Luther Bradish, and Michael Ulshoeffer, two of whom had served on the Board to value the land of the original park, entered

1. New York City Board of Aldermen, Document No. 19, December 9, 1858, p. 3; also Document No. 1, January 3, 1859, p. 45.
2. Edward Hagaman Hall, "Central Park in the City of New York," op.cit.p.463.
3. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 253.
4. Minutes, December 20, 1860.
5. Minutes, April 24, 1861.

their report in the spring of 1863, and the Supreme Court confirmed it on April 21st. This second appraisal placed the value of the land at $1,179,590 of which $171,075 would be recouped through a benefit assessment on surrounding property owners.[1] Green and the Board were not happy with this expense, still thinking it excessive for the 65 acres involved, but unfortunately, what they failed to realize in their own calculations was what had been the impact or effect which the presence of the park was having on nearby property values. Perhaps having paid too dearly, they now had, nevertheless, the full territory of the present park under their jurisdiction.

Along with the original request to the State legislature for permission to extend the park passed in April of 1859, the Board had submitted other proposed amendments that sought to extend or alter their powers. In addition to adding the sixty-five acres to the northern end of the site, they also asked that the position of President and Treasurer, which had assumed the proportions of a full time job, receive compensation. In addition, they wanted the power to create their own police force and to have the ceiling raised on the amount of funds available for the park's improvement. Lastly, and of some substantial interest, they sought the power to affect the city's plan or street system so that greater accessibility to the park would be possible from the more distant sections of the city. What they proposed was the widening of Seventh Avenue from 110th Street north to the Harlem River by making it 150 feet instead of the standard 100-foot width. There would be two 38-foot traffic lanes separated by a thirty-foot bridle path, and each of the main traffic

1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., pp. 53-54.

lanes would be flanked by a twenty-two foot pedestrian walkway on each side. This would make "an approach to the city from the north, of unsurpassed beauty." The same treatment was also suggested on the south of the park from where Seventh Avenue cut across Broadway up to 59th Street.[1]

All of these amendments were favorably acted on by the State, and the Board quickly moved to implement all of them, except the treatment of Seventh Avenue. Green was finally being paid for what had become his full time activity, more money was sought from the Common Council, and by 1860 a force of fifty uniformed men patrolled the park, preventing vandalism, enforcing decency, chasing away peddlers, and keeping commercial traffic off the Park roadways. These park keepers also enforced a set of rules established by the Board that were aimed at preserving the scenery being created in the park and protecting the rights of all to freely enjoy it.[2] As to the proposal to make Seventh Avenue a great multifunctional boulevard or entry way to the park, this was never accomplished, probably because the Common Council was not prepared to appropriate the sums of money that would have been necessary to improve a road still in the wilderness.

With these additional powers given them and the warmer weather of Spring approaching, the Board again put on its full work force complement and took up with the improvements that had been stalled over the winter months. It had become a popular activity for many individuals in the city to travel uptown to watch the massive construction effort underway at the park. This was not always easy, except by private conveyance, for most

1. Minutes, January 14, 1859.
2. For an example of some of the rules see Third Annual Report..., pp. 17-19; Minutes, November 1, 1860; Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op.cit., pp. 122-124.

of the roads leading to the park had not yet been graded and paved. The Third Avenue Railroad did go as high as 71st Street but the Fifth Avenue line stopped at 59th Street, nearly a mile below the pond.[1] In his usual colorful fashion George Templeton Strong provided a careful description of what the park was like in the midst of its improvement and what it was like to observe the army of laborers at work on the park. Leaving Wall Street early one afternoon in a carriage with two colleagues he set off

> "to explore the Central Park which will be a feature of the City within five years and a lovely place in A.D. 1900, when its trees will have acquired dignity and appreciable diameters. Perhaps the city itself will perish before then, by growing too big to live under faulty institutions corruptly administered....We entered the park at Seventy-First Street, on its east side, and made for "The Ramble," a patch just below the upper reservoir. Its footpaths and plantations are finished, more or less, and it is the first section of the ground that has been polished off and made presentable. It promises very well. So does all the lower park, though now in most ragged condition: long lines of incomplete macademization, "lakes" without water, mounds of compost, piles of blasted stone, acres of what may be greensward hereafter but is now mere brown earth; groves of slender young transplanted maples and locusts, undecided between life and death, with here and there an arboricultural experiment that has failed utterly and is a mere broomstick with ramifications. Celts, caravans of dirt carts, derricks, steam engines, are the elements out of which our future Pleasaunce is rapidly developing. The work seems pushed with vigor and system, and as far as it has gone, looks thorough and substantial. A small army of Hibernians is distributed over the ground. Harrowness is its chief drawback. One sees quite across this Rus in Urbe at many points. This will be less felt as the trees grow. The tract seems to have been judiciously laid out. Roads and paths twist about in curves of artistic tortuosity. A broad avenue, exceptionally straight (at the lower end of the park) with a quadruple row of elms, will look Versailles-y by A.D. 1950. On the Fifth Avenue side, the hideous State Arsenal building stares at students of the picturesque, an eyesore that no landscape gardening can alleviate. Let us hope it will soon be destroyed by an accidental fire."[2]

1. New York Times, December 11, 1858.
2. Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 2, pp. 454-455.

Upon his return in September from a similar sojourn, Strong would be very impressed with the extent of progress that had been made. He would observe that what had been a desert of blasted-out rock, stone heaps and cat briars had begun "to blossom out like a rose." And although many of the large transplanted elms had perished, there were many beautiful oases of path and garden culture"...sprung up, with neat paths, fine greensward, and hopeful young trees." Several of the bridges were already completed and the efficient conduct of the work force continued to impress him.[1] Olmsted was able now to report to the Board that instead of the four years at first contemplated in the estimates of the designers he now foresaw that three quarters of the whole park area would be completed and open in some measure to the public within fifteen months of when they had begun their work,[2]

At this point the Finance Committee of the Board of Commissioners issued a kind of interim financial statement and projection as to what the cost of improving the park had been and was likely to be. Through June of 1859, $2,083,000 had been authorized by the State, but only $1,200,000 had been appropriated for their use by the Common Council. Furthermore, the Committee estimated that the total cost of completing the park would finally be more than $3.5 million.[3] In addition, the committee pointed out that because there was no money as yet available for current operating expenses, a good deal of the money intended for construction and improvement was being drained off for current expenses. They recommended that the Board immediately petition the Common Council

1. Ibid., p. 458.
2. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 1, July 7, 1859, p. 5.
3. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 2, July 21, 1859, p. 8.

to provide operating expenses through general taxation of $160,000/year until 1361 and $120,000/year thereafter for the continued care, policing, maintenance, and superintendence of the park.[1]

The report that a great deal more money would be required to finish the park than had at first been anticipated brought an immediate response from predictable quarters. Commissioners Fields acting on behalf of Belmont, the two most consistently divisive members of the Board, offered a resolution expressing great "regret and astonishment at the immense discrepancy" and asked that the work of the park be cut back and forced to adhere to the original budgetary constraints.[2] The full Board did not agree, but this pronouncement was enough to move the Common Council on September 5th to appoint a committee to investigate the expenditures and the future financial needs of the Commissioners.[3] There was no report of wrong doing sought or forthcoming, but the real effect of having the Council consider this matter was their refusal for awhile to appropriate any more money for the park. Because they were about to run out of funds, work on the third and fourth transverse roads was suspended, the building of the expensive bridges and architectural ornamentation cut back,[4] and the size of the work force radically diminished.[5]

The problem of keeping an adequate flow of funds would continue to be a major problem for the Commissioners--and it was a problem that had to be fought on three fronts. First, there had to be agreement within the Commission of its necessity. Except for the occasional dissent of a few members, this was always possible. Secondly, the State legislature

1. Ibid., pp. 14-16.
2. Minutes, August 4, 1859.
3. Minutes, September 9, 1859.
4. Minutes, August 18, 1859.
5. Minutes, December 31, 1859.

had to be convinced to raise the permissible ceiling by amending the original law creating and providing for the governing of the park. On every occasion requested, they acted positively, but only after a series of hearings, investigative reports, debate and exposure to lobbying from both sides of the question. Lastly, the city's Common Council had to give their assent and actually vote to borrow the money and make it available to the Board. Here, too, the money was always forthcoming, but never without the long standing hostility between the two groups emerging in the form of arguments, accusations, committee investigations, executive veto, and attempts to tie its appropriation to some political quid pro quo. The result was the continued presence of a long lag between when the Commissioners perceived they would need the next increment of money and when the Council saw fit to release it. And thus it often seemed that the Commissioners were operating on the verge of bankruptcy and were constantly placed in the position of having to beg for the funds to which they felt they were legally entitled. The facts that the Commissioners had generally acted in a manner above reproach, that Olmsted and Green were running an efficient operation, and that there was a very favorable public response to the park, effectively combined to compel the Common Council ultimately to come forth with the requested funds. In addition, the Council did not wish to jeopardize the large expenditures already made for the park or the continued employment of so many of its constituents.

The particular occasion at hand, with the Commissioners running out of money to continue in the fall of 1859, illustrates in general how these periodic episodes transpired. First, the Board realizes that it may

shortly have to exceed its legal limit.[1] Fields and Belmont acting in the role of watchdogs of the public finances urge that improvement of the park be cut short and be done within the means of the funds on hand.[2] The Common Council appoints an investigatory committee.[3] The majority of the Board votes to petition the State for an increase in the Central Park improvement fund.[4] The Common Council passes, but the Mayor vetoes an already pending request for further money.[5] Green, Commissioner Russell, and the clerk of the Board, Mr. Van Nort go to Albany to lobby for the new bill. Fields denies an accusation that he is opposing the legislation by using his influence in Albany. It is rumored that the bill's main opposition is coming from two ex-commissioners (Hogg, Dillon) of the Board.[6] The bill is approved extending the borrowing limits, and allowing for the appropriation of annual operating expenses.[7] The Common Council takes no immediate action, waiting instead for the next financial crisis to mandate action.

This sort of constant political turmoil that had surrounded the park since its inception was beginning to take its toll. Olmsted, unsparing of himself and completely immersed in his work, personally supervising and driving the work force, seeking to complete the work well ahead of schedule, and under tremendous pressure and the object still of constant political harassment, was approaching a state of total exhaustion. Relations between Green and himself had been deteriorating, with Green in his role as the Commissioner's executive officer badgering him with

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1. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 2, July 21, 1859.
2. Minutes, August 4, 1859.
3. Minutes, September 9, 1959.
4. Minutes, September 15, 1859.
5. Minutes, December 31, 1859.
6. Minutes, March 21, 1860.
7. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 5, March 21, 1860.

various orders, suggestions for economy, and as Olmsted saw it, generally interfering.[1] The two strong personalities would continue to clash over a number of issues, leading Olmsted on a number of occasions to offer his resignation.[2] In addition, Olmsted had assumed substantial new personal responsibilities. His brother John Hull Olmsted, who had accompanied him on his walking tour of England and on one of his journeys to the South had recently died of tuberculosis in London. Partially out of a sense of duty to care for his brother's family, he married the strong-willed widow, Mary, thereby becoming stepfather to Mary and John's three children.[3] As the hot summer progressed, overworked and overburdened, his health broke. Suffering from exhaustion, frequent fevers, and probably bordering on the edge of the first of a series of nervous breakdowns,[4] Olmsted succumbed and requested a six-week leave of absence which the Board quickly granted. "I expect to sail by the Persia, next Wednesday" he wrote his father on September 23rd.[5] The Board gave him $500 for expenses so that he could visit some of the parks of Europe, and further gave him a letter of credit for one hundred pounds sterling asking him to procure drawings of various park entrances and designs of irrigation systems, then in use on the continent or in England.[6] Vaux, who all along had been retained as consulting architect would help fill in, while Green continued to direct the overall operations.

Almost simultaneous with Olmsted's temporary withdrawal, the Board

1. Letter, Andrew Haswell Green to Frederick Law Olmsted, November 17, 1860, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS, Box 28.
2. Elizabeth Barlow, op.cit., p. 25. Also see Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 4, p. 385.
3. Charles C. MacLaughlin, op.cit., p. 39.
4. See Albert Fein, Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition, op.cit., p. 4, footnote 2.
5. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to John Olmsted, Library of Congress, Olmsted MSS.
6. Minutes, September 23, 1859 and September 27, 1859.

acted to formalize the role in which Green had in fact long been functioning. At an early October meeting, the Board voted to have Green serve them as Treasurer, but redefining the position of Treasurer to be the full time executive administrator and comptroller of the park at a salary of $5000 per year. The vacated position of President was filled by Commissioner Blatchford.[1] Formally known as Comptroller, it was Green's duty to act as financial watchdog of the park and to administer the executive powers of the Board, leaving to the president only the power of presiding at meetings. This streamlining of the structure of authority within the park's leadership had the immediate effect of confirming what was already a fact, and insuring the continued hard-driving and energetic leadership Green had evidenced as elected head of the Board. Serving in this position for the next ten and one half years until his ouster by the Tweed Charter revision of 1870--by which time the park was essentially built--he provided the continuity and consistently strong leadership that was necessary to bring it through its constant travail. Familiar with every detail of the park, thoroughly aware of the realities of the local political situation, and adept at negotiating with and placating both local and state legislators, it was he who often single-handedly would successfully carry the park's banner into the numerous political battles.[2] Even his enemies granted his honest administration, and he particularly enjoyed the confidence and respect of reform-minded New Yorkers. For bringing into being this massive civic enterprise, Green has usually been overshadowed by the equally impressive Olmsted. It is clear from the record and his accomplishments, however, that more than Olmsted who was

1. Minutes, October 8, 1859.
2. Edward Hagaman Hall, "A Short Biography of Andrew Haswell Green," op.cit., pp. 156-163.

in fact his subordinate, it was he, first as Commissioner, then as Board President, and finally as executive head and comptroller, who provided the long term effective leadership that nursed the park to completion.

By the end of 1859, now quite clearly in control of the task of improving the park, the Board could happily announce that the park below 79th Street was "complete." With nearly half the park essentially done and most of the rest well underway, and with Olmsted returned and again in charge of the work force,[1] the Commissioners had good reason to be able to look ahead optimistically to its speedy completion. The year of 1860 was significant to the Board of Commissioners for, with one exception, it was one free of customary rancor, and rather one of continued forward motion and extreme quietude. During the Spring the activity of the Board began to ebb, for they made only minor decisions regarding regulations, park enclosures, and in general implemented already decided upon designs. It was often difficult to establish a quorum for the regularly scheduled meetings. And, as a further indication that an acceptable routine had been established, the Board voted in early July that all work on the park should proceed under the direction and management of Green and Olmsted. The assent of the executive committee, rather than the approval of the full Board, was all that would be necessary for action from here on.[2] Satisfied that all major policy decisions had been made, confident of the judgment of Green and Olmsted, and

1. Having visited the Parks of London, Paris, Brussels, Manchester, Dublin, and Cork, he had sailed for New York City on Dec. 5, 1859. Refreshed and again healthy, he brought back books, plans, photographs, drawings, and copies of park regulations which would become the basis of a number of modifications which he would present to the Board over the next several months. He also had selected a valuable collection of foreign trees and shrubs which would be shipped to the park during the following Spring. For his full report see Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 4, December 31, 1859.
2. Minutes, July 10, 1860.

relatively secure of sufficient funds to do the job, the Board withdrew from active participation, and in fact, met only twice from July 27, to October 9, 1860.

The single exception to this otherwise placid year of progress emanated from Albany where in the Spring a movement had been started to begin a complete and thorough investigation of the Board's behavior and financial condition. At this time, when the legislature had before it the request to amend the original Central Park Act and raise the ceiling of its improvement fund, the Senate had been convinced by enemies of the Park to demand of the Commissioners answers to a whole set of questions regarding how they had managed their affairs over the three years of their existence.[1] To this end a committee of three senators was constituted, composed of John Murphy, formerly an experienced and respected engineer, Allen Monroe, a merchant banker, and Francis M. Rotch, the vice president of the New York State Agriculture Society before his election to the Senate.[2] The two primary instigators of this action were two former commissioners, James Hogg and Robert Dillon, who charged amongst other things, that the Board had adopted an unreasonable plan and that the completion of the park would cost more than five million dollars rather than the two and one half that had been authorized. The accusations of these two men flew in the face of what had developed into overwhelming public opinion in favor of the park, as well as respectful approval of how the Board was conducting its improvement. The New York Times, long a loyal friend to the cause of the park, immediately led the

1. New York State Senate, Document No. 63, March 3, 1860.
2. Clarence C. Cook, op.cit., pp. 167-168.

counterattack. Beginning first by criticizing the syntax of an accusatory letter written by Dillon it went on to attempt to dispel the notion that there was any wrong doing connected with the park. The editor wrote,

> We know that our Park is prospering, and that it has proved no drain upon our resources; but on the contrary, in the words of the City Comptroller, promises to "afford more than sufficient means for the payment of interest on the debt incurred for its purchase and improvement, without any increase in the rate of taxation, simply through the increase in the amount of taxes accruing to the City in consequence of the enhancement caused by it in the value of real estate..."[1]

The Board also responded immediately by having its President, Blatchford, send a report to the senate explaining their main actions of the past, stating that they had nothing to hide, and insuring full cooperation with all aspects of the investigation.[2]

Seeking to touch the conscience of the city, the Times hammered away at the need for total vindication, lecturing its readers that they should stand in appreciation of the Commissioners' work.

> The people of New York, they may be sure, rejoice with them, not only in the escape of a noble enterprise already endeared to the popular heart, from the arena of partisan struggles and personal or political spites, but in the vindication of an important body of public functionaries from the odious imputation of "malfeasance." It is a sad sign of the times that this imputation should have been so lightly flung before the legislature....It illustrates the unhappy familiarity into which we have fallen with all kinds and degrees of official incapacity and dishonesty, that any man should venture to launch charges so serious... on grounds so frivolous and in a temper so hasty as the grounds Mr. Dillon laid down...[3]

The public was apparently in agremeent for when James Hogg appeared

1. New York Times, March 13, 1860, p. 4.
2. New York Times, supplement, March 13, 1860.
3. New York Times, March 19, 1860.

before the investigatory committee on June 18th to outline his formal charges, no other person showed up to aid the prosecution. And even Hogg frankly stated that he could not prove that any single commissioner had acted corruptly or dishonestly.[1]

The committee of Senators Murphy, Monroe and Rotch continued the hearings nonetheless and fulfilled their responsibility by calling more than fifty witnesses to testify about the park, during the summer of 1860. The result of their deliberations was released in the form of a fifty-six page report, given in the Senate on January 25, 1861. The report traced all the activities of the Commission since its inception, carefully audited its financial records, reviewed its work rules, and its means employed to manage the work force efficiently, and even sought the expert opinion of a Swiss architect and engineer, Julius Kellersberger, on the quality and appropriateness of the "Greensward" plan. The committee exonerated the park and the Commissioners on all counts, and in fact the report was by and large a laudatory document in praise of the endeavor. The committee concluded its investigation by saying,

> ...The park is its own justification. It is open to public examination; it has received approbation of the public with an almost unprecedented unanimity, and meets fresh encomiums as it daily develops its attractions. The committee do not hesitate to assert that already, in its infancy, it has promises of beauties and convenience far surpassing those of any of the parks of the Old World.[2]

The committee was entirely satisfied. There was no malpractice proven, no lack of integrity evident, and in fact their statement actually

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1. New York State Senate, "Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Examine into the Condition, Affairs, and Progress of the New York Central Park," reprinted in Fourth Annual Report..., pp. 63-64.
2. As quoted Edward Hagaman Hall, "Central Park in the City of New York," op.cit., pp. 477-478.

displayed a degree of pride in how the Commissioners had conducted their business. What had Dillon and Hogg accomplished? They certainly did not bring forth any material that would serve to indict the behavior of the Board, nor could they, under the circumstances, realize any personal satisfaction from their prosecution. Most importantly, they did not develop any degree of public outrage over their charges. The only support at all received was from a few individuals who came forth to testify that they would like to see some changes adopted in the plan, and a letter to an editor from the head of a concerned tax payers association who expressed fear at the total cost of the park's improvement.[1] In fact, the investigation that had been pushed by the two ex-commissioners had an effect quite opposite from anything they ever intended, for seeing the park under fire, most citizens, led by the newspapers, rallied to its defense. Positive public support was galvanized by the findings of the committee, and the park, now seen as quite free of any taint or suspicion, became less subject to interference or meddling by public officials.

