

Henry Shaw's Victorian Landscapes: The Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park by Carol Grove, ISBN 1-55849-508-8. Published in hardback by the University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Library of American Landscape History, Amherst. 185mm x 260mm, 250pp, priced £28.95.

This volume tells the story of Henry Shaw, a Yorkshire businessman and entrepreneur who made his fortune in America in the early 1800s,

and whose avocation for botany, landscaping and civic reform did much to develop the gardenesque method of landscaping.

Having left England with his father at the age of 18, Shaw settled in Saint Louis and set up a successful business in imports and exports. He went on to pursue his interest in the growing science

of botany. Hugely inspired by the Chatsworth estate, as well as the Sheffield Botanical Gardens and Hampton Court, and the burgeoning design innovations of Paxton, Shaw resolved to use his substantial financial resources to develop a comparable estate in the River City. The result of these endeavours was the Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower

Grove Park, the latter of which was designated as a national historic landmark in 1989.

Carol Grove adeptly mixes the biography of this entrepreneur, social reformer and philanthropist, with the history of the garden and the park, describing their inspiration in relation to the artistic styles and political ambitions of the period. The park opened to the public in 1859, the very same year that Charles Darwin published the *Origin of the Species*. Shaw's landscaping reflected

something of these changes in the opinions of the time in that he chose to put aside the picturesque method, with its romantic identification of god and nature, and developed the so-called gardenesque method, a precursor to modern formal gardens.

Shaw conceived of his gardens and park as spaces for public education and enjoyment wherein 'higher tastes and manners' could be gained by all social classes. He believed that civic improvement would come out of the appreciation of nature in a more structured and formal manner. A wide variety of shrubs and trees of particular botanical interest were planted and labelled to convey information. Botanical knowledge had been greatly advanced by the discovery of new species in South America and by new methods of transporting plants such as the Wardian case. Plants were placed in their own

space so that they could grow unhindered and their natural characteristics develop to the full. The desired effect was for the plants to take the form of individual pieces of art, laid out as if they were artefacts in a museum exhibition, yet maintaining an overall aesthetic continuity.

Situated at what was the northernmost navigable point of the Mississippi for most vessels, the Saint Louis of Shaw's time was quickly

increasing in size. The gentleman gardener's property was spared from damage in the fire that engulfed steamers and warehouses in 1849. His continued financial liquidity allowed him to endow the University of Washington's School of Botany.

In this well presented, pleasantly written and superbly edited volume Shaw's personality as an ambitious reformer with a mix of 18th and 19th century preoccupations is brought back to life for a contemporary audience. □

