

# CHOICE

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Kowsky, Francis R. **The best planned city in the world: Olmsted, Vaux, and the Buffalo park system.**

Massachusetts/Library of American Landscape History, 2013. 253p index afp ISBN 9781625340061, \$39.95

Who knew that Buffalo was "the best planned city"? Of course, the operative word here is "planned," since many city parks were built but later destroyed or highly compromised by other needs, such as freeways in the 1960s. This is a beautifully illustrated text sprinkled with early postcards and color images from the strategically aimed lens of photographer Andy Olenick. The volume's semigloss leaves contain many maps and landscape plans for the lavish 19th-century parks, aimed to express the concept of passive recreation in an urban oasis. Kowsky (emer., art history, SUNY Buffalo State) largely focuses on Olmsted, including his urban design theories, his park landscape design, and his lifetime relationship with Buffalo's political leadership. Olmsted built a network of natural settings connected by parkways that also accommodated bicycles and pedestrians. Unfortunately, many of these met various sad fates; one (Bennett Place) was paved over with asphalt to create a tennis court. The author adeptly explains the city politics of the gilded era and Olmsted's privileged outsider role, putting park building into the broader context of city planning. Readers will come away with an appreciation of parks and a personal empathy for park builders. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. All academic, professional, and public library collections. -- *D. E. Cleary, York College*