Just a few weeks before the investigatory committee issued its final report in January of 1861, one event occurred that was carefully kept from public notice to avoid any unfavorable publicity in Albany. Olmsted offered his resignation from the position of Architect-in-Chief, citing the harassment of restrictions imposed by the Board, and particularly the constant chaffing of personalities resulting from the close supervision of Green. In particular Olmsted had been criticized for the constant adjustments and elaborations to the details of the plan which he felt were

1. New York Times, March 15, 1860, p. 2.

critical, but the Board and Green saw as time-consuming and potentially costly. With no real desire to leave his position with the park,[1] he nonetheless felt that their attitude represented a growing lack of confidence in his judgment. Displaying his pique, he explained again to them why his behavior was necessary, in fact, critical to the final outcome of the park. The park

> ...is a natural, spontaneous, individual action of imagination--of creative fancy. I mean that the best conceptions of scenery, the best plans, details of plans--intentions--the best are not contrived by effort, but are spontaneous and instinctive and no man would be worthy of my office, who did not know that he must depend for his best success, less upon any strong effort, than upon a good instinct. There are circumstances favorable to the action of this good instinct, and there are circumstances unfavorable to it....The work of design necessarily supposes a gallery of mental pictures, and in all parts of the park I constantly have before me, more or less distinctly, more or less vaguely, a picture, which as Superintendent I am constantly laboring to realize.[2]

The lack of an adequately trained professional staff to aid him was, as well, a primary complaint he conveyed to the Board. Since Olmsted had within the last year badly broken his leg when thrown from a horse, and yet still felt it necessary to provide personal supervision of the work force by being carried around the park on a litter, this seemed a particularly sensitive issue to Olmsted. Yet masked behind all that was explicit in his offered letter of resignation, was the real issue that bothered Olmsted, and this was a question of personality. The temperaments of the two main actors in this stage of the park's drama, Green and Olmsted, were so fundamentally different that the conflict that materialized was

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1. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, December 8, 1860, quoted in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 64
2. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to Board of Commissioners of Central Park, January 22, 1861, reprinted in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit.,II, pp. 309-310.

probably inevitable. One commentary has described Green's personality in these terms: "His temperament appears to have been that of an honest, active-minded, self-confident, masterful man, intolerant of opposition, perhaps rather lacking in sense of humor, apt to carry his vigilance in the city's behalf roughshod over the beliefs of others equally honest and sincere and sometimes no less intelligent. Apparently he was not free from what is perhaps the most besettling limitation of executives of great personal energy--unwillingness or inability to delegate plenary powers to subordinates.....and refrain from dictorial interference in the details of their work. He was sort of a practical idealist, perhaps a little obstinate in his methods of realizing the ideals he so constantly had to defend."[1]

In contrast to the Comptroller, Olmsted, certainly no less an idealist, has been correctly depicted as more the sensitive artist and efficient manager of the work force. Acting in a subordinate role to the demanding and powerful executive head, Olmsted interpreted many of Green's directives and actions as being an unwarranted, even arbitrary interference in the on-going process of creation and management.[2] These he viewed as wholly his own domain. Neither questioned the other's dedication to the cause of the park, nor the commitment to seeing the Greensward plan brought to its best conclusion, but in the chore of getting the job done, Olmsted found the frequent confrontations to be untenable. Not wishing to plot against Green, he concluded, "to quarrel with him while I am his official subordinate would be undignified and impolitic, and would be playing into the hands of the enemies of the park."[3]

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1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, pp. 70-71.
2. Ibid., pp. 71-73.
3. Ibid., p. 73.

With the formal notification of resignation before it, the Board held a series of discussions with Olmsted. Not wishing to lose his valuable services, the majority agreed that the exact nature of his authority would be redefined so that he would have greater personal latitude in managing his specific aspects of the park's development.[1] Olmsted withdrew his resignation and to avoid any public disclosure of this internal riff, all evidence of it was carefully expunged from the public record.

During this difficult encounter and the hectic year of investigation that preceded it, the nation had been moving inexorably toward civil war. With the firing on Fort Sumter, on April 12, 1861, the park, city and entire nation became engrossed with preparation for the fighting. In June of that year, Olmsted finally did resign his position to take the appointment as Executive Secretary to the United States Sanitary Commission in Washington. He had attempted to enlist, but was rejected because of his age and the fact that he still was lame from the broken thigh. Instead with the same energy and devotion he had characteristically displayed at the park, he threw himself into the job of administering this forerunner of the American Red Cross whose duty it was to provide medical care, supplies and evacuation services for the Union troops.[2] This turn of events left the park, for all reasonable purposes, under the direction of Green. Vaux was contracted to carry on Olmsted's duties, but with overall authority for the completion of the park still vested wholly in the executive committee

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1. Letter, Frederick Law Olmsted to John Olmsted, March 22, 1861, reprinted in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., p. 65.
2. For an intimate account of the Commission and Olmsted's role, see numerous references in Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 3, passim. Also Laura Wood Roper, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Port Royal Experiment," The Journal of Southern History, XXXI (August, 1965), pp. 272-284.

of the Board which strongly respected Green and usually followed his lead, the fact was that the remaining work on the park would be fully determined and directed by the Comptroller. At an early June meeting the Board restated its desire to have all operating decisions made by the executive committee, and from then until nearly the beginning of October no scheduled meeting was able to attract a quorum. Satisfied with the park's progress and the leadership in charge, they turned their attention to more pressing national events, and served the cause of the park in little more than a caretaker relationship.[1]

With a large part of the work on the plan accomplished or underway, with sufficient funds apparently assured to them,[2] with political interference in temporary abatement, and fully exonerated of the charges of malfeasance and mismanagement, it would have seemed like an appropriate time for the Board to take stock of their accomplishment. Yet, preoccupied with the developments of the war, as were the rest of the citizens of New York, the majority of the Board now saw the Park as having very much a secondary claim on their attention. And there was little real need to assess what they had done, for the State investigatory report issued a few months earlier, had in fact said it all. Nearly everyone was pleased with the findings of this report and was delighted with the prospect of the park's promise. Some observers, unable to control their imagination, when confronted by the park, waxed poetic.

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1. Minutes, June 8, 1861.
2. The total funds authorized for improving the park are given in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit.,II, p. 65. "In the Act of 1857, the Legislature set one hundred thousand dollars as the maximum annual interest on the sum for which stock could be issued for the construction of the Park. This sum was increased by the Act of 1859 to bear an annual interest of $125,000. Reckoned with interest at six percent the revised capital sum was $2,833,333. In March 1860, an additional capital sum to bear an annual interest of $150,000 was voted for construction; or a total appropriation of $4,583,333."

> As the spectator stands upon a chiseled crag at the entrance to that lovely maze of hill and valley, stream and lawn, of the Great Central Park--The Ramble--he is reminded of the charming story in the "Arabian Nights"....
>
> What awful solitudes and mystic fastnesses are mimicked there! Rip Van Winkle might doze away a lifetime in these dreamy wilds, or grotesque gnomes might revel in their grim recesses....the whispering melody glides along the uncertain dewy distances which hem the "mighty Hudon," until it expires in the purple remoteness of the heights of Harlem and the pearly-painted screen of hills beyond. It is a truly lovely scene, wondrous in its delicate detail and splendid spread of glad and leafy woodland--a sylvan miracle, teeming with bowers of romantic loveliness and dripping fountains of clearest crystal--a worthy jewel in the crown of the Queen of the Atlantic.[1]

Perhaps a more realistic picture of the park's wonders at this stage of the park's development is this description given by one of the local newspapers a few months before the beginning of the war:

> ...the Park when purchased by the city was a straggling suburb, covered with low, squalid houses, inhabited by a class of persons whose occupations were really nuisances... in short, the ground was used as a sort of repository for all sorts of rubbish...[Now] this unsightly spot of ground is neither a park, a stone yard, nor a piece of waste ground.... After three year's labor and the expenditure of millions of dollars New York is almost as parkless now as ever. For all practical purposes the Central Park is at present useless, and there seems to be not the slightest probability that it will answer the real purpose for which New Yorkers need a park for years to come. Incomplete, unfinished, with only promises here and there of good things to come, with no shade, with walks and drives beginning in dust, running along sand banks and stone yards, and ending, like humanity, in dust again, the Central Park, instead of attracting a greater number of visitors, is losing its habitues who flock away to Jones' Wood, to Hoboken, to any place where there is shade, and it is visited now only by a few rural strangers who go to see the Park as they go to see Barnum's,or any other of our city sights.[2]

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1. "General View of the Central Park," Harper's Weekly, IV (June 16, 1360), p. 378.
2. New York State Commission to Select and Locate Lands for Public Parks in the 23rd and 24th Wards of New York City, Report to the New York Legislature of the Commission to Select and Locate Lands for Public Parks...etc., New York, 1884, pp. 73-74.

Certainly, the already large attendance figures gathered for the park and the overwhelming general acclaim in evidence belies this rather disparaging view of the park's utility while in the midst construction. True, the park's scenic assets would not be evident for many decades, and it must have appeared a rather bald landscape for those who over-anxiously expected it to be in full and immediate bloom at an instant. On the other hand, the highly romantic assessment of the park that attempts to portray it as a small corner of the Garden of Eden is no more realistic a description at this juncture, or for that matter at any period in the history of the park. The truth, of course, rests somewhere in the middle. The park at the outbreak of the Civil War, was, as described, well on its way to completion and considering the constraints that had affected its construction, its progress was all the more impressive. Much remained to be done, but for the first time since its inception, it now appeared certain that New York City would have its park, and would have it in a form both attractive and useful to all its residents.

CHAPTER VII

FURNISHING AND FINISHING

Turning from civic improvement to questions of war preparedness with an obvious need to now protect its residents and the north's most vital port, the city erected defensive works at the Narrows and Fort Hamilton. In the upper bay and closer into the island, additional fortifications were mounted on Governor's Island, the South Battery, on Bedlow's and Ellis Island, at Throgg's Neck in the Sound as well as other strategic locations. These were supplied with more than six hundred guns. Three hundred more were available down the New Jersey shore at Sandy Hook, and at Hoboken an immense floating battery was under construction.[1]

One New York resident who had gone to New Orleans in late March, commented on the great transformation of the city as he returned to view it again in May:

> When he crossed the Hudson River into the great city of almost a million inhabitants, it seemed to him like a vast military camp. The streets were swarming with soldiers. Among the stately trees in Battery Park white tents were standing and sentinels were pacing. Rude barracks filled with men were covering portions of City Hall Park, and heavy cannon were arranged in a line near the fountain, surrounded by hundreds of soldiers, many of them in the gay costume of the Zouave.[2]

The Central Park, itself, would also not escape the exigencies of war, for in a few short months it too would come into use as a military camp ground, with troops quartered in tents, horses pastured in it, and camp fires kept burning throughout it during both night and

1. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1893.
2. Benson J. Lossing, History of New York City, as quoted, Ibid.

day.[1] At first this use of city's parks was tolerated as a necessary requirement, but as time passed with New York City in no real danger of attack, it became increasingly evident that the parks were being badly abused by this use. The Common Council passed a resolution in 1863 directing the street commission to remove the national troops still quartered within the city's squares and parks. It demanded, furthermore, that damages be paid to restore the parks to their former condition. Mayor Opdyke vetoed these measures, but under this criticism, the troops were shortly removed and some effort was made to bring the parks back to their original condition.[2]

At the outbreak of the war, however, public officials were quite unconcerned with the future of the parks, rather rightfully feeling that other matters deserved priority. The Board of Supervisors of the County of New York, for example, adopted a resolution urging all civic enterprises that drew money from their treasury, to suspend work "so far as may be warranted by a proper regard for the public interest." The commissioners of the Central Park, though sympathetic to the intent of what had been resolved, responded by reminding them of the special conditions "that the discontinuance of work at this time when employment is with difficulty obtained, will be particularly onerous .... it would be expensive and uneconomical. Many structures on the Park are unfinished and will sustain damage if not protected and completed .... The Commissioners .... do not deem this a time for public bodies to manifest a greater degree of timorousness and apprehension than has yet been shown

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Spoils of the Park ...," op. cit., p. 428.
2. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1909.

by businessmen in their affairs, nor do they believe that they would be justified in a suspension of their work."[1]

The supervisors apparently agreed with these arguments, for on July 9th, they rescinded their motion and allowed the park commissioners to continue their work and maintain their momentum toward finishing the park. The structures which they mentioned as being half finished, are an important part of the overall history and design of the park, and in themselves deserve our attention. The basic landscape construction of the park, as has been discussed, was well on its way to conclusion. And, although the lack of maturity of its plantings and its new embankments, ditches, roads and lakes, gave the impression of being incomplete, it was in general outline accomplished. By the end of the war, virtually all of its details would be fully articulated. On the other hand, this four year interval would be the period during which the various architectural artifacts -- the bridges, the structures and other permanent man-made ornamentation -- would be conceived, or constructed or placed into use in the Park. A few of the structures that would be placed in the park, had from the outset been designated by the Commission as necessary to the proper functioning of a public park. Others, which over time would become all too numerous, would be foisted on the park by well-intentioned donors or in fact be forced on the park by public organizations that saw in the open, attractive and centrally located tract of land, the ideal setting for their purpose. Very shortly, after the park was laid out, it became clear that it would be under immense pressure to accommodate buildings of all sorts. This was clearly not the original intent of the designers or the Commissioners.

1. Quoted in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 63.

The original "Greensward" plan by Olmsted and Vaux, following essentially the guidelines established by the Board, included architectural elements of two sorts -- those required by the provisions of the contest, and those which were placed into the plan by the designers as integral parts of their proposed treatment or effect. There were few of the first sort, for the commission's guidelines suggested only that sites be reserved for a prospect or viewing tower, a major fountain, and a hall for exhibits and concerts. None of these materialized quickly, for they were expensive additions and the primary effort of the Board went first into the preparation of the grounds. Nonetheless, these and most of the other architectural elements of the park were conceived, designed or actually constructed during the war years. The observation tower was embraced in a building that became known as the Belvedere, which was in fact a miniature romanesque castle set on a high hill, north of the ramble and on the very edge of the second transverse road. Following its design by Vaux, construction was initiated in 1868, and upon its completion four years later, it served as an observation tower and rest house for the park visitors.[1] As to providing a hall for concerts and exhibits, this was solved in a much more complex fashion. An outdoor music pavillion had been erected in 1862 from designs prepared by one of Vaux's assistants, Jacob Wrey Mould. It stood at the head of the mall and to the west. Outdoor concerts had been given in the park since 1859, and a decade later the twice a week band performances that were scheduled, were drawing immense crowds during good weather. As to the provision of a permanent all weather or indoor structure for this purpose, the commissioners did not initiate this, although over

1. Clarence C. Cook, op. cit., p. 122.

the years concerts would be given from a number of the buildings within the park.[1] On the matter of providing for exhibits or essentially a museum space, this requirement would ultimately be accommodated near the park, but only after a long series of events.

The state arsenal building, built in 1848 for military purposes, was one of the few buildings left standing after the park's acquisition. When it first came under the control of the Park Board, it was used for a number of purposes, including the payroll and timekeeping center for workers, and as headquarters for the park police. During the Civil War it reverted to military use, but upon the cessation of hostilities, it was refurbished to house a small but developing zoological and natural history collection of such things as stuffed and mounted birds, mammals, fishes, serpents and massive skeletons of prehistoric animals. Outside of the arsenal were cages with live bears, eagles, reptiles, and a variety of specimen animals.[2] These functions were maintained within the building until 1874, when the present Museum of Natural History was constructed on what had formerly been one of the city's original open spaces, Manhattan Square, adjoining the park and bounded by Eighth and Ninth Avenues between Seventy-seventh and Eighty-first Streets. This move to a place near but outside the Park, removed a potentially busy use from the park, and one which in the eyes of the Commissioners would later be viewed as increasingly incompatible with free enjoyment and intended effect of the park.

Interestingly, one more museum use was deflected from the park during the same period. In 1861, the New York Historical Society had

1. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
2. J. F. Richmond, New York and Its Institutions, 1609-1872, New York, 1872, pp. 160-163.

sought the use of the arsenal for their library and exhibit area.[1] Unsuccessful, they, too, would ultimately build their home outside the park, and in fact on the parcel of land directly south and adjacent to the Museum of Natural History. Later in its life the Arsenal would be used as a meteorological observatory, as stables, and now as the headquarters of the City Parks Department, but never again as a museum or exhibit hall.

The Commissioners and their designers were at first eager to have the park used as a setting for educational purposes, and when in 1869 the state legislature authorized the location of the Metropolitan Museum of Art within the park, they generally welcomed it. And with the construction of this building, the park finally had its permanent exhibit hall as outlined in its original provisions. Only as time passed, with the museum expanding further into the park, and with other similar groups then attempting to use this act as precedent for their desire for a piece of the park, did park officials realize that the museum represented a serious encroachment.[2] On the balance, however, the park had come out ahead, for two of the three proposed museums were located outside the park's boundaries though in close proximity. As later critics would note, the commissioners' interest in a museum for the park was probably mistaken. Such a use was incompatible with the main functions of the park, and indeed with the addition of numerous architectural ornaments and statues, the park itself became a museum for both the natural and fine arts.

1. Minutes, December 5, 1861.
2. For a full history of the museums and their relationship to the park see, Jay E. Cantor, "The Museum in the Park," The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, XXVI (April, 1968) pp. 333-340.

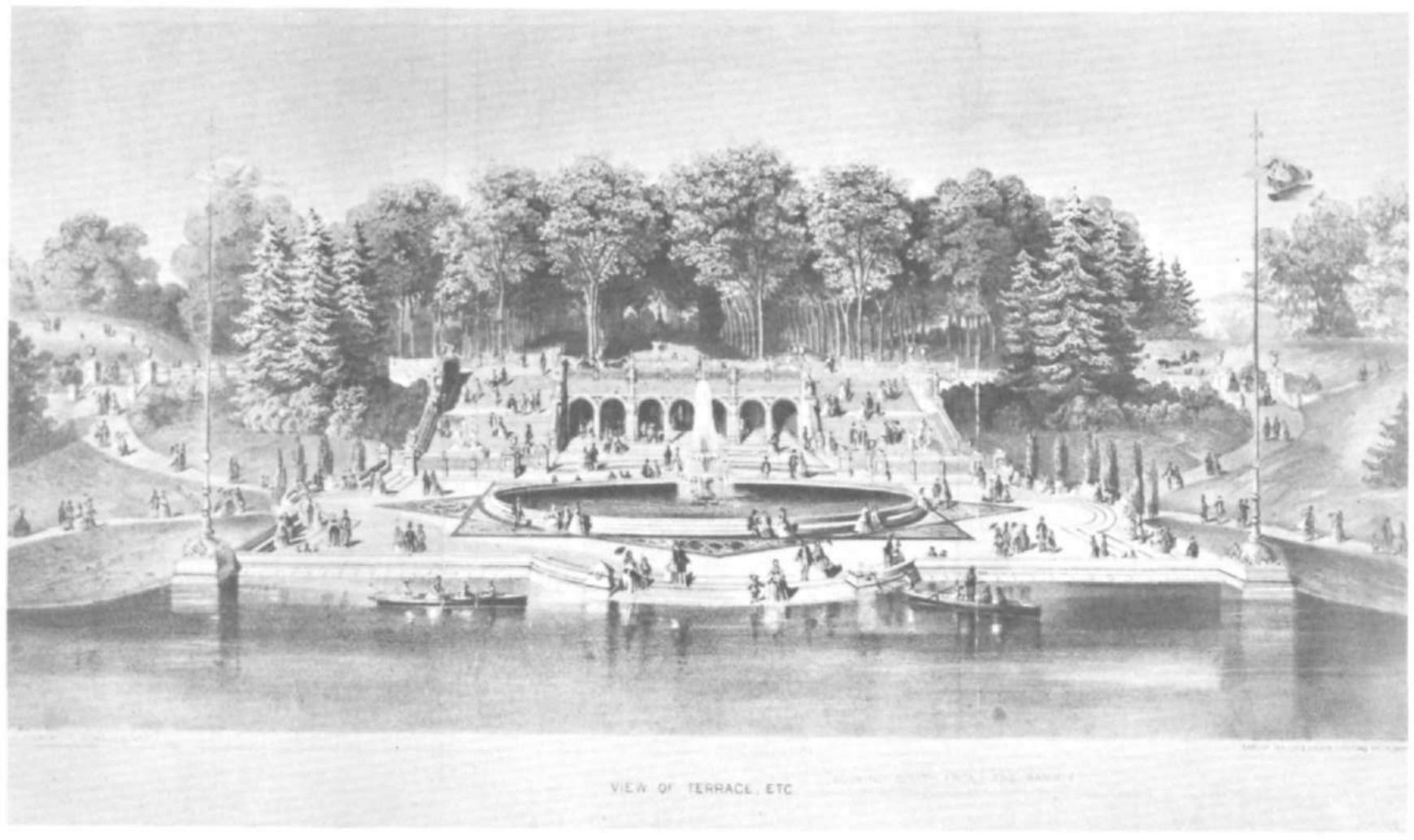
The last architectural element which had been specified from the outset, was an ornate fountain which in a formal way would introduce and highlight the use of water within the picturesque plan. As conceived by Olmsted and Vaux, and integrated into their plan, this was to be a major component of the central, formal element introduced by the Mall. The large Bethesda Fountain, cast in bronze in Munich, would sit as a center piece of the formal ensemble which defined and terminated the northern end of the Mall. Part of the mid-Victorian interest in dramatic prospect, this ensemble was made up of a combination of four elements. Extending from the end of the mall was a plaza which looked down to the terrace and lake and ramble beyond. Centered in the middle of the terrace was a round pool in which the fountain was mounted. And between the two staircases leading down to the terrace, at the lower level, an arcade goes back under the plaza and roadway opening into a deep long gallery covered by a minton tile ceiling.[1] All of this was freely decorated by the expert immigrant stonecarvers then available in the New York labor force, so that there are many elaborate carvings of fruit, animals and birds visible. The sandstone balustrades contained allegorical representations of the four seasons. One later observer described it all in these terms:

> The northern end of the Mall terminates in a balustrade. Broad steps lead through an arched under pass down to a brick terrace that extends to the Lake. In the center of the Terrace is Bethesda Fountain, the only piece of statuary arranged for in the original plans. Like the ornamented pilasters and balustrades of the stairways and the arcade, the bronze Bethesda, wings outspread, was executed by Emma Stebbins after

1. Clay Lancaster, "Central Park, 1851-1951," Magazine of Art, XXXXIV(April, 1951) p. 123. The basic design of this area was conceived by Vaux, but most of the details were executed by his assistant, Jacob Wrey Mould.

Figure 10. View of the Terrace, Bethesda Fountain and Mall as Proposed in 1859.

Drawn by C. Vaux and J. W. Mould and published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Third Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1860.



VIEW OF TERRACE, ETC.

> the design by architect J. Urey Gould. Worn stone, gurgling fountain, and the wooded hillside of the Ramble across the Lake succeed more than any other spot in the park in fulfilling the intent of Olmsted to take the city dweller out of his urban surroundings.[1]

The entire effect of this ensemble, of which the required fountain was but a central feature, was one of elaborate monumentality and by further completing the symmetry of the mall, it, too, stood quite in dramatic contrast to the smooth lawns and soft natural effects surrounding them. Particularly in the summer the white hue of the dominant material, Albert freestone, contrasted with the brilliant colors of the blossoming flowers planted on the adjoining slopes. Well underway by 1861, this spot became a favorite gathering place, as the park came into freer public use during the war.

