

cost and location, just how do built forms contribute to the process of normalization and the growth of civic culture that the authors otherwise so exhaustively document? This formal inattention leads to some odd juxtapositions of imagery, beginning with the book's cover. There, just below the words "an All-American City," is a montage belying those words and the authors' emphasis on a "normalized," non-Strip Las Vegas. The images are all taken from the Strip. They include a medieval castle, an Egyptian sphinx, and two hotel towers with the words "Riviera" and "Mirage" boldly displayed. If this is meant to be ironic, it is irony's only appearance here.

Another more banal yet nagging question is why, if living in Las Vegas is "like living anywhere else," as the authors repeatedly insist it is, one should want to read, let alone write, a 300-page book on the subject. Just as often the book slams home the notion that Las Vegas is not at all like other cities. The authors' language becomes almost ludicrous at times, smacking of an "only-in-Las Vegas" surreality. We are told, for instance, of an "intimate" 417-room Strip hotel, and of "the aura of romance attached to [the] commercialized practice of marrying people with glitzy efficiency" (46, 80). On numerous occasions the book takes on the boosterish tone of promotional literature. Las Vegas's incomparable "sexual mystique" is noted (78), as are its unparalleled "pedestrian delights" (88), its "visionary" planners and "growing sense of civic life" (128), the "architectural masterpiece[s]" that are its new public buildings (169), and the "outstanding young faculty" (including, presumably, Dickens and Collins) employed by its local university (189). At odds with these highly subjective and often unexplained claims is the book's unrelentingly dry tone. This manner of expression may be due to the authors' earnest and even laudable desire to take seriously a place most commentators have regarded as anything but serious. But when coupled with the sometimes turgid social science jargon ("the second

circuit of capital," "corporate collateral financing," etc.), and the all-too-frequent repetition of statistics and descriptive terms, it can make for less than compelling reading.

Still, despite its flaws, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City* should serve as a valuable foundation for future studies of that remarkable city. Like Julie Nicoletta's equally seminal book, it provides a complex and densely layered snapshot of a place all too often taken at face value. Further, amid the past decade's barrage of literature on the mounting placelessness of the new American landscape, it is bracing to read of localities struggling so vigorously over time to define and come to terms with their idiosyncrasies.

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Surveys and Guidebooks

Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson, editors

Pioneers of American Landscape Design

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, xxiii + 486 pp., 350 b/w illus., 100 color illus. \$59.95, ISBN 0-07-134420-9.

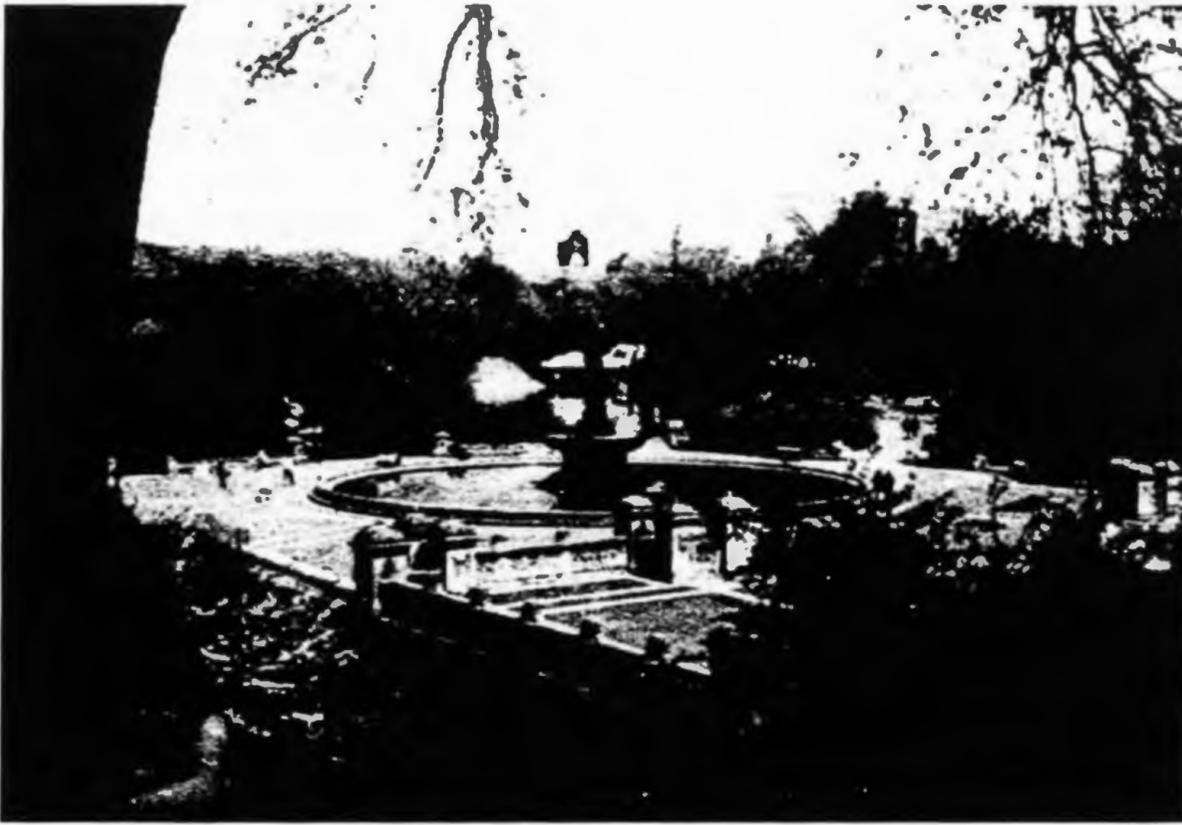
In the early 1860s, Calvert Vaux chided Frederick Law Olmsted for abandoning Central Park in its earliest stages of development to manage a gold mine in California. Vaux told Olmsted that he had made a mistake leaving the field of landscape architecture, which, Vaux maintained, God had put him on earth to practice. He also expressed his belief that both he and Olmsted were under a serious obligation to the future of the profession. As the winners of the Central Park competition, they had been placed in a special position to foster the professionalization of landscape archi-

