

landscape architecture

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

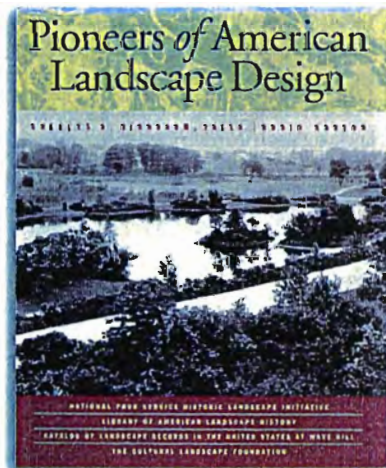
THE MAGAZINE OF THE

Pioneers of American Landscape Design, edited by Charles Birnbaum, FASLA, and Robin Karson; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000; 486 pages, \$59.95.

REVIEWED BY BOB SCARFO

Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson have, with *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, made an incalculable contribution to America's heritage, landscape architectural history, and the depth and diversity of the roots from which landscape architects draw their identity and pride. One hundred sixty narrative essays of mostly little known "visionary practitioners" comprise this first ever encyclopedia of designers. The essays were amassed through the dedication of more than one hundred authors. The designers' biographies and works span two hundred years, the earliest being Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), the only African American, and include the histories of thirty-one women, the earliest being Nellie B. (Osborn) Allen (1869–1961). An outgrowth of a National Park Service database, the biographies and more than 450 illustrations present designed and cultural landscapes along with facts gleaned through meticulous sifting through bits and pieces of information. This repository of bits of information is called the CATALOG, or that portion of the Wave Hill collection of incomplete information on landscape architecture.

Pioneers expands the definition of garden. By illuminating the diversity of skills, knowledge, and expertise of the visionaries, Birnbaum and Karson display unlikely sources of garden and landscape aesthetics. They make explicit the realities



contemporary landscape architects often struggle to express as their professional heritage and legacy. Most exciting, and beyond the growing sense of pride I have for my profession as I read about each designer's development, are the visual benchmarks. Numerous plans, landscape photos, sections, postcards, and more allow me to see the significant growth, and the designer's foresight, in landscapes that still exist. The benchmarks also alert me to the great loss of those landscapes no longer found outside the faded images.

Pioneers is a natural reference for landscape history classes and designers who recognize the value of knowing the roots of their vocation or avocation. I hope its

value is recognized in design studios and in other academic programs whose professional ancestors are recognized as contributing to American landscapes. The pioneers had backgrounds in horticulture, planning, engineering, surveying, sanitation, farming, and journalism, to name a few. Two additional resources in the encyclopedia are the inclusion of "important bibliographic citations" and a closing resource entitled "Sites Accessible to the Public." The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of contacts for many of the pioneers' gardens are provided. This latter resource could be improved in subsequent editions if the list were cross-referenced by geographical location. Currently it is organized alphabetically by designers' names.

A unique quality of *Pioneers* comes from the authors. Birnbaum and Karson clearly recognize that the building of history is an ongoing endeavor of many people's efforts. The reader is asked to become involved in the continuing discovery of history and to feel free to seek further information. I hope readers respond and, through discussions with friends and neighbors, expand the wealth of the bits and pieces of history that make up this truly unique expression of professional pride. LA

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