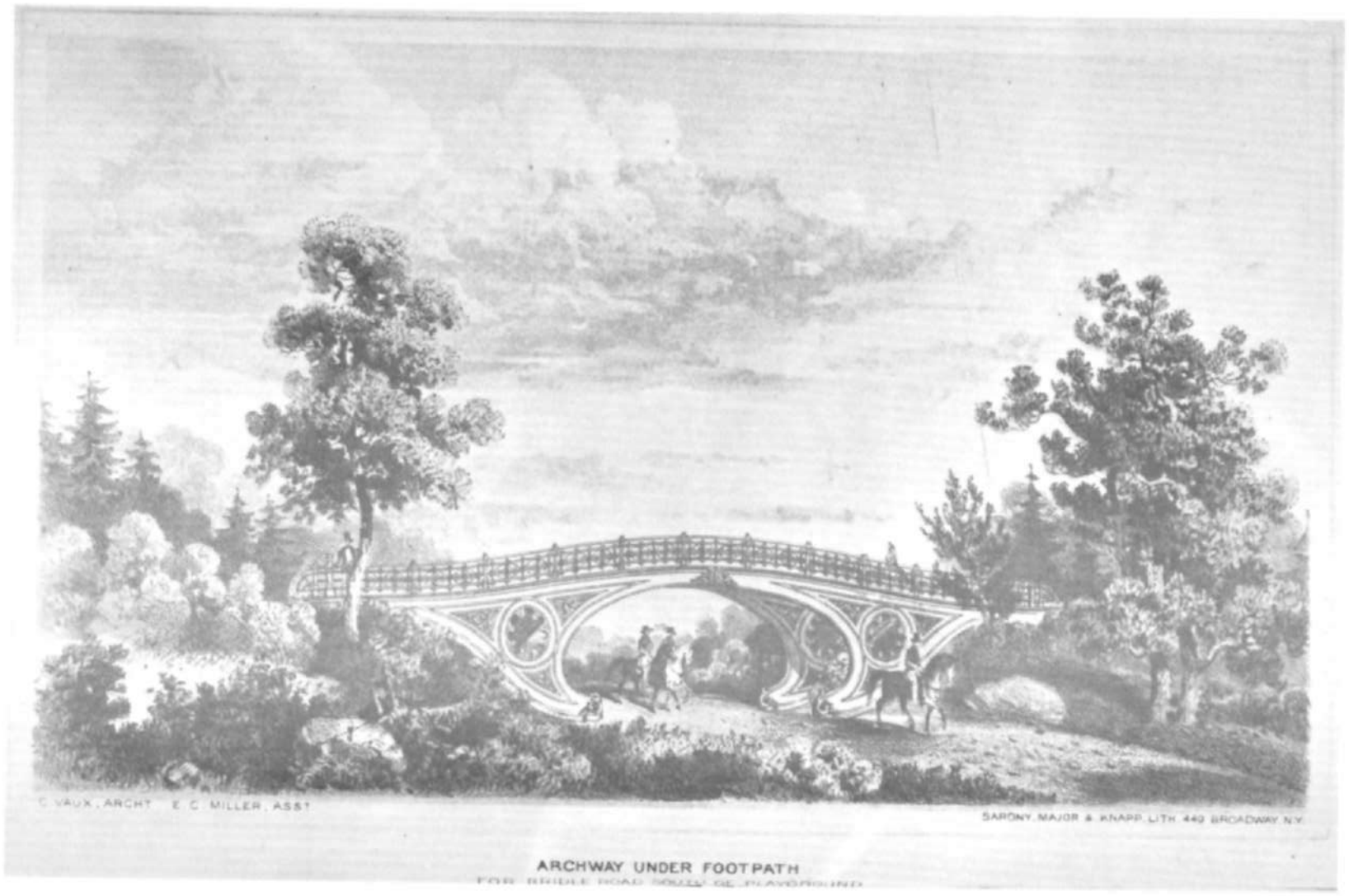
Also during this period, many of the bridges and archways necessitated by the hierarchical road system devised by Olmsted and Vaux were nearing completion, and while they had not specifically been required by the Commissioners, they were integral elements which in a broad sense became architectural features. In addition to those at the major transverse roads, there were forty three spans, acting to traverse ponds or brooks or to conduct the walks and drives over one another. They were so numerous and varied as to defy any reasonable classification, ranging from small rustic foot bridges made of raw bark-covered logs, marble and granite arches, to broad sweeping spans in cast iron. Stylistically, they reflected all the popular aspects of victorian taste, and while their ornamental aspects were frequently in evidence it was also uncharacteristically subdued. Often the decoration was just

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1. Federal Writers' Project, New York City Guide New York, 1939, p. 353.

Figure 11. View of Footpath Bridge Designed by Calvert Vaux, 1860.

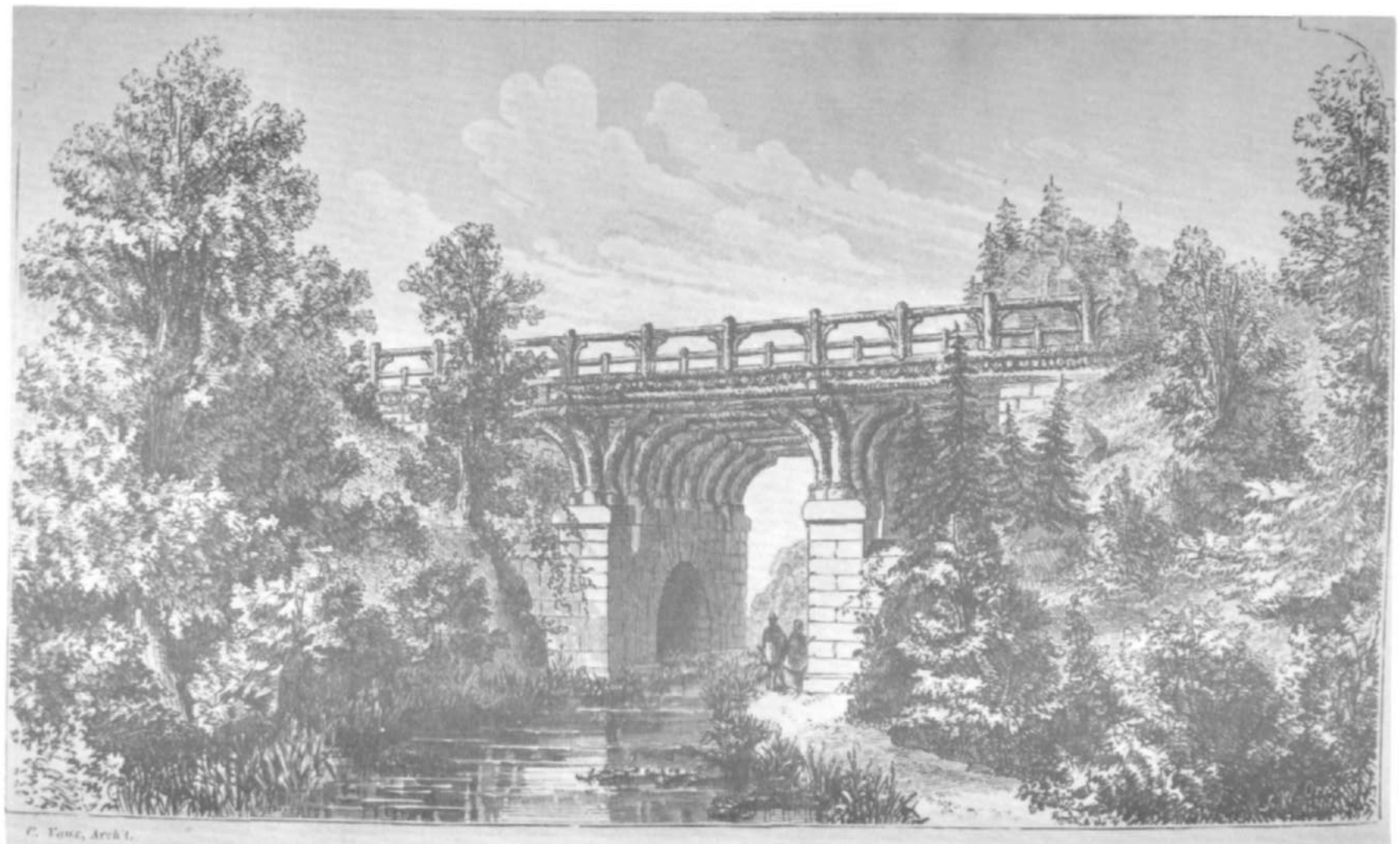
Published in the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Third Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1860.



ARCHWAY UNDER FOOTPATH

Figure 12. View of Rustic Carriage Drive Bridge, Designed by Calvert Vaux, 1862.

Published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Sixth Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1863.



C. Vaux, Arch't.

RUSTIC BRIDGE, FOR CARRIAGE DRIVE, NORTH OF THE MEADOWS.

limited to a fanciful design on the ironwork railings. Their main purpose was, of course, functional, but as a part of the built environment, they had also to be considered in terms of aesthetic impact. Most all of them were designed by Vaux or under his direction and their competition with or intrusion on the landscape was kept to a minimum.

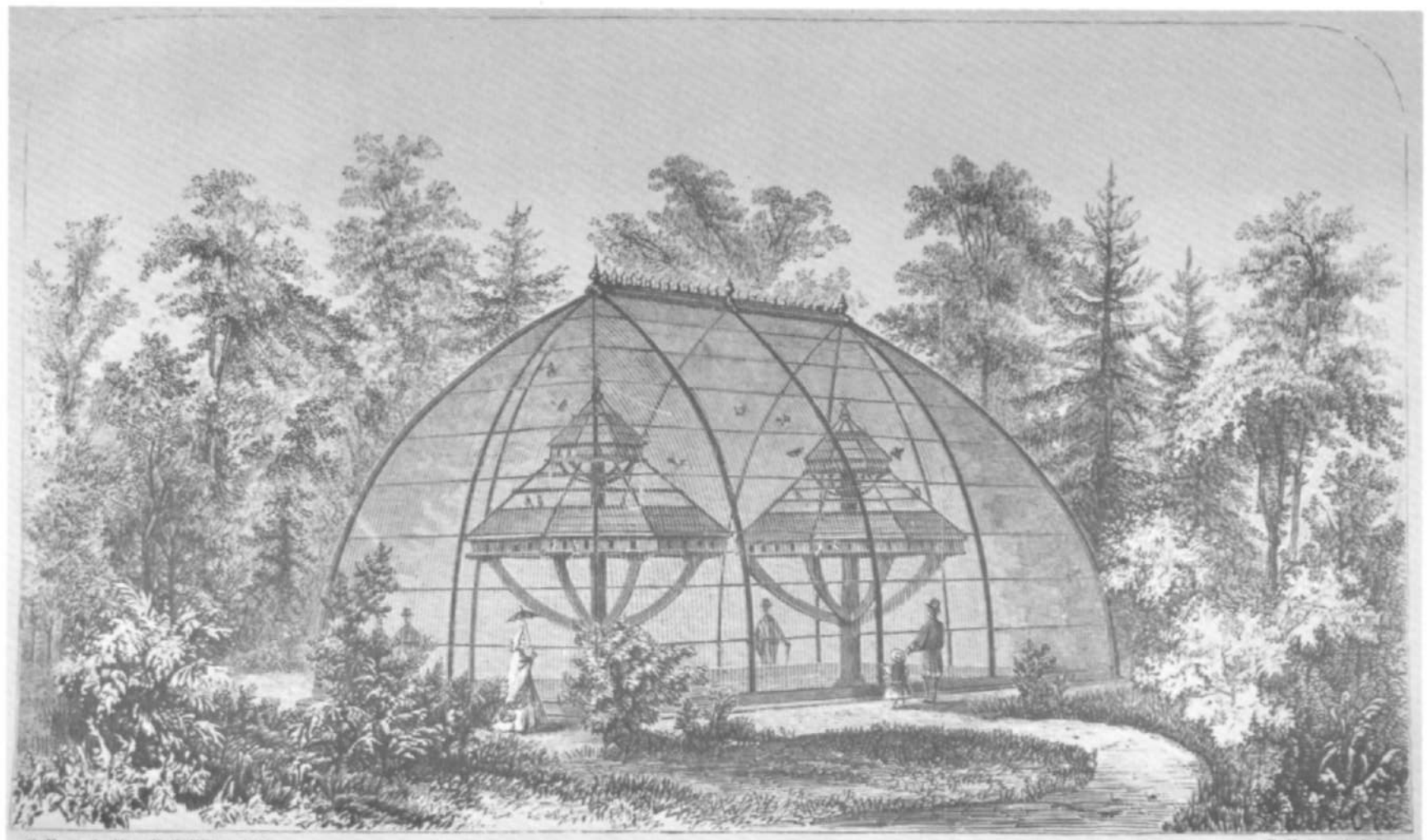
Related to the bridges, in terms of functional additions to the park, were the numerous small tiny artifacts that were designed and quickly added to the park for a host of purposes. Essentially all designed by Vaux or other trained professionals, these included such "street furniture" as light standards, park benches, drinking fountains, as well as special functional structures such as small boat houses, rest stations or a dove cote. The fine detailing and careful design even at this scale or level was representative of the concern with overall effect which had emerged as the consistent policy of the board during this early period.

Many more substantial buildings which were never originally considered, or were purposely left until a later stage of the park's development, began to appear during the decade of the sixties, and many would become important landmarks in the park for many decades. Regrettably many have been subsequently abused or destroyed. For example, in 1864, Vaux designed a Casino or restaurant on the east side of the park near the Seventy-second Street entrance. A handsome brick cottage, it was leased to concessionaires who vended food and refreshments to visitors.[1] It was destroyed long ago. Also under Vaux's direction, a mineral spring's pavillion was erected in 1868, at the request of local

1. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op. cit., p. 100.

Figure 13. Dove Cot designed by Calvert Vaux, 1862.

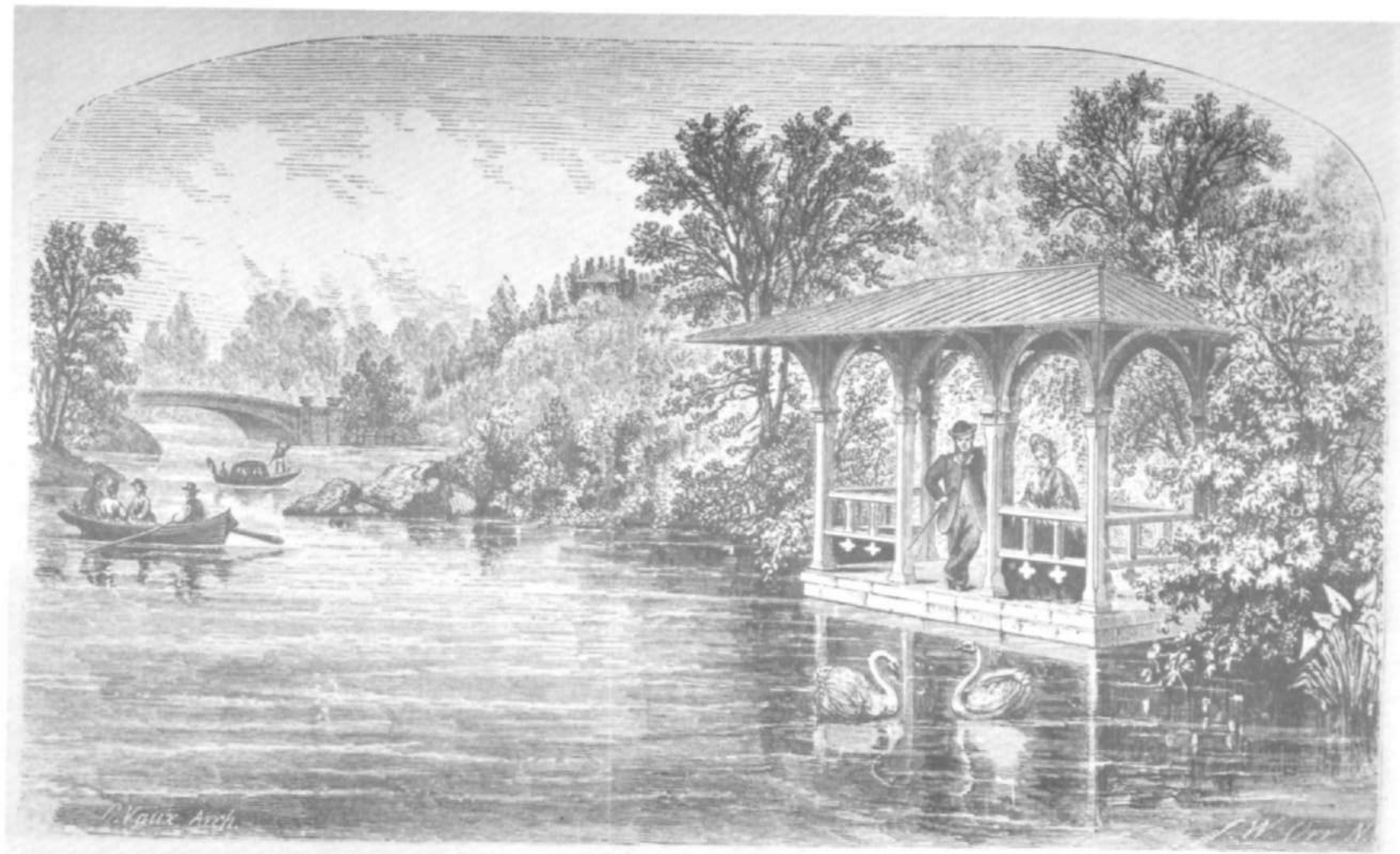
Drawn by B. Hufnagel and published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Sixth Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1863.



C. Vaux, Arch't. *E. C. Miller, Ass't.* DOVE COT. *B. Hufnagel, Del.*

Figure 14. View of Boat Landing on Central Park Lake, 1863.

Drawn by J. W. Orr and published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Seventh Annual Report, for the Year Ending with December 31, 1863. New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1864.



BOAT-LANDING, NORTH-EAST OF THE LAKE

doctors and residents who had great faith in the curative powers of taking 'the waters'. Initially run by the firm of Schultz and Walker, for many years their product helped those with gout, liver ailments, and most other diseases. In 1960, this structure, too, was torn down.[1]

A small dairy in gothic revival style was placed in the park in 1870, a little to the west of the mall's entrance. It dispensed fresh milk and other light refreshments for children. Tethered nearby on a piece of meadowland, were a long string of cows. This building is now a storage shed.[2] In the same year the Sheepfold was placed into use. This building was occupied by a shepherd, his wife and two hundred sheep which were used to help keep the many acres of grass clipped in the days before lawn mowers were in common use. It is now the Tavern-on-the-Green restaurant situated at the western end of the Sixty fifty Street transverse road.[3]

It is not the intention of this work to provide a catalogue of all the structures that were once or are presently within the park. Simply to identify every architectural addition to the site and to review briefly the history of its conception, would be a formidable task well beyond the rightful scope of this inquiry.[4] It has been rather the intent to mention a few of the representative architectural additions to the park that reflect in a general way the common use of structures within the landscape. What is most important here is not the individual

1. Ibid., pp. 69-70. It was located in the southeast quadrant of the park just north of the sheep meadow.
2. Ibid., p. 107.
3. Eugene Kinkead and Russell Maloney, "Central Park: Grass on Manhattan," The New Yorker, Vol. 17[2] (September 13, 1941).
4. For more on this subject see, Reed and Duckworth, op. cit. and Clarence C. Cook, op. cit.

pieces of architecture or ornament but the manner in which they served the park and their careful relationship to the landscape plan.

As early as 1864, when it was becoming increasingly clear that buildings and other architectural ornamentation were becoming more numerous than initially anticipated, the Commissioners went on record as to the subordination of buildings to the landscape:

> So far as is consistent with the convenient use of the grounds, vegetation should hold first place of distinction: it is the work of nature, invulnerable to criticism, accepted by all, as well the cultivated as the ignorant, and affords a limitless field for interesting observation and instruction.
>
> There is not only fitness in this idea, but there is safety. All art work is the subject of animadversion; much of it sinks beneath observation: it is the fortune of but very little of it to escape wide censure, less of it finds permanent acceptance. Such as finds a place in the Park in answer to the demands of convenience and pleasure should therefore be subordinate to its recognized natural features and in harmony with them, not impertinently thrusting itself into conspicuous notice, but fitly fulfilling the purposes for which it is admitted. Art, as the follower and student of nature, is dignified: in so high a service there is scope and range enough to meet the requirements of the loftiest genius. Neither variety in design nor poverty in detail are wanting in the school in which nature is exemplar, architecture and all the kindred arts that are brought into use on the Park rejecting all symbolisms of classic and pagan mythology as things of a past civilization, and leaving out the petrified emblems of exploding faiths, should be submissive to the predominance of nature and illustrate the purer faith of our age.[1]

Olmsted, a year later, then back in New York after leaving the Sanitary Commission in late 1863 and, after having spent two years in California managing the huge Mariposa Estate of the Fremonts,[2] echoed these sentiments in the first Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for whom he and Vaux were then working to develop plans for Prospect Park.[3] What was now emerging under the pressure of building within the park, was an additional chapter in the aesthetic credo which guided its

1. Eighth Annual Report, pp. 26-27.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, pp. 79-80.
3. Sections of this report reprinted in Ibid., pp. 474-475.

