

Henry Shaw's Victorian Landscapes: The Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park
Carol Grove

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In 1859, as Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux were executing their plan for New York's Central Park, another public garden nearly 1,000 miles to the west was opening its gates to the public for the first time. This botanical garden and an adjoining park (which opened in 1872) is the subject of a new book, *Henry Shaw's Victorian Landscapes: The Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park* by art historian Carol Grove. Grove's monograph on these two important gardenesque landscapes in St Louis is a valuable reminder that the picturesque aesthetic as exemplified by Central Park was not the only landscape tradition in play during the nineteenth century. Grove provides the reader with a fascinating examination of the lifelong passion of Englishman Henry Shaw to create a botanical garden and park for the residents of his adopted city. These two projects shared not only a common patron and a prevailing aesthetic, but also were both conceived with the dual mission of public education and recreation. This book, part of a series by the University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Library of American Landscape History, is a pleasure to read and is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the broader range of designed landscapes in nineteenth-century America.

The story of the Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park is inextricably intertwined with the biography of Henry Shaw. Grove paints an intriguing portrait – arguing that he was both English and American 'with one foot planted in the eighteenth century, the other firmly in the nineteenth' (pp. 5–6). Grove's narrative follows a chronological path tracing Shaw's origins in England, his study of botany as a young man, his successful career as a merchant in the Mississippi River valley, his extensive travels and his passion for gardening as an adult. She traces the many influences on Shaw, including the writings of John Claudius Loudon, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the work of Andrew Jackson Downing. It was during a visit to Chatsworth in Derbyshire, however, that Shaw conceived of the idea

to build a similar garden for St Louis where the middle class could study botany.

The form Shaw's garden and park would take was the direct result of his interests in both the ornamental qualities of gardening and the scientific applications of botany. Shaw believed that the gardenesque was 'the midpoint between the picturesque and the formal style' (p. 126) and thus was the optimal method of laying out a garden to simultaneously delight and educate the public. By placing an emphasis on the display of plants rather than the creation of a picturesque scene, Shaw was indulging his own interests, but was also tapping into the general public's growing interest in botany in the mid-nineteenth century. While this less than scientific approach disappointed some of Shaw's correspondents and advisors such as Harvard botanist Asa Gray and William Hooker at Kew, Shaw's intellectual legacy included the creation of a graduate programme and the Shaw School of Botany at Washington University in the late nineteenth century.

After Shaw's death in 1889, like many public spaces, the garden and park was the subject of many changes that threatened the founder's original vision. Grove describes the renewed emphasis on ornament, particularly spectacular and colourful floral displays that had great popular appeal, which dominated the development of the park in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The garden was also the focus of an extended study and largely unrealised planning effort by the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot. In a nod to changing taste, alternations between 1913 and 1917 imposed the picturesque aesthetic on Shaw's garden. More recent efforts to preserve Shaw's Victorian landscape are addressed in an afterword by John Karel, the current director of Tower Grove Park.

Several observations are in order regarding the book's documentation and illustrations. Grove consulted extensive archives, including records of the books Shaw used, his plant inventories and correspondence. While the reader can refer to the rich endnotes to piece together the author's research strategy, a bibliography would have been helpful. The author and publisher should be commended for the numerous illustrations that include historic drawings and photographs (highlights are images of nineteenth-century visitors shown floating on the garden's giant lily pads). Photographs by Carol Betsch of the park and garden as they appear today bring the pictorial documentation up to date. Although the illustrations are extraordinary in their breadth and quality, the reader is left wanting a comprehensive site plan to

better understand the original design and the evolution of the park and garden over time.

Despite these two omissions (which one hopes can be addressed in future reprints), this book is of great interest to the historian because it documents the theoretical debate between the picturesque tradition, on the one hand, and the gardenesque tradition, on the other. This book is also an important contribution to the emerging interest in designed landscapes in the American Midwest.

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