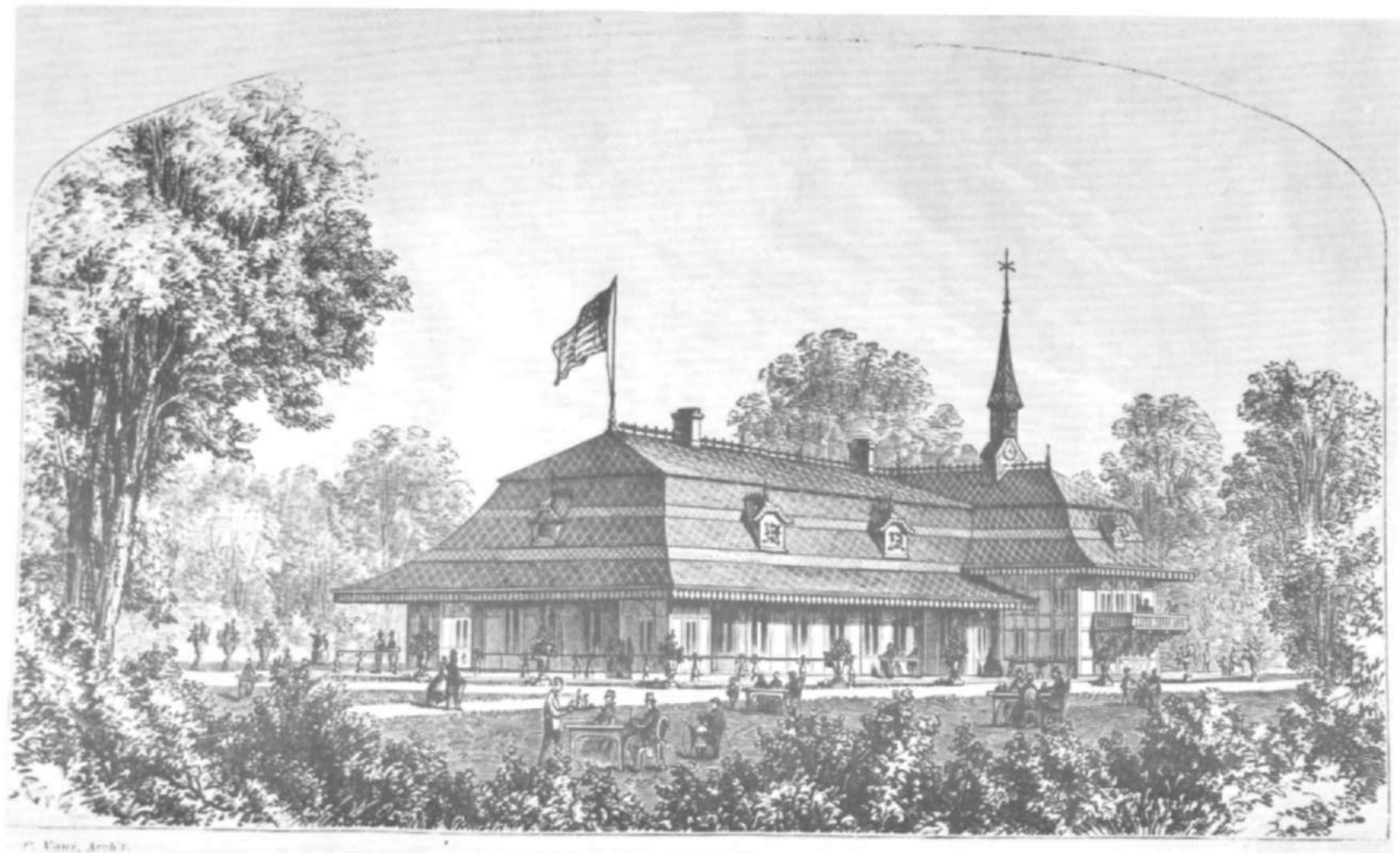
development. The general feeling of the commissioners and their designers was that the placement of structures and their subservience to the overall landscape effect was dependent on essentially two factors. The first involved how the buildings were sited, and the second was related to the choice of materials, color and style. In the first instance Olmsted and Vaux were careful to locate the structures in such a way as to be unobtrusive and non-interfering. This effect was often aided by a carefully contrived set of plantings which left open to view only those aspects of the structure which were harmonious with the landscape. In regard to materials, they were most often natural -- wood, or stone frequently taken from the site and held together by very small joints of mortar. In terms of their color, these too were chosen to blend into the rural environment. Shades of buff, gray or brown predominated while materials of white or red were avoided as either too glaring or too bold.[1]

The architectural styles reflected in the structures emerging in the park, while by today's taste appear rather ornate and in places even gaudy, were in the 1860's commonplace, and not at all seen as presumptuous or unusual. Most of the identifiable styles closely adhered, in fact, to those which had been outlined and popularized by Downing and Vaux's books on domestic architecture. Taken as a whole -- the bridges, the buildings, the smaller artifacts -- or even in some cases when looked at singularly, no one style predominates. Rather one can discover the full range of Victorian styles -- Romanesque, Italinate, Swiss cottage, rustic and renaissance or gothic revival. A melange of

1. For Vaux's attitude on this see, J. B. Jackson, American Space, New York, 1972, p. 109.

Figure 15. View of Proposed Casino Designed by Calvert Vaux, 1862.

Drawn by Calvert Vaux and published in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Sixth Annual Report... New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1863.



GENERAL VIEW OF PROPOSED CASINO

eclectic Victoriana, they did generally avoid the extreme decoration and ornamentation characteristic of many examples of these styles. More restrained than many contemporary examples then being built in the city, their quiet harmony with the landscape was aided by the fact that the great majority of them were designed personally by Calvert Vaux or were done under his direct supervision by talented men like Jacob Wrey Mould.[1] Because Vaux had been one of the designers of the landscape plan, he was fully cognizant and sympathetic to the picturesque intent of the design. And this very much helped to insure the ultimate compatibility and complementarity of the structures that went into the park.

Unfortunately, not everything that found its way into the park was as compatible or placed as sensitively as the above description suggests. While it was fully their desire to adhere to this emerging policy, the Commissioners from the outset found it impossible to ward off what would become the innumerable requests for a niche in the park for some special use or function. Of particular interest in this regard were the many statues or pieces of monumental sculpture that quickly found their way into the park. At first the Commissioners were quite pleased and willing to accept such gifts, believing that such ornamentation, in

1. For a good review of the neglected but important role of Mould see, David T. Van Zanten, "Jacob Wrey Mould: Echoes of Owen Jones and the High Victorian Styles in New York, 1853-1865," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XXVIII (March, 1969) pp. 41-57. Also Clarence C. Cook, op. cit., pp. 49-51. Valuable and talented lieutenants also emerged to aid in the design of the landscape elements. For commentary on the role of Ignaz I. Pilat, head gardener, see Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, pp. 75-77; Samuel Parsons, superintendent of planting, see Ibid., p. 157; William Grant and George Waring, Jr., park engineers, see Albert Fein, Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition, New York, 1972, p. 29.

moderation, would enhance the design of the park, and further whatever educational purpose the park would be able to offer. Thus in 1860, they gratefully accepted the offer of the widow of a Mr. Crawford, of eighty seven plaster casts of this obscure artist's work. This large collection of statues, bas-reliefs and sketches were placed in the chapel of the old Mt. St. Vincent academy, near Ninety-sixth Street.[1] In a very short time it became evident that the park was becoming a dumping ground for all sorts of statuary. The first to be erected out of doors was a female figure representing Commerce which was unveiled in 1865.[2] The Commissioners discovered that there was no tactful way to prevent well-meaning donors from offering at their own expense an endless number of marble memorials. One commentator noted thus,

> Mr. Green's letters in reply to the persons who, every week or so, present him with a new stone elephant, are models of how to disguise disgust in courtesy. The last blow came in the shape of a colossal statue of Columbus, by Miss Stebbins .... But other things are left for fruition. There are the friends of the late gifted poet Fitz-Greene Halleck who may desire to contribute towards the erection of a full length bronze statue, etc. are invited ... This threat may not be fulfilled but ... a modest monument over the grave of this gentleman whose works will hardly descend to another generation, as, indeed, they hardly outlived his own to come to us, is surely all that is due to his position as a literary man. A monument in the Central Park is out of all proportion to his slender merit..[3]

In general, moved by these outlined problems, but in particular by the request of John Quincy Adams Ward to erect a memorial to the Seventh Regiment portraying the recent struggle between brother and brother, the Commissioners in 1867 were forced to issue a statement that began to establish a firm policy regarding statuary in the park.

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1. Clarence C. Cook, op. cit., p. 169.
2. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op. cit., p. 37.
3. Putnam's Magazine, III (May, 1869) p. 641.

> The Commissioners of the Park have thus been guarded in dealing with this subject [7th Regiment Monument] because they have deemed the Park not an appropriate place for sepulchral memorials; it is for recreation and pleasure, its especial aim and object is, by all justifiable means, to dispel from the mind of the visitor, once within its enclosure thoughts of business and memories calculated to sadden or oppress. It is a pleasure ground. The beautiful cemeteries in the vicinity of the city offer abundant opportunity to commemorate, by appropriate memorials, the virtues of those who are passing away from the strife and distinctions of the cabinet or the field.[1]

They went on to outline in this statement their belief that it would be wiser to wait a long period before erecting such memorials, so that history might determine which few were truly worthy of such singular honor. It is ironic to note that one of their developing concerns was that the park might come to resemble the rural cemeteries which just twenty years earlier had been pointed to as proof of the need in large cities of public parks. In spite of this observation and protest, Ward's statue was unveiled with great public ceremony in 1870.[2] This single case became all too indicative of the continued failure that the Commissioners would experience in regulating the placement of statuary in their park.

One critic, distressed by both the amount and quality of the works being offered or thrust on the park, suggested that adaptive behavior might be necessary on the part of park visitors.

> ... and how should we all have felt if, in addition to the measly Horse, the squatty Scott, and the horrid Howe, we had been obliged to make long detours in order to avoid the works of Vinnie Ream, or Clark Mills, or Horatio Stone ... At present one soon learns what paths to avoid, if he would not have his aesthetic sensibilities hurt, but if the pressures on the Commissioners shall continue we may fear their heroism

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1. As quoted, Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 486.
2. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op. cit., p. 63.

> won't be equal to the task of suppression, and that guys in bronze and marble will abound.[1]

One reason for the Commissioners' inability to control these gifts effectively was that their donors were most often amongst the city's most wealthy and respected citizens. And because their intentions were good, one did not like to insult their generosity. These facts did not insure, however, that their taste was always good. William Dean Howells, strolling through the park in the eighteen nineties, succinctly observed what many other sensitive people felt:

> ... note the quiet comfort of the elder people ... unmolested by the company of the worst of all the bad statues in the world.[2]

Perhaps an overzealous reaction to one more example of Victorian excess, his comment, nonetheless, reflects the general equanimity with which this situation is now viewed. One writer, nearly eighty years after this issue bubbled to the fore and when so many more artistic incursions were firmly ensconsed in the park, attempted a partial census of the people who were commemorated in the park by statues, plaques or other suitable memorials. It included Beethoven, Schiller, Stephen Foster, and Samuel Morse, and Dr. J. Marion Sims, founder of the New York Women's Hospital; Daniel Draper, the first meteorologist who worked in the park observatory; W. T. Stead, an English newspaperman who went down on the Titanic; Mrs. Emma Nicholson, president of the Euphrosyne Club; the victims of the sinking of the battleship Maine; and Balto, one of the sled dogs that brought antitoxin to Nome, Alaska in the 1920's. Of what was this obscure listing indicative? This census taker's judgment was that it was of little more consequence than that "some statuary in the park does not

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1. Scribner's Monthly, VI (October, 1873) p. 675.
2. William Dean Howells, Impressions and Experiences, New York, 1896, p. 231.

commemorate anything except the inevitable inability of certain citizens to leave well enough alone." And of what harm was it all beyond the obvious effect on the landscape? Probably little, said this man, except perhaps for the bronze lioness at the edge of the east drive near Seventy-sixth Street occasionally scaring a nocturnal motorist.[1]

Both the problem of properly siting and compatibly designing the necessary buildings within the park, and the overabundance of statuary thrust upon the Commissioners, were symptomatic of a much broader problem of encroachment which would plague the park throughout its entire history. Very early on the Commissioners saw the problem emerging for as soon as 1864 they would comment:

> If all the applications for the erection and maintenance of towers, houses, drinking fountains, telescopes, mineral water fountains, cottages, Aeolian harps, gymnasiums, observatories, weighing scales, for the sale of eatables, velocipedes, perambulators, Indian work, tobacco, segars, for the privilege of using steam-engines, snow shoes, ice boats, and for the use of the ice for fancy dress carnivals, were granted, they would occupy a large portion of the surface of the park, establish a very extensive and very various business, and give to it the appearance of the grounds of a country fair or of a militia training field. A catalogue of applications to use the [park are] utterly incompatible with its preservation ...
>
> The absurdity of the uses proposed does not always appear to the applicants, and their persistence seems sometimes to increase with the inappropriateness of the objects they desire to obtain.[2]

The sort of suggested intrusions outlined here while in the aggregate serious and sometimes singularly successful in finding their way into the park, were more easily controlled or restrained than other forms of intrusions. The latter included requests from individuals to establish

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1. Eugene Kinkead and Russell Maloney, op. cit., p. 30. Most of the statuary presently in the park is well catalogued and described in Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op. cit., pp. 149-159.
2. Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1863, p. 35.

a commercial concession to capitalize on the presence in one small area of tens of thousands of visitors who were visiting the park daily. But these requests were from single and most often uninfluential persons and the Board had unchallenged authority to carefully screen them and subject each to a rigorous licensing procedure. Only a few would be admitted and it was those judged to be essential to the convenience of the visitors which would at the same time interfere as little as possible with the use and enjoyment of the park itself. Of course, the Commissioners could not control the location of such enterprises outside and along the borders of the park, and as many of them established themselves there, a good deal of public concern was expressed about the developing circus and moral atmosphere which the numerous concessions and grog shops gave to the area.

The more serious sort of encroachments which the Board was less successful in fending off were the requests by groups of prestigious residents or public institutions for a piece of the park on which to establish a building or use which did not really seek to make money, but in fact would meet a real public need. The natural inclination of such groups to locate their facility in an attractive, busy, and increasingly popular setting, was often given further impetus by the local politicians who were all too willing to lend their support in an attempt to trade a piece of the park to satisfy certain interest groups, curry favor of influential individuals or provide work projects for their many jobless constituents. From the very outset, as when during the war interval unanticipated structures and uses such as the various museum requests, the zoo, the Mineral Springs pavillion, and so many others began to dot the park, it became evident that a constant rear-guard action would

Figure 16. View of Indian Wigwam Proposed to be Erected in Central Park, for the Preservation of the Relics and Customs of the American Indians, 1872.
Published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XXXIII. No. 857 (March 2, 1872).

FRANK LESLIE'S
ILLUSTRATED
NEWSPAPER

No. 651—Vol. XXXIII.] NEW YORK, MARCH 2, 1872. [Price, 10 Cents. $5 00 Yearly, $2 50.

OUR "CASE."

Already the feeling and sense excited on both sides of the Atlantic by the publication of the American Case in England, through the ambitious zeal of "Diary" to unseat Gladstone, is subsiding. Of course, both our Administration and Mr. Gladstone's have made the most of it, each on its own side, to show the opportunity of its patriotism, from its own point of view, and manufacture popularity at home. But no reflective man on either side ever for a moment supposed that it would amount to anything.

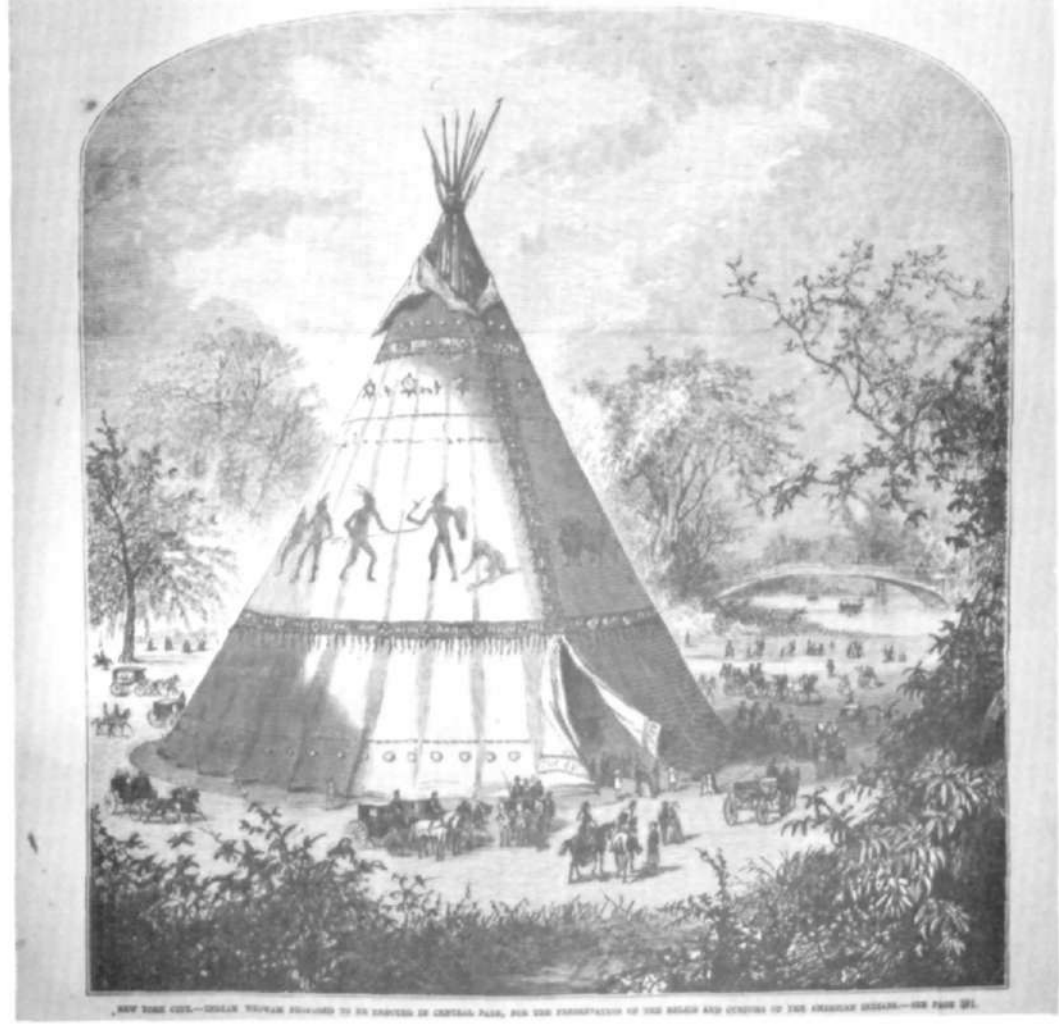
The attitude of our Government and that of Great Britain toward each other, under these circumstances, from the beginning of "the row" until the present moment, is well hit off in the old ballad:

> "The Earl of Chatham, with sword drawn,
> Stands waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;
> Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,
> Is waiting for the Earl of Chatham."

And on the parties will continue to stand until the Geneva Conference—whose business it is—takes up the consideration of the Case.

The whole thing would be ludicrous if it were not so mischievous. The relations, financial and commercial, between the two countries, are so complicated and so delicate, that any disturbance of public confidence is fraught with disaster to legitimate interests.

Great enterprises, public and private, are paralyzed by the slightest distrust; and credit, which is a sensitive plant, withers a seven o'clock, which it requires time to recover from. The politicians and stockjobbers who play



NEW YORK CITY.—INDIAN WIGWAM ERECTED TO BE SEEN IN CENTRAL PARK, FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE BELLES AND DUDINES OF THE AMERICAN ISSARS.—SEE PAGE 371.

have to be fought if the park's scenic function was to be maintained and if the integrity of the ideal of the park as a single harmonious work of art was to be preserved. One of the main purposes of the park had been to provide one place in the city where one escapes from the commerce of the city and the buildings appearing everywhere which symbolized its dominance. To permit the park to also move in this direction, the Commissioners knew, would be self-defeating. By 1872, a number of astounding propositions would be made but successfully turned away. They included but were certainly not limited to the following:

> That a street railway be built in the park.
>
> That permanent circus tents be erected in the park.
>
> That a steamboat and fully rigged ship be placed on the lakes.
>
> That a portion of the park be reserved as a burial ground for the distinguished dead of the city.
>
> That all denominations be invited to build places of worship in the park.
>
> That a great central building be constructed in the park and be used either as a grand People's cathedral for all sects, or for the continuous exhibition of merchandise for sale in the city.[1]

There was even serious discussion during this year growing out of the suggestion of a school teacher, that the North Meadow be modeled to form a map of the world.[2]

As frivolous as some of these may now appear, they were at the time of their consideration taken by both sides to be entirely serious matters. And at each occasion when such a use was proposed, heated debate and public pleas would follow. Never entirely successful in firmly barring such proposals from the park, and to strict preservationists, all too

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1. Edward Hagaman Hall, op. cit., p. 485. See also Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters ..., op. cit., pp. 12-13.
2. Robert Wheelwright, "The Attacks on Central Park," Landscape Architecture, I, (October, 1910) p. 12.

unsuccessful, the Board did their best to adhere to the basic principle that was again articulated by the landscape architects in 1872.

> To determine whether any structure on the Park is undesirable it should be considered, first, what part of the necessary accommodation of the public on the park is met by it, how this much of accommodation could be otherwise, or elsewhere provided, and in what degree and whence the structure will be conspicuous after it shall have been toned by weather and the plantations about and beyond it shall have taken a mature character.
>
> .... what is well designed to recreate the mind from urban oppressions through the eye, makes the Park the Park. All other elements of it are simply accessories of these essentials.[1]

The problem of attempted encroachment on the park would be faced by every subsequent board in control of the park. As time passed the attractiveness of the park as a site for every kind of enterprise would increase,[2] and the result was even greater pressure against the established policy laid down by the original board. And yet to the extent which the park today is still an open and available public recreational spot, it is the result of a firm adherence to the early principles laid down in these formative years.

Two sub-issues developed in the 1860's which would also fall under the general issue of encroachment. This first was fairly subtle and never during this era developed into a full-blown controversy. It also involved how the park should be used, and centered around the extent to which this scenic resource should also embrace certain active recreational uses as baseball, tennis, cricket, and other group sports which seemed to infringe on a wholly passive enjoyment of the park's natural resources.

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1. As quoted, Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, pp. 475-476.
2. The best review of most of the encroachments, both successful and attempted, are related in, Robert Wheelwright, op. cit. See also the famous New York Times cartoon reproduced in Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op. cit., II, p. 517.
3. Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1866, pp. 36-37.

Without any cataclysmic event forcing the adoption of a rigid policy, over time the balance between the passive or active use of the park shifted toward a greater inclusion of sports activity. While this must be said to have involved some erosion of the ideal of the park as a unified, single work of art, it must have been seen as well as a rational response to the changing recreational requirements of a growing metropolis. The park could not simply remain an untouched, aesthetic experience and still be responsive to the changing needs of the city that created it.

The second smaller problem in the area of encroachment was analogous in most respects to what the commissioners had faced in regard to statuary. For as the park took shape and was coming into greater and greater public use, the beneficient, public response threatened to become overwhelming. With good intentions and desirous of helping celebrate the success of the park, many individuals offered gifts to help furnish the park. Just a casual review of the Board's minutes from May 1862 to the following April, shows that they were given three elk, a pair of musk deer, the stuffed skin of the calf "Katie," two breeding sheep, swans from the park officials in Hamburg, Germany, pelicans from the Surveyor of the Port of New Orleans, another stuffed skin this of the mammoth ox "Constitution," and a Venetian gondola "complete with all its appointments" to be placed on the lake as the generous gift of former Commissioner Gray who had been travelling in Italy. A year later the partial inventory of gifts offered or received was augmented by a silver grey fox, a prairie wolf, a bronze statue of Eve, a lizard, four peacocks, and a boa constrictor.[1] Not all of the proffered gifts were accepted,

1. Minutes, August 31, 1864 See also, Seventh Annual Report ..., pp. 55-57.

though many of the animals and gondola were. For some the Board paid the freight, for others they paid only the price of risking that the park might come to resemble a museum basement, a surrealist Garden of Eden, or a natural habitat in extreme ecological imbalance.

One last challenge to change or discredit the park's dominant aesthetic ideal was brought out to public view. This issue revolved around the best way to decorate or design the main entrances or gates to the park. In the spring of 1862, the Commissioners had designated twenty separate entrances around the full border of the park, and given each of them a name which would reflect the broad constituency of individuals whom they anticipated would be drawn to the park. These included the artisan, the merchant, the warrior, the explorer, the foreigner, the child, and the mariner.[1] A year later, aware that the four gates or entry ways on Fifty-ninth Street would be the most important and highly used because they faced the already built up part of the city, it seemed appropriate to seek a means to formally plan and ornament them by a more elaborate gateway design than those of a more subservient function. Accordingly, in June of 1863, the Board publicly offered a prize of five hundred dollars for the best set of designs for the four gateways along the southern boundary of the park. In response to the Board's offer, twenty-one sets of drawings were submitted,[2] and they were opened for comparative consideration at their meeting of August 13, 1863. Although "several of them presented features of merit," the Board was not satisfied with any one of them. The premium was awarded to no one, but it was directed rather that it be distributed equally amongst the

1. Board of Commissioners of Central Park, Document No. 2, April 10, 1862, reprinted in Fifth Annual Report ..., pp. 125-136.
2. Seventh Annual Report ..., p. 18.

competitors, for none of them, in the Commissioner's words, "comprehends a sufficient degree of originality and fitness to the surrounding features of landscape," to merit it.[1] Nevertheless, the Board did act positively in that they did vote to accept in their general features, the designs of the respected New York architect, Richard Morris Hunt. This was essentially a delaying action because there was no consensus as to which to follow. In addition, there was probably not enough money available to immediately build any gates, nor had the city yet paved any of the roads along the park's long borders,[2] and thus the question of gates was deferred and simply placed before the public for its review and commentary.

The public criticism that came forth was characterized as much by unenthusiastic silence, as by active debate, and thus in May of 1865 the Board voted formally to stop all consideration of gateways for the park until further order of the Board.[3] Hunt had an energetic and flamboyant personality, and had no interest in seeing his designs so casually dealt with and with Olmsted and Vaux no longer in full employment of the Board, he forcefully pressed his case before the Commissioners and public. In 1865, he exhibited his plans at the National Academy of Design, where in general they received a respectful review.[4] A year later, they were brought out in book form.[5] The designs by Hunt, the first American graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, were seen as too elaborate, monumental, and contradictory to the

1. Minutes, September 2, 1863.
2. Ninth Annual Report ..., p. 13.
3. Clarence C. Cook, op. cit., pp. 157-158.
4. The Nation, I (1865) pp. 186-187.
5. Richard Morris Hunt, Designs for the Gateways to the Southern Entrances to the Central Park, New York, 1866.

park's English landscape motif. An architectural critic writing for The Nation described them in these terms:

> Here is the old stock in trade of modern French pseudo-classical ornament, emblematic, all of it, no doubt, crowded with meaning; if only it were not such bad art, if only the meaning were not so commonplace. The bronze vulgarities have their ruling group, also of bronze, on the top of a tall column of poor design, namely the coat of arms, and its supporters of the city of New York .... an heraldic device not familiar to heralds and certainly not ornamental .... if all of the gods, men, dogs, horses, griffins, lions, eagles and splashing water are in any way emblematic or representative of the city, the citizens should seriously protest ....
>
> .... The fine arts in New York can hardly bear so severe a chill as that would be; they are not hardly enough yet. The people need no more examples than they already have of bad architecture and misapplied ornament. Let us have gates as plain as those of a farm yard, unless the ornament shall be appropriate and the design beautiful.[1]

The Commissioners still refused to act under Hunt's prodding,[2] and with public opinion agreeing that the proposed gateways were too elaborate, too "French," and too aristocratic, the issue and Hunt quietly faded away. Nearly twenty-five years later the opposing aesthetic doctrines of Hunt and Olmsted would come into conflict again when in 1888, Olmsted landscaped the grounds of the George Vanderbilt estate Biltmore, which had been designed by Hunt.[3]

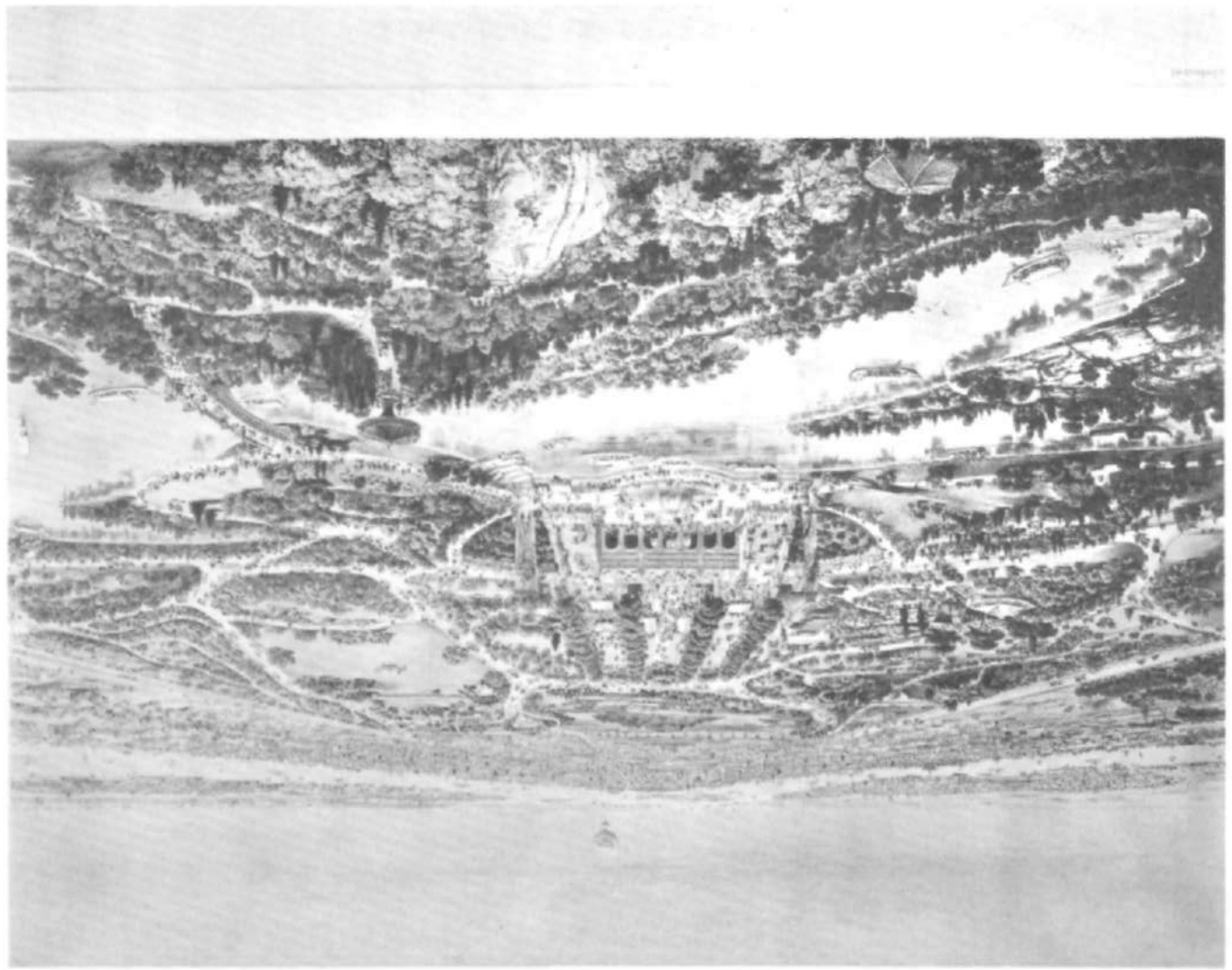
By the end of the war between the states, the park commissioners had essentially been able to establish a general framework and relatively sound set of policies for handling the developing problems of encroachment, buildings and ornament within the park, and thereby preserve the artistic ideal they had labored to create. While these sorts of problems

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1. The Nation, I (1865) pp. 187-188. For a continuation of this criticism see Ibid., pp. 410-412 and The Nation, III, pp. 255-256.
2. Richard Morris Hunt, op. cit., pp. 35-36.
3. MacLaughlin, op. cit., p. 91. See also, Albert Fein, Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition, op. cit., pp. 11-14.

Figure 17. View of Ramble, Lake, Terrace and Mall, c. 1864.

Lithograph drawn by John Bachmann and printed by J. Bien, c. 1864.



would have to be faced continually in the future and while they would be absolutely critical to the history of the park as we know it, they were at this time of no real concern to the daily users of the park, and they went essentially unnoticed by the residents of the city. Their attitude was one of appreciation and general respect for what was taking form in the upper wards of the city. And if attendance, usage and popularity were any indication of approval of the park and the way in which Commissioners had responded to these various challenges, then certainly it was generally accepted.

By the end of 1865, as the last wounded soldiers under the care of the Sisters of Charity left the temporary hospital that had been established in the buildings of Mount St. Vincent, more than 7.6 million visits were being made annually to the park. This was up from the 4.2 million who had come in 1862. Interestingly, 658,000 of them had come as pedestrians during the cold month of January.[1] At entrances to the park, even without their ornamental gates which were open from thirteen to eighteen hours a day according to the time of year,[2] there were park keepers who kept careful records of the number of visitors arriving each hour of every day as pedestrians, equestrians, or by carriage. Other measurements than this single one attested to the fact that the park was being intensely used. In its Eighth Annual Report issued at the beginning of 1865, the Board was able to note that the work force necessary was greatly diminished, and with the exception of some few small areas, principally above One hundred and sixth Street, "the surface of the park has already assumed the general form proposed."[3]

1. Ninth Annual Report ..., pp. 22-23.
2. Sixth Annual Report ..., p. 29.
3. Eighth Annual Report ..., p. 11.

The remaining portion of the main drive in the upper park was being completed and the finishing up of structures previously designed was near.[1] The annual report of two years later indicated that the labors to improve the park were so wound down that the year's major efforts had gone into constructing remaining portions of the boundary wall.[2] One more year hence, 1867, and total expenditures for improvement would be less than two hundred thousand dollars. All that seemed necessary now was simply to enjoy the park and explain to the rest of the world what had been accomplished in New York by the park.

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1. Ibid., p. 5.
2. Tenth Annual Report ..., p. 8.

CHAPTER VIII

SOCIALIZING AND RATIONALIZING

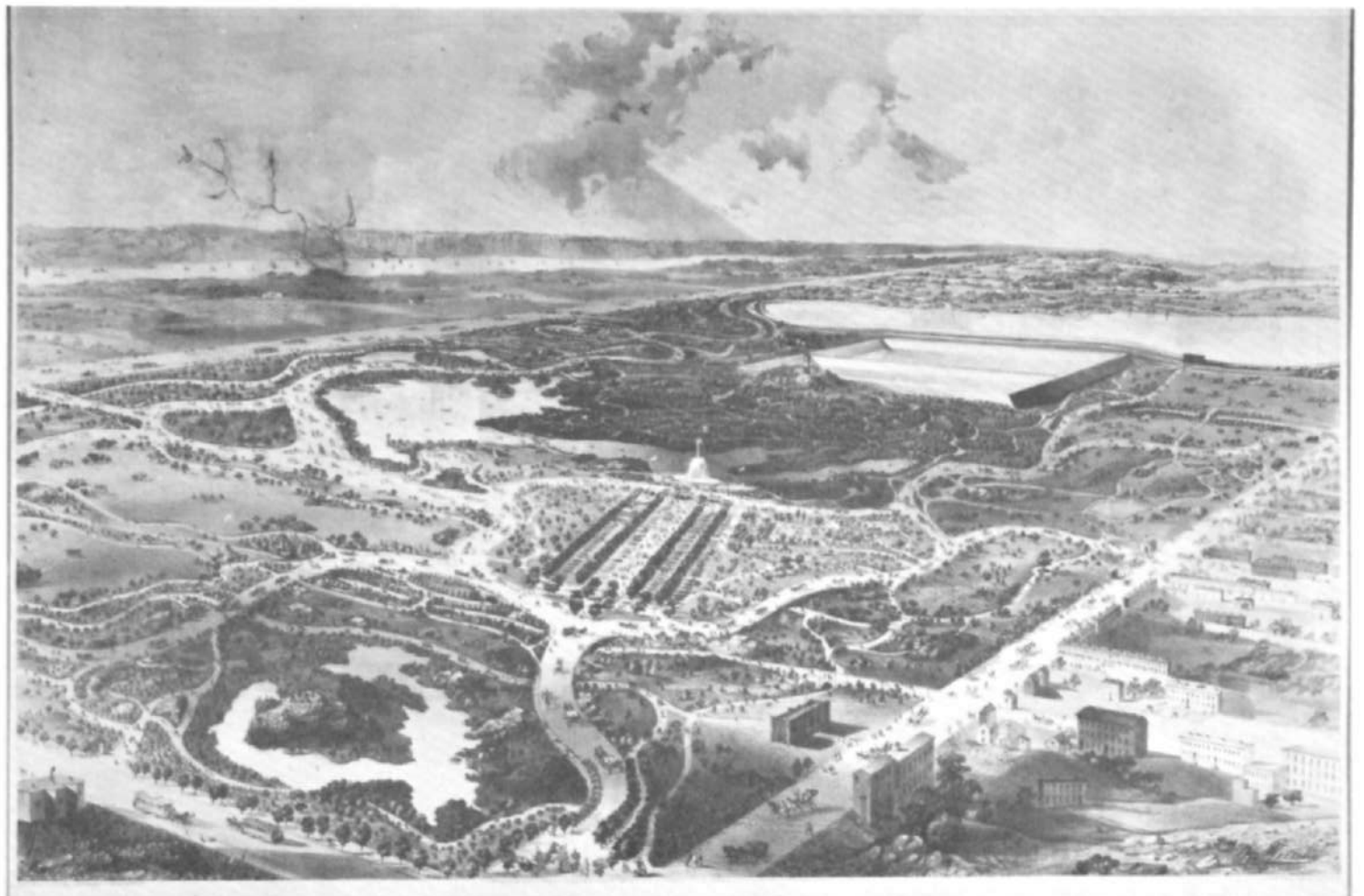
From the first day that the park site came under public control it drew people to it. At the very beginning it was the curious who arrived to examine the barren, rubbish-strewn, and squatter-occupied acreage, and to wonder aloud how even their unpredictable public officials had agreed to spend millions of dollars for this hopeless prospect. As the site was cleared and graded, and rudimentary efforts at shaping and improving the land began, more people were attracted who simply wished to watch its construction. By 1861, when it began to take recognizable shape and even appear to resemble a park in places, more than 2.4 million visitors would make the long trip up town.[1] Many of them were drawn, no doubt, by the sheer novelty of the city's newest and finest civic adornment which was one of the few visible symbols that the improvement of the physical city was possible. In fact a welcome curiosity, hundreds of thousands came for the same reasons they had a decade earlier flocked to see Jenny Lind or the wonders of P. T. Barnum.

By the end of the war, when for all intents and purposes the park was done and fully useable, the seven million annual visitors came just to enjoy the charm and attractiveness of the rural scenery. The bucolic nature of the setting reinforced by the sheep, quail and deer roaming the site, made it seem a place of escape from the burgeoning city nearby. In addition, it was a place to meet with friends in a relaxing atmosphere and to observe the buildings and art work, and zoological specimens which had not before been so carefully aggregated within the community. The

1. Fifth Annual Report,..., p. 28.

Figure 18. Birdseye View of the Southern Half of Central Park, 1864.

Martel's New York Central Park. Lithograph of Henry C. Eno published by the Central Park Publishing Co., New York, 1864.



MARTEL'S NEW YORK CENTRAL PARK.

motivations of all who came are too varied to enumerate, but in short they were the same things which today draw the city's residents to it.

As suggested by the hierarchical system of roads which Olmsted and Vaux had so precisely integrated into the plan, there were essentially three modes then by which to pass through the park--on foot, horse, or by carriage. Those who were going to walk through the park had to be brought up from the city proper by the omnibuses which plied up and down the north-south avenues. They might take the Fifth Avenue line to Forty-Second Street and walk the remaining distance across the unimproved roads to the park. Or preferably, they would take the horse-drawn cars on Broadway, Third, Sixth, Seventh or Eighth Avenues, any of which ran the full distance to Fifty-ninth Street.[1] From there they could walk into the park along the various footpaths or across the broad lawns. For George Templeton Strong, walking was the best way to enjoy the park. "The place reveals its full beauty to pedestrians only. Everything in it seems complete, well appointed, and well regulated. It is a boon to the city, and must exert much influence for good..."[2]

Not everyone agreed with Strong, of course, for indeed a very large number of residents enjoyed the exercise of going to the park on horseback. Along the more than five miles of bridle paths were well dressed young men and fashionable ladies. So popular was the park as a place to ride, that some would assert that it literally preserved horse flesh within the city for at least a half century. Certainly there was some truth to this claim for the park in the mid-sixties was one of the few pleasant and safe places within the city where one could ride. The

1. Lloyd Morris, Incredible New York, New York, 1951, p. 91.
2. Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 4, p. 258.

attractive and colorful scene created has been described in these terms by a later commentator:

> The fashionable hour for equestriennes was before breakfast. You could see them elegantly togged out in silk hat draped with a flying veil, tight-buttoned bodice and flowing skirts, a crop in one gloved hand, beautifully perched on a side-saddle.
>
> A lady riding alone was invariably attended by a liveried groom or a riding master. But ladies were likely to ride in parties, attended by gentlemen, and always chaperoned by some young matron. And a new social occasion developed from equestrianism. On the east carriage road, at One Hundred and Sixth Street...stood the buildings formerly occupied by the Roman Catholic Seminary of Mount St. Vincent...now leased to Colonel Stetson, proprietor of the Astor House...[it] had been converted into a luxurious restaurant. It became the fashionable thing for ladies to breakfast at Mount St. Vincent. But, according to the rigorous code of New York, this charming resort, with its fine panoramic view, was not a proper dining place. It was too remote, too secluded, and in the evening it was left to the patronage of gentlemen of rakish tastes and their abandoned feminine companions.[1]

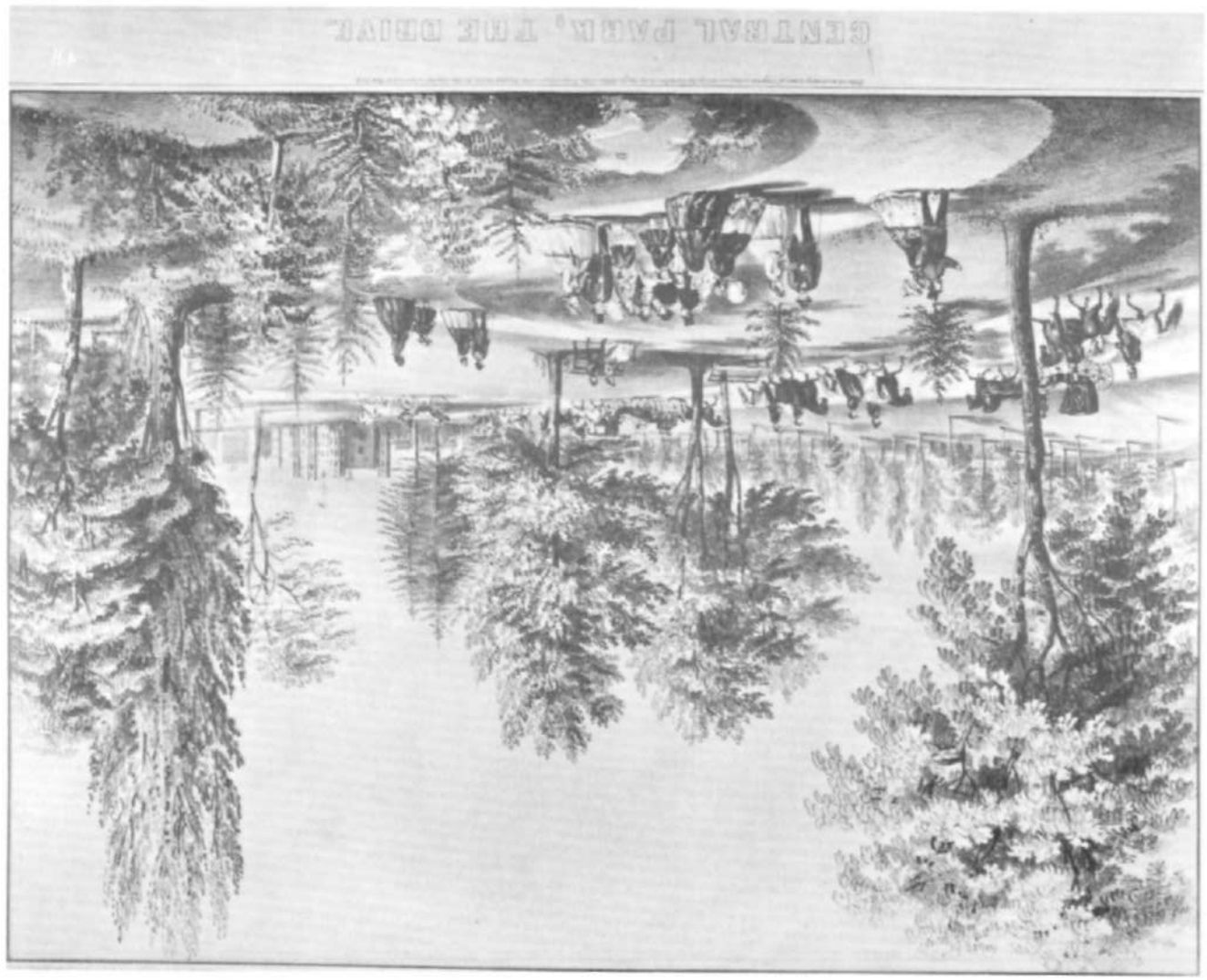
But the grandest of spectacles and the most fashionable means of moving through the park was by carriage. To own a carriage in New York connoted wealth. To bring the vehicle to the park provided the opportunity to display ostentatiously one's wealth and taste. This "broad torrent of vehicular gentility," as Strong called it,[2] rivalled the attractions of the park itself, and many came to the park simply to observe the excessive show provided by the upper class. As early as the fall of 1860 the Herald observed this growing trend by recording,

> It is not uncommon to find from three to four thousand people driving over the Central Park in costly equipages of all shapes in one day at this delightful season....Every quality of animal from the showy and steady roadster to the fastest blood horse, can be seen there, and every build of vehicle from the sulky to the dashing four-in-hand carriage. It would not be too much to say that the cash value of one day's turn-out in the Park...both in animals and equipages, is not far from a quarter of a million dollars. Every class of society, too--moneyed society, we mean--is represented there...[3]

1. Lloyd Morris, op.cit., p. 93.
2. Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 3, p. 567.
3. As quoted, Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op.cit., p. 93.

Figure 19. View of the Carriage Drive in Central Park, 1862.

Lithograph published by Currier & Ives, New York, 1862.


GENERAL PLAN, THE DRIVE.

Five years later, with all the roads open, the numbers had greatly increased and the variety of carriages had grown to include the new hanson cab,[1] the brougham, the landau, the victoria, the barouche, or even the unique demi-d'Aumont imported from Paris.[2] Not always considerate of others in the park, many owners of these expensive carriages, especially the younger ones, found pleasure in devising trotting matches across the roads, and thus endangered those who came only to use it as a public promenade. The Times and other newspapers would often editorialize about this problem by posing questions such as..."Why there should be any connection between fast horses and the 'drinks' and billingsgate we are unable to say....If the ordinance fixing the rate of speed be rigidly enforced, this class will find the park drives a great bore and continue to confine their patronage to the Harlem Flats and the adjacent taverns...without being gnawed by the desire to raise dust about somebody else."[3]

Many years later when Olmsted took the time to reflect on the immediate impact of the park's popularity and all the travel to and through it, he would claim, and perhaps rightfully so, that within a few years after the park became available, the dinner hour of thousands of New York families had been permanently changed, that the number of carriages kept in the city had increased by a factor of ten, that livery stables had doubled their businesses, and "the investment of many millions of private capital in public conveyances made profitable."[4]

The park was conceived as something more than just a place to walk or ride, and its many diverse attractions, of course, varied greatly according

1. Stokes, Iconography, Vol. 5, p. 1904.
2. Lloyd Morris, op.cit., p. 94.
3. New York Times, November 8, 1859, p. 4.
4. Boston Park Department, Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park and Related Matters, Boston, 1886, p. 94.

to the season of the year. In the summer, the more than 800 acres of green landscape provided numerous opportunities for diversion. Beyond the many that have already been mentioned, one of the most popular was the use of the lakes for boating. As early as the Spring of 1860, with construction still underway, the Board had voted to make boats available for hire.[1] There were two types available. One, the passage, or excursion boat, could carry up to twelve persons at a time for a fare of ten cents per passenger. From May to November, it would leave the Terrace stairs every thirty minutes, stopping at prescribed landings to receive or discharge passengers. The call boats, or those for personal hire, would accommodate up to six people in a private party, and were forbidden to approach within ten feet of shore except when landing.[2] This concession, run by Mr. Thomas S. Dick, was highly successful, for his records show that by the third year of operation, 1863, he was providing service for 21,000 passengers by his passage boat, and for 11,000 people by the call boats, from which he derived $3,600 in revenue.[3]

For the children who might become thirsty or hungry during their visit, they could obtain at the Dairy a glass of fresh milk for five cents a glass or a bowl of bread and milk for ten cents.[4] But most of the people, if they came for an all day excursion, brought their own food. Picnicking was a common and popular activity during the summer months, and it was not at all unusual to see an immigrant family relaxing on the grass and drawing food from their straw basket or cloth container.[5] And even

1. Minutes, May 17, 1860.
2. Fifth Annual Report..., pp. 30-31.
3. Seventh Annual Report..., p. 39.
4. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 418.
5. New York Times, August 15, 1860.

more intimate gatherings became a popular activity within the park. The many niches of the park were favorite places for young lovers to meet, and as one reporter carefully noted on a summer afternoon, the bright-eyed damsels, "beaued by their admirers," could be numbered in the scores.

> It would not be exactly fair for us to tell all that we saw in that little walk--such billing and cooing, such tender embraces, such enthusiastic demonstrations of affection, and unmistakable evidence of regard, do not often come before the vision of such dull plodders as we are....Sometimes...the very popping of the question may be heard, when, with bended knee and tearful eye, the all-absorbed lover breathes the name of his mistress and eagerly kisses her hand.[1]

For those whose taste ran to a more passive pleasure within the park, there were the musical concerts given on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the warm weather. Given from the music pavillion at the head of the mall, the program usually was dominated by military music or marches, although Wagner's "Tannhauser," Beethoven's "Lenora" and the "Iphignera in Tauris" by Gluck, could also be heard.[2] The audiences were attentive and appreciative, and most often very large. The fashionable folk might have their carriages driven to the adjacent carriage concourse, from where they could listen. Others, sometimes as many as forty thousand would hear the concert from nearly benches, rented, canopied rustic chairs, or simply spread out on blankets across the nearby grass. These concerts were largely free, supported by contributions from the street railway companies who profited by bringing the throngs of passengers to the performances.[3]

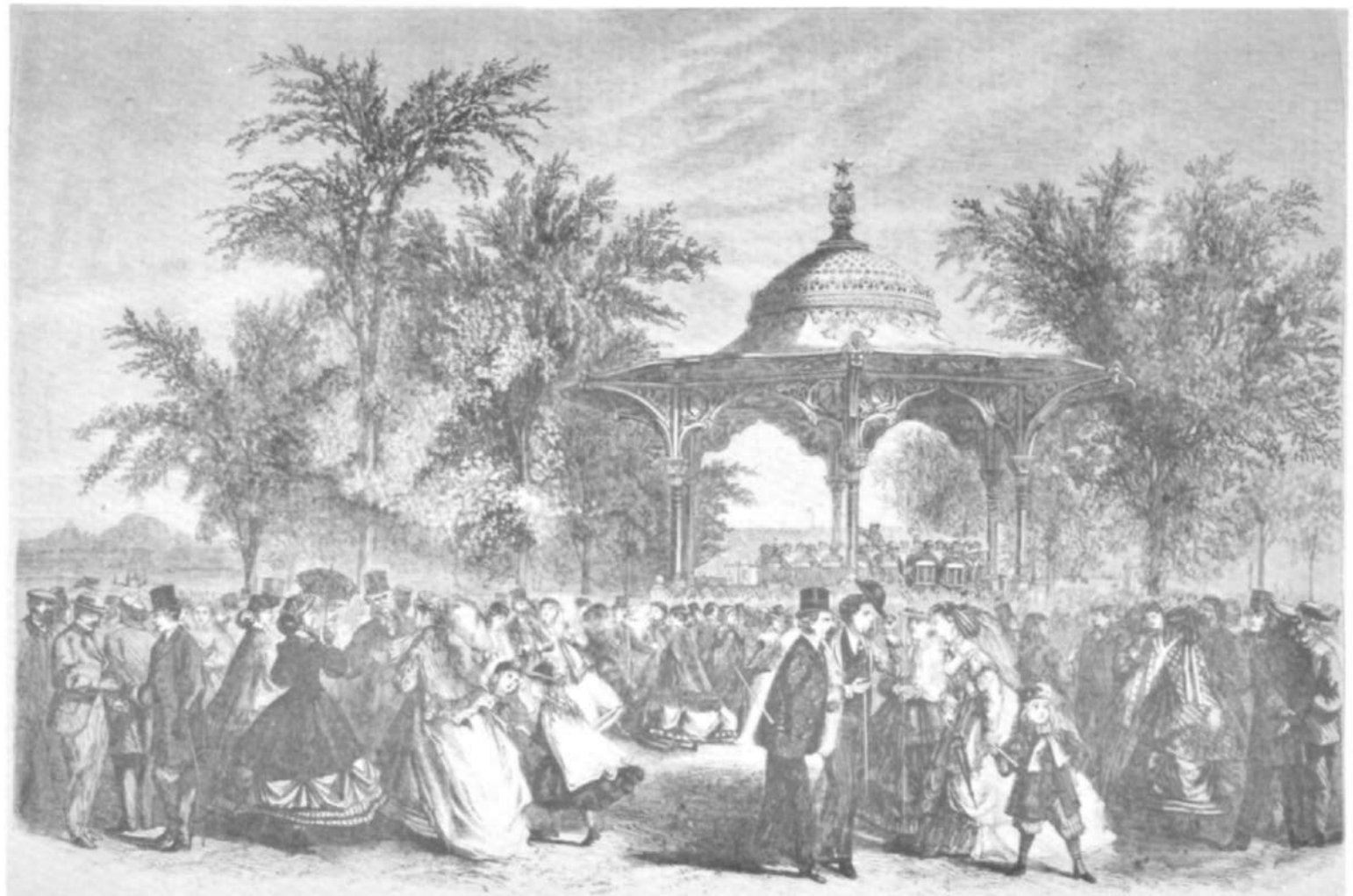
From late November or the first firm frosts through the cold month of February, the park took on a far different aspect, of course, and the range of activities possible within it were much more circumscribed. Not

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1. Ibid.
2. Eleventh Annual Report..., pp. 38-43.
3. Lloyd Morris, op.cit., p. 92; also New York Times, October 9, 1860.

Figure 20. View of Musical Concert in Central Park, 1866.

Published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (August 4, 1866).



THE MUSIC STAND AT CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK—SATURDAY AFTERNOON, 3 O'CLOCK.—See Page 397.

only was travel to the distant park site much more difficult, but also sleighing, sledding and skating were the only activities possible within the park. Yet, this did not stop the city's residents from trying to make it into a winter garden. With the first snowfall parents would gather with their children to slide down the slopes of the park's hills. In addition, because of the many miles of gently undulating roadways, many adults, "the lovers of rapid motion, crisp, wintery, sparkling air and merry bells",[1] often joined in a sleighing carnival or just pleasantly rode behind their horse-drawn sleighs.

But by far the most popular winter activity within the park was ice skating which had just recently come in vogue amongst the wealthy classes of the city. In fact, when skating was first possible on the new lakes in December of 1858, there were few skates available for purchase within the city, for there were none manufactured in America. What few were to be found had to be imported.[2] This temporary shortage was soon rectified, however, and by the mid-1860's any announcement that the ice was in condition for skating would bring large numbers to the park to glide across the ice or just to look on. Most often this word was spread by means of a large red ball that was hoisted to the top of the Arsenal Building when the ice was in a good, safe condition. In turn, the signal was conveyed throughout the city by means of a small white flag, on which was printed a red ball, which was flown on every streetcar running to or from the park.[3] Conversely, if the national flag were not hoisted above the roundhouse in the middle of the main pond, the ice was not considered

1. New York Times, December 14, 1859.
2. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 65.
3. James D. McCabe, New York by Sunlight and Gaslight, New York, 1882, pp. 457-458.

safe.[1] Yet, in New York's winter climate the word usually passed around town was, "the ball is up," and this was enough to attract thousands of skaters to the ice daily.[2]

The scene that confronted those who travelled up to the park in the cold weather was one of attractive gaiety. Around the edges of the lake and ponds were parked sleighs so that their fur-wrapped occupants could watch the proceedings. Also at the edges of the ice were temporary tent-like structures from which skates could be rented or a hot drink purchased. Printed rules were posted at conspicuous points warning the sketers about the dangers of thin ice and generally regulating their behavior.[3] At night, when as many as 20,000 skaters could be seen on the lake, gas lights were lit and with the aid of huge reflectors behind them, the entire spectacle was illuminated.

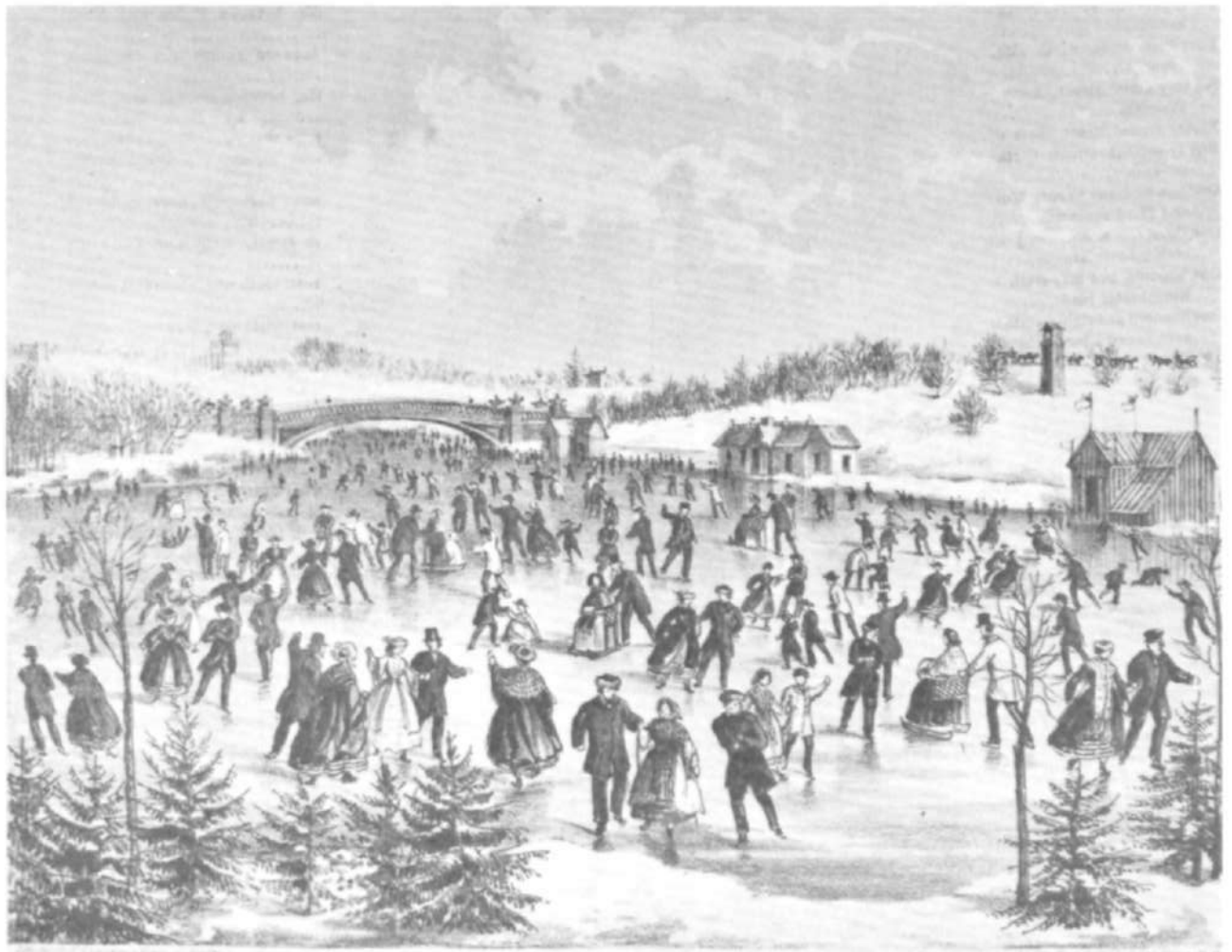
Down on the ice itself, which every evening was cleared of snow by hand and its surface renewed by means of a horse-drawn ice plane,[4] was the whole focus of this surrounding activity. With a poetic style uncommon to official reports, the commissioners described this scene in their annual report for 1863:

> The feats of a practical skater are as attractive to spectators as those of a rope dancer or an expert gymnast. The movements of a throng of skaters on a clear day, chasing each other in gleeful mood over the crystal ceiling of the imprisioned lake, the fur-clad inmates of a thousand gay vehicles coursing along the silver snow to the music of bells, the dusky foliage of the fir and the pine on the adjacent heights, wrapped with wreaths of fleecy white; leafless branches strung with a fairy network of icy pearls, frail but gorgeous as it glistens and flashes with a thousand hues in every glance of the sunlight, form in our midst a winter scene unmatched by

1. Fifth Annual Report..., p. 34.
2. T. Addison Richards, "The Central Park," Harper's New Monthly Magazine XXIII (August, 1861), p. 298.
3. Fifth Annual Report..., p. 34.
4. Seventh Annual Report..., p. 45.

Figure 21. View of Skating Pond in Central Park, 1861.

Published in D. T. Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York. New York: Edmund Jones & Co., 1861.



SKATING POND, CENTRAL PARK, N.Y. 1861

> that of any capital or country of modern times, because it is attainable only in a climate, amid an extent of population of wealth and liberality, such as peculiarly characterizes this Queen City of the Western Hemisphere.[1]

If the visitors were particularly fortunate, they might see some extraordinary display of skill as when an expert in the new sport, "on a wager skimmed over the ice, bearing, above his head, a salver of glasses filled to the brim with wine, spilling not one drop in all his escapes from the clutches of baffled pursuers."[2] None of the parks' amusements enjoyed a wider popularity than skating.

With many millions of visitors coming to the park annually almost all of whom were respectful of one another and the park itself, it was inevitable that there would be some transgressions of the rules or even outright criminal acts. The designers recognized that the large numbers of people that would gather over the vast acreage would surely pose some problems in social control. That is why nearly from the beginning they had successfully advocated a large and well trained force of uniformed park keepers be on duty throughout the park. The nature of the site itself as well as the large numbers visiting seemed to bode ill.

> The advantages for clandestine purposes offered in its numerous coverts of rock and foliage, will tend not only to bring the park itself into disrepute, but to form a bad neighborhood about it.[3]

In spite of this dire prediction, which may well be a better description of the park's present dilemma than in the period of its early development, the number of arrests or infractions against the park's rules was not a major problem. For example, while more than seven and one-half million

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1. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
2. Lloyd Morris, op.cit., p. 92.
3. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters..., op.cit., p. 47.

people came to the park in 1865, there were during that year only 115 offenses reported in the park. Sixty of these were for fast driving, only seven were for the serious crimes of robbery or assault. The remainder were divided amongst more trivial offenses such as breaking shrubs, public drunkenness, and disorderly conduct. Nearly half of the offenders were discharged with a reprimand, many were fined ten dollars or less, and but one was bound over for trial.[1] The total of just over one hundred infractions per year remained the approximate annual average for the fifteen year period following the park's opening. This figure is remarkably low considering the immense attendance, and it is most likely the result of the well trained, and respected group of park police that were always on duty. The commissioners strongly believed in the necessity of their presence, and in fact, in the same year as described above, they allocated $60,000 of their annual operating budget of $150,000 for the salary and maintenance of these men.[2] The city residents greatly appreciated the safety of the park and many made a strong point of relating these feelings in terms similar to the following observer:

> Owing to the care taken by the police, the park is remarkably safe....In the course of many rambles in the park, at all hours of the day and on all sorts of occasions, I fail to recall an instance of rowdyism or rude behavior, and the influence of the place seems to be wholly for the good in this respect. Its peaceful and safe character makes the park especially suitable as a place of resort for the young, and has contributed not a little to its present popularity.[3]

By the later years of the 1860's the success of the Central Park was indeed very evident to every New Yorker. From the attendance figures,

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1. Ninth Annual Report..., p. 21.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Charles F. Wingate, "Amusements at the Central Park," Appleton's Journal, VIII (August 3, 1872) p. 131.

popular use of the park during all seasons, the number of bequests or gifts made to the park--by no matter what measure used--the park had to be seen as a fashionable outdoor resort and the city's new social center. Ten years after the land was acquired, the park seemed to be fulfilling every promise that its early advocates had claimed. New Yorkers were proud of this achievement, especially since it was accomplished under particularly difficult political circumstances, and they appeared anxious to inform other American cities, and in fact the rest of the world, exactly why they had begun and what they had done.

Praise for the park came from all quarters now and most of the popular national magazines and local newspapers needed little excuse to write a descriptive article explaining some small new wonder within the park. But the most tireless praise and commentary came from those who for a long time had been involved with the park. For example, Andrew Green writing in 1868 in another effort to preserve the sanctity of the park, this time from the request to turn over sixty more acres of it for a parade ground, reiterated two of the park's major and desirable functions:

> The Park is a ground appropriated and arranged for the enjoyment of all the classes that inhabit a great city and... the visitor may...by the continual discovery of fresh objects of interest...divest himself of the thought and reflections that attend upon city business life and give himself up to an hour of undisturbed recreation.[1]

These two ideas, often stated earlier by proponents of the park, that it was a place for all classes and a place to improve one's health and outlook by escaping the city, would now with the full confidence of success behind them be further developed to help explain the park's accomplishment.

From the outset it is clear that at least Olmsted viewed the Park as

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1. Thirteenth Annual Report..., p. 162.

an instrument that would contribute to the democratization process. To the park were drawn people of all classes and from all backgrounds for a common purpose, "not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual and intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of others, all helping to the greater happiness of each."[1] In a more simple description a popular guide book of the day explained the social process in the park:

> Central Park is essentially a democratic place. It was created for the enjoyment of the people, and, when you drive there on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, you will see a brilliant and ever changing pattern, such as you will not find elsewhere. The most expensive vehicles of the wealthy classes will be mingled with the humbler barouche that has been hired for the occasion by a family pleasure party, or perhaps you may find yourself side by side with the grocery wagon of some sturdy German who has brought his frau and little ones to enjoy the stirring scene, and is enroute to the lager-bier saloons....[2]

What was developing out of the park was a confirmation of the social theory that one could fulfill the democratic promise and the egalitarian ideals for which the young republic had been formed. If the crowded city had seemed to spawn inequities and if the lower classes had seemed to be relegated to tightly contained tenement districts that belied the American dream, here in the park was physical proof that classes could intermingle compatibly, and through the models observed there, could aspire to the mobility and opportunity that had long been this society's promise. In spite of what might appear to be wide disparities between the ranks of the many who came to the park, there was a common denominator. For as the Commissioners wrote in 1863, there is "a universality in Nature, that

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," in S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities, op.cit., p. 75.
2. New York Illustrated, New York, 1869, p. 45.

affords a field of enjoyment to all observers of her works."[1]

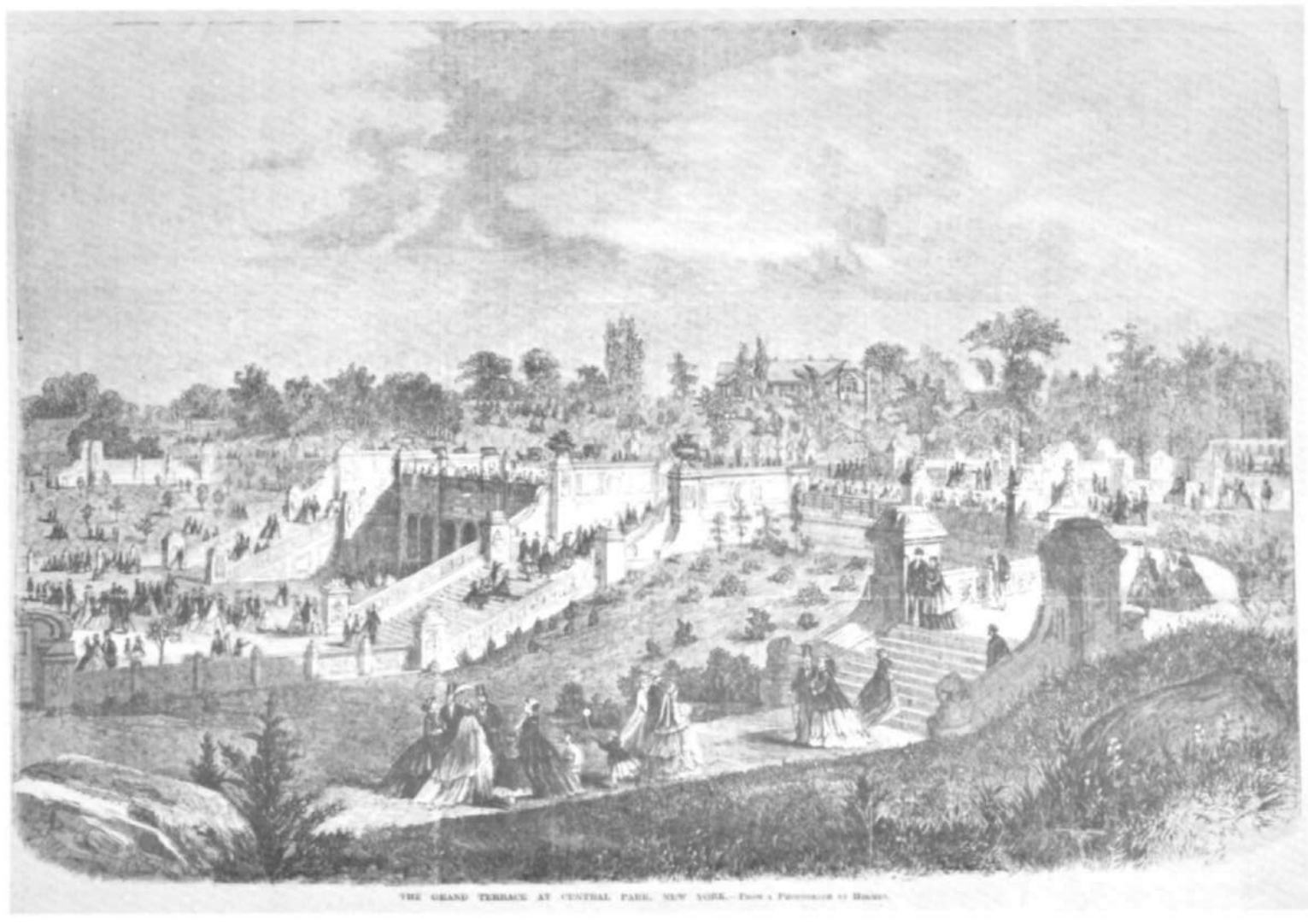
The implications of this philosophy, that a more perfect natural environment could help perfect society, seemed particularly important in regard to the many new immigrants swelling the population of the city. If the park and its broader influence could act to acculturate the large numbers of immigrants by helping assimilate them, raise them to middle class value systems, and incorporate them into the economic system, then this was a far more preferable way to bring them into the ranks of democracy than the means which Tammany was using at the ward level.[2]

Such an accomplishment or objective for a park was certainly ambitious. That an essentially physical improvement might have such a broad social effect was more a fond hope than an attained, or even achievable fact. For in spite of the rhetoric of the designers, the Commissioners, and much of the informed public, the poorer classes of the city were never able during this period to use it intensely. Granted it was open and available to all, and the experience various classes might receive by being in the park could be similar, yet the way in which they might use and enjoy it, was not. Most everything about the park bespoke money. Carriages, horses, even boats and skates, rented or owned, required a good deal of money. And even if one came as a mere pedestrian, one had to be able to afford the time. This was not an easy proposition for those worked six days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day. Even when they could come, because the park was still well above the settled portions of

1. Third Annual Report..., as quoted Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 407.
2. For more analysis of the democratic purpose of parks see, Albert Fein, "Parks in a Democratic Society," Landscape Architecture, LV (October 1964) pp. 24-31; also see Albert Fein, Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

Figure 22. View of the Grand Terrace in Central Park, 1866.

Published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (August 5, 1866).



THE GRAND TERRACE AT CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK.—From a Photograph by Bogardus.

the city, it involved a long and grueling walk to reach it or the payment of car fare on the omnibuses. Once there, if one did not wish to walk miles more to enjoy the full park, it was necessary to pay twenty-five cents for the omnibus ride through the park that left from the Fifth and Eighth Avenue gates.[1] And thus access to the park by the poor, was in fact limited:

> The Central Park is visited only by such poor as live in its not thickly settled neighborhood, and by those to whom the price of a car-fare there and back is not a tax. Those of us to whom so small a sum is an unconsidered trifle, should reflect that there are thousands in our big city to whom it is no trifle, but an item in the week's earnings to be well considered. We are not of those who think a great park is made particularly for the poor, but we should be glad to see the power to enjoy it made more equal than it is.[2]

Even Olmsted had to grant in 1872 that the park was too far away for working people to reach it easily.[3] Many years later, the usually accurate observer of the poor in New York City, Jacob Riis, would still be able to note, "only three poor children, were ever in Central Park."

Very few would want to go the park from downtown in the same style that cost Oliver Wendell Holmes four dollars in 1862,[4] but it is also equally preposterous to assume a great deal of social contact or interaction between classes once they did get there. The image of George Templeton Strong or John Jacob Astor stopping their carriage to rub shoulders or involve themselves in intimate conversation with an Irish laborer, a German saloon keeper, or Italian rag-picker is simply not plausible. While they may well have been in the park at the same time, they were hardly together,

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1. James D. McCabe, Jr., Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or the Sights and Sensations of the Great City, Philadelphia, 1872, p. 348.
2. Scribner's Monthly, VI (October, 1873), p. 691.
3. Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to William Robinson, May 17, 1872, reprinted in Charles C. MacLaughlin, op.cit., p. 367.
4. Henry Hope Reed and Sophia Duckworth, op.cit., pp. 33-34.

nor probably even taking note of one another except as the wealthy and ostentatious are always capable of being a curious sight.

The park was then, in spite of all good intentions, and a great deal of rhetoric, of greatest service to the upper and middle classes and really generally inaccessible to the large population of poor in the city. To the extent that anyone might conclude that the park was meeting its democratic function, it may not be reasonably said to have been filtering down the social scale any further than to the middle class. Nor might it be seriously claimed that it facilitated social interaction between classes. No matter what the intention had been or how strong were the pronouncements to the contrary, the park in 1870, was of primary benefit to the wealthy and influential citizens of the city who had all along been its strongest advocates.

There is another set of facts related to wealth, that had also been carefully developed at this time to help explain or display the success of the park for New York. These were the economic arguments carefully laid out in the Commissioners' official reports and elsewhere to display that the park was in fact responsible for a large increase in real estate taxes--so large in fact as to be more than sufficient to cover all the outlays made for the park. It was very important that the park be justified on some economic grounds, for as a single civic improvement not intended to generate its own revenues, its cost had been unprecedented. The total cost of the land including its extension to 110th Street, exceeded 7.3 million dollars, and even when this was adjusted by crediting the amount recouped by the benefit assessment, the net cost was still close to 4.8 million dollars.[1] When the cost of the park's improvements through 1870

1. Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 54.

were added, in the amount of 6.4 million dollars all funded by the issuance of city debt instruments,[1] the cost of providing the city with a park was well in excess of eleven million dollars. Much later, and in another context, Olmsted would calculate that the cost of land had been $7000/acre and the expense of construction $15,000/acre.[2]

The Commissioners were, of course, sensitive to the frequent criticism that the park was costing the city very dearly. And every year in their annual report they traced the increase in assessed valuation, and thus taxes, from the three wards contiguous to the park. In 1869, for example, their comparative figures showed that from 1856 when the land for the park was first purchased, the assessed valuation of the surrounding property had increased by 124 million dollars. With a tax rate of $2.27 for that year of 1869, the increase in revenue for that year alone was 2.8 million dollars.[3] By similar calculations it could be shown that the park had actually generated a profit in taxes well in excess of the park's cost. And by 1884 as a small pamphlet signed by eminent bankers and businessmen pointed out, "the rise in land values adjoining the park, even allowing for a substantial increase for other causes, was sufficient not only to offset the whole cost of the park, its land, and interest on the capital involved (a total expenditure of nearly $44 million), but also to show as a profit income in taxes of nearly half this sum annually."[4]

This claim that the park paid for itself and even generated a profit to the city is one which is very difficult to evaluate by any objective

1. First Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks for the Year ending May 1, 1871, New York, 1871, p. 110.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, The Park for Detroit, Printed for the author, 1882, p. 27.
3. Thirteenth Annual Report..., pp. 53-54.
4. George F. Chadwick, The Park and the Town, op.cit., pp. 188-190.

standard. Surely the park stimulated development near it and made the surrounding area one of extremely high real estate value--often in a startlingly short period. This effect is axiomatic in the field of land economics. One particularly convincing example was documented by New York officials. A piece of property bounded by 78th and 79th Streets and Fifth and Madison Avenues was sold in 1852 for three thousand dollars. A year later it exchanged hands for $4,500, and in 1857 with the park more of a certainty it was purchased for $40,000. Twelve years later in 1869 with the park essentially complete, the owner refused an offer from Mr. Vanderbilt to purchase the land for $1,250,000.[1] The number of lots that adjoined the park and were able to have their value thus influenced were, of course, limited, and with this fixed supply their price would naturally be bid up.

On the other hand, it seems a very shaky proposition to suggest that the presence of the park was responsible for a net increase in assessment and taxes. Surely, with or without the park wealthy residences and other buildings would still have been built in the city, probably in the same numbers, but just in some other attractive location. The aggregate assessed valuation in the city would be essentially the same, it simply would have been distributed differently. While granting that it may have helped make the city a more attractive place to live, work or transact business, and thus may have marginally helped to stimulate trade and attract residents, basically the growth of New York would have been as great and as rapid without the development of Central Park. The park may have helped condition the direction and location of growth, but it

1. New York State Commission to Select and Locate Lands for Public Parks in the 23rd and 24th wards of New York City, Report to the New York Legislature of the Commission to Select and Locate Lands for Public Parks... etc., New York, 1884, pp. 65-66.

did nothing by itself to cause it. Growth, building and an increase in valuation was inevitable, unless the growth of population ceased, and the park had no influence one way or the other on this fact.

Only one contemporary commentator seems to have recognized this obvious conclusion:

> The situation of the park, the character of its improvement, and uses made of it, negative [sic] the assumption that it was the cause of a development that all the avenues of progress brought to and around it. The pressure of the city upwards and onwards, in its natural and healthy growth, the growth of every industry and trade, of wealth and taste, of population and popular energy, of public faith and private credit, have filled the upper vacant lands of the city. The population of the wards named increased from 117,935 in 1850 to 351,597 in 1880. Will this be attributed to the Central Park?[1]

The assertion that the park facilitated social interaction and immigrant acculturation and the claim that the park was singularly responsible for a substantial net gain in taxes for the city are at the very best tenuous. But this is not important. Rather what is critical, is that they were clearly believed to be true. These conclusions about the effect of the park, misguided though they were, stimulated other cities and New York itself to build parks or try other similar improvements which could only make a very positive contribution to bettering the fast-growing American cities. The large number of other cities, who shortly after the success of Central Park was evident chose to emulate New York by building large landscape parks of their own, is substantial testimony to the power of these arguments.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that contrary to most perceptions of the role of urban improvements and reform at this time, both the

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1. James A. Deering, Proposed New Parks; a Waste of Money, New York, 1885, p. 2.

democratic and economic arguments cast the park into something that was to be an additive to the city, a positive force to be integrated into the dynamics of urban growth and life. It was to contribute to improving the city, according to these two arguments, not by diminishing some of its problems or by draining off some evil from the city and thus recapturing some measure of pre-urban simplicity. Rather it was to make the city more urbane and more civilized, for rapid urbanization had made the city only large, urban, and seemingly uncontrolled.

There were, of course, other arguments put forth to explain the impact and accomplishments of the park, and many of these fall more neatly into a category from which the park was seen as mitigating some negative aspect of urbanization. The most common and important of these was the often heard remarks that the presence of the park represented a substantial improvement in the city's public health. Certainly, it would not have made it worse, for as we know, polluted water sources, lack of sanitary facilities, crowded tenement districts, and free-roaming swine scavenging for garbage in the streets, were a very common fact of New York life. But the case for the park in terms of aiding public health was drawn on a broader basis, that is, that it helped open up, ventilate the city and act as its pulmonary organs. Clean, fresh air such as was apparently available to those in the park, more closely approximated conditions in the open countryside, where people appeared to be more healthy. Olmsted believed this, and writing in 1870, after his experience with Central Park, he made this observation:

> ...the average length of life of mankind in towns has been much less than in the country, and...the average amount of disease and misery and of vice and crime has been much greater in towns...It has shown, for example, that under ordinary circumstances, in the interior parts of large and closely built

> towns, a given quantity of air contains considerably less of the elements which we require to receive through the lungs than the air of the country...and instead of them it carries into the lungs highly corrupt and irritating matters, the action of which tends strongly to vitiate all our sources of vigor.[1]

Working from a premise such as this, which of course had no basis in scientific fact, the park was portrayed by numerous intelligent New Yorkers as having salubrious and curative powers in all matters of health. Recalling a frightful increase in mortality amongst children which occurred every year at midsummer, Olmsted also noted that in the absence of an ability to visit the country during these months, the next best means of cure was "to spend an occasional day or part of a day on the Park. It has been for some years a growing practice with physicians to advise this course."[2] Specific portions of the park had been included and designed, in fact, with this very purpose in mind.[3]

There was not much difficulty in having the medical profession in New York sustain this proposition, for as early as 1867 the Metropolitan Board of Health was publishing carefully collected meteorology data gathered in the park and showing correlations between this physical information and the incidence of death and illness from certain diseases.[4] No one seriously doubted, then or now, that the range of physical exercise available to those who visited the park could be anything but beneficial to their general health. Yet as the New York Times noted early on, since most visitors came by horse or carriage, even this healthful influence was somewhat of an illusion.

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," in S. B. Sutton, ed., Civizing American Cities, op.cit., pp. 64-65.
2. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Two Letters..., op.cit., p. 6.
3. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
4. New York State, Second Annual Report of the Metropolitan Board of Health, 1867, Albany, 1868, p. 379.

> The radically false notions on the subject of exercise with which our public mind is imbued could not be better exemplified than in the hallucination with which a large portion of it is afflicted, that a trotting wagon and a pair of fast horses afford what might be called 'exercise'... The lungs, the limbs, the liver and other visera, and the circulation, derive from it hardly any more benefit than from sitting in a bar-room with the feet on the window-sill... The tremulous motion of a vehicle...is not a powerful tonic for a male adult with an average appetite. We venture, moreover, to assert that there is not a business man in New York, who, if his health gives way, may not grow more fat, flabby, scrofulous, sour-tempered, and dyspetic every year he lives, in spite of the fastest team in the country, and the neatest wagon and harness money can purchase.[1]

No matter how absurd such claims to better health as derived from the park might now seem, they appeared with great frequency, and were carefully and sincerely argued by doctors and others.[2] Directly related to physical health, only drawn on a slightly more subtle basis, were the claims made that the park had a great psychological effect on the city's residents. The Reverend Dr. E. W. Bellows, a close friend of Olmsted and a fervent supporter of public parks, succinctly articulated this point of view when he wrote, "To teach and induce habits of orderly, tranquil, contemplative, or social amusement, moderate exercises and recreation, soothing to the nerves, has been the most needed 'mission' for New York. We think we see daily evidence that the Park accomplishes not a little in this way."[3] Bellows also believed that he saw in the park another positive influence which was equally dear to a minister's heart. It seemed that it also had an effect on the behavior and general morality of those who went there.

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1. New York Times, November 17, 1859.
2. For the classic article on this subject see, John H. Rauch, M.D., Public Parks; Their Effects upon the Moral, Physical and Sanitary Condition of Large Cities, Chicago, 1869, pp. 1-84.
3. E. W. Bellows, "Cities and Parks with Special Reference to the New York Central Park," Atlantic Monthly, VII (April, 1861), p. 429.

> "It has been observed that rude, noisy fellows, after entering the more advanced or finished parts of the Park, become hushed, moderate and careful...What would they have done, where would they have been, to what sort of recreation would they have turned, if to any, had there been no park? Of one sort the answer is supplied by the keeper of a certain saloon, who came to the park, as he said, to see his former customers. The enjoyment of the ice had made them forget their grog."[1]

Commonly repeated in the newspapers and in most of the other written analysis about the park, these were not the thoughts of but a few men closely associated or dedicated to the idea of the park. They were widely held by many in the city. What in fact was emerging from this argument was the idea that the mere act of bringing a piece of the country to the city would help transfer the social tone of the countryside which was seen as less impersonal, overwhelming, and anxiety-producing than that in the city.[2]

There was one last claim made in support of the park's accomplishment that it is important to deal with. This was that the park, now completed, served as an educational device for the cultural improvement of the city. The presence in the park of artistically conceived statues and architectural artifacts, the frequent performances of classical music, the growing collection of fine arts which would soon be intimately associated with the park, the fact that the design of the park itself represented America's pre-eminent example of landscape art, and that the park was becoming a laboratory for the study of botanical, zoological, and other natural history specimens,[3] all gave credence to this argument. In this respect, the park was having a manifestly civilizing effect on the

1. Ibid., pp. 428-429.
2. For more on this see, Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, op.cit., pp. 4-5, 28-30.
3. Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art, I (July 10, 1869), pp. 471-473.

young and growing city. For as George Templeton Strong nostalgically noted:

> One would prefer, if he could, to annihilate his past and commence life, say in this A.D. 1860, and so enjoy longer acquaintance with this era of special development and material progress, watch the splendid march of science on earth, share the benefits of the steam engine and telegraph, and grow up with this park....Central Park and Astor Library and a developed Columbia University promise to make the city twenty years hence a real center of culture and civilization, furnishing privileges to youth far beyond what it gave me in my boyhood.[1]

Nearly forty years later, William Dean Howells would attribute one other virtue to the park when he claimed that its purchase and improvement had been an act of preservation of both the natural landscape and the condition of life before rapid urbanization had become a reality in America.

> The park is...an American woodland, breaking into meadows, here and there, and brightened with pools and ponds, lurking among rude masses of rock and gleeming between leafy knolls and grassy levels....a memory of the land as it was before the havoc of the city began and giving to the city-prisoned poor an image of what the free country still is, everywhere.[2]

About this distillation of defense that was growing up around the idea of the park, a number of things must be briefly mentioned. First, the park, in essence just a physical improvement and a creative act of civic adornment at its conception, was now being justified as strongly on the basis of its perceived ability to effect the social well-being of the city's residents. Calming rude crowds, acculturating immigrants, educating the masses and exposing them to cultural endeavors, were now represented as just as important as the more modest original intention of providing a public recreational area, an attractively landscaped

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1. Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 3, p. 30.
2. William Dean Howells, Impressions and Experiences, New York, 1896. p. 227.

park, and a bit of fresh air to the city. Except in its most literal sense, Central Park was understood to be something more than just an example of bringing nature to the city, and thus physical planning was now seen as imbued with certain social and economic purposes.

From this varied rationale that was constructed around the park there was also emerging a new conception of the city. Granted, much of the argument describing the park's success was drawn out of the old tradition of stock romantic arguments that portrayed the park as a means of escape or an antidote to the growing evil of the city. This cannot be denied and is forcefully reflected in many of the arguments enumerated. At the same time, nevertheless, some were saying that the park was a positive act of urban affirmation and vote of confidence, not just a reaction or attempt at regression, which symbolized the sort of improvement that was necessary in the growing city. By these people, urbanization was realistically seen as irrevocable and perhaps even desirable. The growth of cities was inevitable, the nation's density would be acted out there and no longer in the countryside, and therefore one ought to accept this fact and seek to improve them in whatever ways possible. This was a theme to which Olmsted in particular, would return again and again as his career proceeded. He wrote in one brief autobiographical statement:

> Our country has entered upon a stage of progress in which its welfare is to depend on the convenience, safety, order and economy of life in its great cities. It can not prosper independently of them; can not gain in virtue, wisdom, comfort, except as they also advance.[1]
>
> It is hardly a matter of speculation, I am disposed to think, but almost of demonstration, that the larger a town becomes because simply of its advantages for commercial purposes, the greater will be the convenience available to

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," reprinted in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape into Cityscape, op.cit., p. 52.

> those who live in or near it for cooperation, as well with reference to the accumulation of wealth in the higher forms, as in seats of learning, science, and of art....[1]
>
> The rapid enlargement of great towns which has hitherto occurred, must then be regarded as merely a premonition of the vastly greater enlargement that is to come. We see, therefore, how imperative, with reference to the interest of our race, is this question, whether as the enlargement of towns goes on the law of improvement is such that we may reasonably hope that life in them will continue to grow better, more orderly, more healthy?....It [will not] be ascribed to the direct action of the law of supply and demand.[2]

This perception of the city, uncommon for its time, emerged directly out of Olmsted's work on Central Park. Others, especially those who sought to emulate the success of Central Park in other cities, would soon begin to articulate some agreement with these sentiments, and thus further reinforce the idea that parks grew out of urban reality as well as rural ideals. No longer did everyone believe that the city was inherently a menace to civilization as had Jefferson and his many followers, for the democracy that had been born in the countryside was now reaching maturity and being shaped in its burgeoning cities.

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1. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," in S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities, op.cit., p. 64.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents to the President of the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, Brooklyn (1868)," in Albert Fein, ed., Landscape Into Cityscape, op.cit., pp. 146-147.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

It had taken two decades to move Central Park from conception to completion. In 1871, the final year of this period, the park faced the last serious challenge of its formative years. In the November elections of the year before, Tammany managed to retain complete control over nearly every local office. Also through the deft direction of William Marcy Tweed, the machine gained majority control of the State House and elected its gubernatorial candidate, John T. Hoffman. A new city charter was quickly forced through the legislature on April 15, 1870. The new "Tweed Charter" managed to redress many of the long term grievances which the city had endured by placing back in the hands of local officials many of the powers which the state had carefully withdrawn in its series of reform moves. One of the changes embodied in the new charter abolished the Board of Commissioners of Central Park and replaced it with a new board of five commissioners called the Department of Public Parks. It was given complete control over all the city's open spaces including Central Park.[1]

Under the direction of Peter "Brains" Sweeney, a sly, conniving lieutenant and close confidant of Tweed, the new board took over the management of the park and used it in the same fashion as the other public works of the city. One commentator reviewed the financial abuse in these terms:

> In the four years prior to the coming of Sweeney, the average annual cost for maintaining Central Park was just under $250,000. From April 20, 1870 to November 1, 1871, however, Sweeney and Company in executive sessions spent $6,000,000. They left

1. Charles Nordhoff, "The Mismanagement of New York--A Remedy Suggested," North American Review, CXIII (October, 1871), pp. 332-333.

> behind them liabilities amounting to over $1,500,000, contracts amounting to another $500,000--a total expenditure of $3,000,000 of the public's money.[1]

In addition to the damage to the public purse, the park itself was physically misused when in order to expand the public payroll, Sweeney hired thousands of new laborers to work on the already completed park. With little to do, they cut away flourishing shrubbery, transplanted trees to other city parks, pruned branches off the new trees, and removed many trees and shrubs from the borders so that one could have an uninterrupted view of the new residences being built along Fifth Avenue. A popular slogan that soon emerged was, "Ringman, spare that tree!"[2]

The Tweed Ring was deposed in the fall of 1871 after an eighteen month foray which had brought the city to the edge of bankruptcy. A new preservation-minded park board was appointed which quickly rehired Olmsted and Vaux to restore the park and rectify the damage. Except for the angry taxpayers, the public hardly took note of the Tweed Ring's misuse of the park. This eight hundred and forty acre preserve was too important a fact of daily life for the city to have its use and enjoyment affected by this brief political incursion. For in 1871, more than ten million residents visited the park. It is clear that the city's greatest public improvement had also become its most popular attraction. As the social and recreational center for the entire city, it was praised and justified on a very wide range of grounds. The New York Herald concluded simply that it was "the most noble, the most praiseworthy, the most Philanthropic of our public works."

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1. Alexander B. Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring, op.cit., pp. 127-128.
2. Edward I. Sears, The Central Park Under Ring-Leader Rule, New York, 1871, p. 21.

Figure 23. Plan of Central Park in 1875.

Hinrichs' Guide Map of the Central Park, drawn by Oscar Hinrichs and published by Mayer, Merkel & Ottman, Lithographers, New York City, 1875.

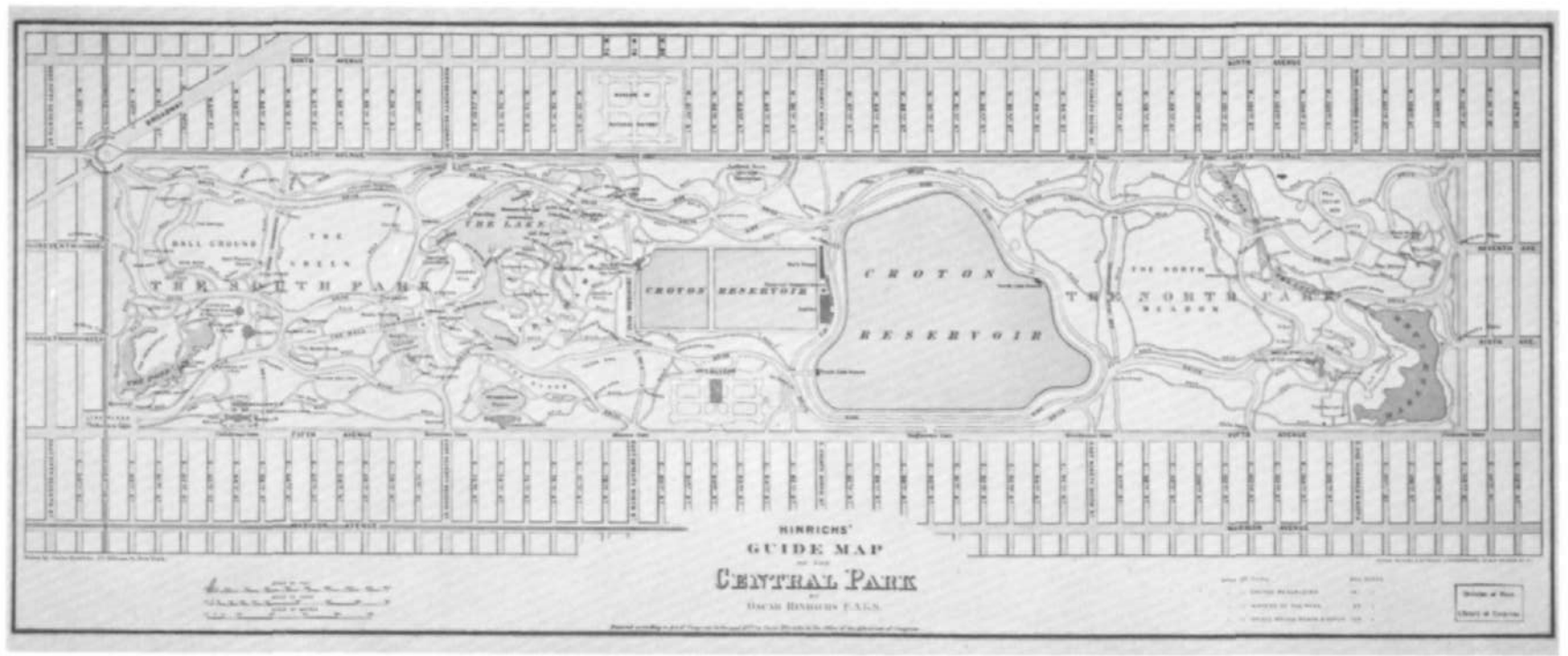
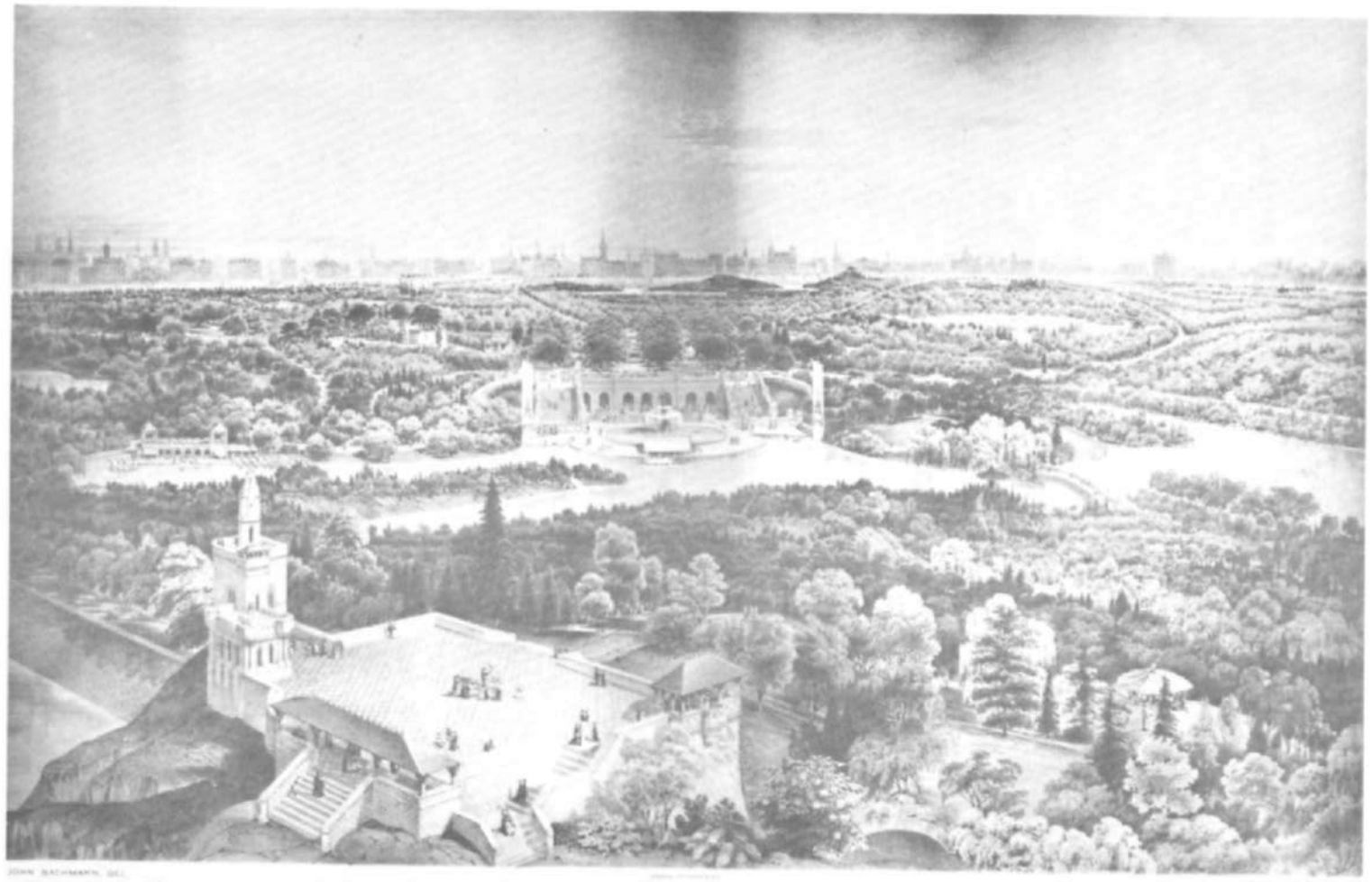

THE SOUTH PARK
THE LAKE
CROTON RESERVOIR
CROTON RESERVOIR
THE NORTH MEADOW
HINRICHS'
GUIDE MAP
OF THE
CENTRAL PARK
DAVID HINRICHS F.A.G.S.

Figure 24. View of Central Park Looking South from Reservoir, c. 1875.

Lithograph drawn by John Bachmann and published by H. Bencke, c. 1875.



VIEW OF CENTRAL PARK
NEW YORK

No one can doubt that the park was a great success if judged simply by the extent of its use and the popular acclaim it generated. Yet in some respects it had failed, particularly in regard to many of the original promises articulated by its designers and early advocates. The park, for example, did not measurably improve public health conditions nor provide much real relief to the tenement dwellers. The park did not actually facilitate interaction between social classes or help acculturate the immigrant population. Nor did it increase the overall tax base of the city as was claimed. And thus much of the original vision of the park as stated by its strongest proponents was in fact never realized. What then were the positive achievements and implications of Central Park?

At the most fundamental level, a barren, rocky, rubbish-strewn wilderness was transformed into an artistically conceived rural pleasure ground and reserved for future generations. By creating the park, a large piece of the city was preserved from the private development process and given over permanently to public use and enjoyment. Furthermore, the simple physical act of acquiring and improving the park also had ecological implications for the city. The reservation of this large tract of land in the middle of the growing city helped relieve the overall density of development within the community. A more human scale and balance was introduced into the otherwise congested environment. The park also provided a degree of environmental variety which positively affected the city in both a physical and visual sense.

In addition to these accomplishments which resulted from the mere physical presence of the park, we know that the park also achieved a symbolic dimension. There was a common feeling that a well designed urban ornament like the park could help bring the rough and relatively young City

of New York more on a parity with the more civilized and urbane European urban centers. Pushing aside the arguments that such a park might appear too aristocratic to be sanctioned in America, too artistic a creation to be appreciated by the average American, or be an unrepublican use of money that might have primary attraction only for the wealthy, the park defenders forged instead a philosophy that preyed upon the pride and insecurity of a populace that hoped to emulate the quality and character of established, old world cities. So recently associated with unpaved streets, scavenging pigs and crowded, frame tenements, New York needed to display some symbol of its new cosmopolitan stature and emerging urbanity. The park, a piece of landscape creatively molded according to artistic principles, was a part of this new urban consciousness and civic pride.

Another important accomplishment of the park is related to the administrative mechanism created to bring the park into being. The Board of Commissioners, an independent, single purpose agency, provided a new means for effectively governing one small aspect of the city's development. Such autonomous board were not a new invention, but after the Commissioners' successful and efficient management of the park within a political framework of great turbulence, this administrative device took on a new lustre. The New York Times noted:

> "There was one other good result of the construction of the Park, and it was perhaps the most important of all. It proved the possibility, in which hardly anyone previously believed, of conducting a great public work, employing hundreds of men, in absolute disregard of political influence, and in the best manner. Workmen found for the first time in New York, since politics became a trade, that they could earn money in the public service without having to throw in their votes with their labor, and the people found it was possible to spend enormous sums for public purposes without jobbery, corruption or leakage....We know of no chapter of recent American social history on the whole more hopeful and

> encouraging than the very short one which tells the story of how the Central Park was made and has been managed.[1]

Central Park had established the independent commission as a model for the efficient administration of governmental enterprises. This governing device would be used again and again in the coming decades to manage numerous civic enterprises.

A critical element related to the Board's success was its intelligent, zealous and effective administrators. Green, as executive head and comptroller of the entire enterprise, led the Board for thirteen consecutive years until he was effectively neutralized by the Tweed takeover of the Park. He personally must be accorded much of the credit for the successful completion of the park. Olmsted seems only slightly less responsible. As first co-designer of the unique plan, as hard-working superintendent of the work force during its most demanding years, as consultant landscape architect during the years of its completion, and finally as articulate defender against later encroachments, he also deserves much of the responsibility of its success and preservation. The devotion and tenacity of these two leaders helped to insure the Board's integrity and establish it as a means for progressive urban management.

The accomplishment and success of Central Park may also be measured by the number of its emulators. Central Park would be important even if it were an isolated or a unique example of an urban, landscaped open-space. But it was not just a singular case for it quickly became a precedent for similar endeavors in other American cities. As soon as 1868, the Board of Commissioners could comment on the spread of parks throughout the country:

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1. New York Times, March 13, 1870.

> "There is scarcely a city of magnitude in this country that has not provided, or taken measures to provide, a park for the pleasure of its citizens. Brooklyn our neighbor, has one, that differing in its characteristics from our own, yet promises to be of great attractiveness.
>
> "Baltimore had laid out and improved its park under the enlightened action of its Commissioners. Philadelphia has already secured grounds of great extent; enlightened citizens throughout the country already perceive the desirability of procuring conveniently situated pleasure grounds that will accommodate present and future generations, while the necessary space can be acquired within the limits at a reasonable cost; and the subject is under discussion in Providence, Albany, Troy, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis and Louisville.[1]

Other major cities could shortly be added to this roll, such as Montreal, Detroit, Newark, Buffalo, Bridgeport, Rochester, San Francisco and Boston. In the latter city, an entire system of parks was laid out and tied together by a system of roads and parkways.

Even if the plan for Central Park had not been brilliantly conceived and efficiently implemented, and even if it had not helped to reform the environment of America's largest and most important city, it would have been copied by other cities. The fact that millions were deriving pleasure from it annually and that a set of careful justifications and rationalizations were being enticingly spread about it, demanded that other communities try their hand at similar endeavors. What in fact happened was that an entire generation of American cities uncritically adopted the idea of acquiring large landscaped parks. Most of the nation's cities quickly reserved park lands so that the legacy of Central Park became an entire American parks movement. These open spaces provided an enduring positive influence on the environment of our urban centers.

The parks movement which developed from the Central Park precedent

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1. As quoted Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., II, p. 178.

was also primarily responsible for the emergence of the profession of landscape architecture in this country. Through the design of scores of new urban parks, landscape architects gained invaluable experience in large scale environmental planning. Many of then turned their attention to the problems of designing whole communities or suburban extensions during the last third of the nineteenth century.[1] When the picturesque principles of park design were translated into plans for entire neighborhoods and towns, new criteria for urban form were established.[2]

The final long term effect of the park to be revieved here is the relationship of the park to the development of city planning as a governmental function. There are two aspects of this question which are especially relevant. At an early point the state moved to make further use of the Board of Commissioners who were so impressively managing the construction of the park. A whole set of collateral powers was conferred on the Board in order that it might control the growth and development stimualted by the park at the northern end of the island. From 1865 to 1870 more than a dozen enabling acts were passed that granted new and unexpected authority to the Board.[3] In addition to having the ability to pace development by deciding when to open the streets around and above the park, the Board was empowered

> ...to survey and lay out the lower part of Westchester County; to devise plans for the improvement of the Harlem River and Spuyten Duyvil Creek, and for the construction of

1. See Olmsted, Jr. and Kimball, op.cit., I, p. 130; H.W.S.Cleveland, Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West, Chiefo, 1873; Ian R. Stewart, "Parks, Progressivism and Planning: Charles Eliot in the Metropolitan Context," Landscape Architecture, LVIII (April, 1968), pp. 201-204.
2. See John W. Reps, "Picturesque Planning in the Romantic Style," The Making of Urban America, op.cit., pp. 325-348. For the logical extension of this tradition see Clarence S. Stein, Toward New Towns for America, Cambridge, 1957.
3. For a review of the various laws see First Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks for the Year ending May 1, 1871, New York, 1871, pp. 68-106.

> bridges over these streams; to establish and define bulkhead lines on the North River, north of Fifty-Fifth Street; and to survey and lay out that part of the island lying west of Eighth Avenue and south of One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street.[1]

These laws and the various actions recommended by the Board in pursuit of its new objectives are of importance because they display the fact that the Board of Commissioners had been elevated to the position of a regional planning authority.

In one of the many perceptive reports prepared by Green outlining the Board's position regarding a local planning matter, he outlined what ought to be the rightful scope of his newly constituted body.

> The laying out of roads and bridges, and the apportioning of expenditures for great works built in the interest of both counties, and of the whole public, should be taken out of the petty squabbles of small jurisdictions, and left to the determination of some body with comprehensive powers, capable of dealing with these subjects, not in the interest of New York alone, but in that of both, and of the whole public convenience.[2]

Few tangible results were realized immediately from the Board's new powers. Nevertheless, it was now recognized that public planning was necessary in a rapidly developing city and that comprehensive powers such as those vested in the Board would be required for successful environmental management.

Finally, it is clear that Central Park stimulated urban planning in a more fundamental way. The very process of locating and designing a park and relating it to the existing community embraced fully what are now considered common planning functions. In attempting to define the present and future relationships between man, space, nature and the urban condition, parks planners inevitably became involved in the sort of evaluation of

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1. As quoted John Foord, The Life and Public Services of Andrew Haswell Green, Garden City, New York, 1913, pp. 71-72.
2. Twelfth Annual Report..., p. 160.

environmental impact that is at the heart of modern urban planning analysis. The successful employment of this comprehensive urban planning process which emerged from the parks movement displayed to cities one important means by which they could consciously control the developing physical environment.

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