ture. Vaux's appeal to Olmsted's conscience eventually won the day and the great man returned to New York in 1865 and to the profession that has since become synonymous with his name.

While Olmsted is well known as America's great landscape designer (though this story of his near abandonment of the field is not), the many others who came before and after him have not been so well studied. Until now, there has been no comprehensive source book in which one could find the stories of these other men and women who helped shape America's landscape. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* attempts to change that by presenting the biographies of 160 people who played important roles in forming the public and private landscapes of our country. Over 100 researchers authored the individual entries, presenting details of the subject's life, professional training, major projects, and design philosophy. Each entry ends with an annotated bibliography. The editors, Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson, interpreted their mission broadly to include not only those who called themselves landscape architects, but also horticulturists, writers, teachers, and designers. The entry for Guy Lowell, for example, refers to him as "architect, landscape architect, educator, author" (230). Others are "conservationist," "activist," "planner," or "journalist." In other words, there is far more than traditional landscape architecture covered here.

The text is well illustrated with ample photographs, plans, and drawings, and most biographies are accompanied by a portrait. The alphabetical format of the biographical dictionary is logical and makes the book easy to use, but it prevents a historical overview. That is provided to some extent in Birnbaum's introduction, but it is more of a bibliographic review of the field than a narrative of its development.

While Central Park was the project that started the American park movement and inaugurated landscape architecture as a serious discipline, it was by no means the first expression of landscape design in America. The editors



Bethesda Terrace, Central Park, 1995

have included such notable early shapers of the land as Thomas Jefferson, who, C. Allan Brown tells us, wrote “some of the earliest documented musings on the picturesque from the pen of a colonial American” (199); George Washington, who by opening the sides of the hyphens flanking Mount Vernon, says Mac Griswold, offered the visitor “flashing slices of the view of the Potomac River framed by the arches [that] are practically cinematic” (428); the Belgian émigré André Parmentier, who in the 1820s, according to Cynthia Zaitzevsky, was “especially significant as a transmitter of the European picturesque style into American landscape design” (286); and Andrew Jackson Downing, the man who David Schuyler explains gave mid-nineteenth century American middle-class homeowners their first lessons in gardening and landscape design. Nonetheless, the titles these men had—landscape gardener, horticulturist, author, and nursery owner—indicate how tentative a place landscape design occupied in American culture until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Avocation gave way to vocation after the Civil War, when the term *landscape architect* began to be used consis-

tently to describe men and women who laid out a growing number of public parks, cemeteries, private estates, and institutions. This heroic age of American landscape design included such luminaries as Horace Cleveland, Jacob Weidenmann, Howard Daniels, and Frank J. Scott. Vaux and Olmsted receive thorough coverage from Joy Kestenbaum and Charles Beveridge, respectively. But what will be fresh information for many is the story Arleyn Levee tells of Olmsted’s stepson and son, John C. Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who continued the Olmsted firm for twenty-five years after their father retired in 1895. It was the largest landscape architecture business in the country. John C. not only headed it, he was also active in organizations that promoted the profession; as first president of the American Society of Landscape Architects he had much to say about early standards of practice and membership. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was instrumental in creating the Harvard program in landscape architecture, the first academic course of study in the field. He also became a major player in the City Beautiful Movement, and as president of the National Conference on

City Planning he “helped lay the theoretical foundation for the new discipline” (274). The Olmsted office also served as an unofficial school for landscape architects; in the introduction, Charles Birnbaum lists more than fifteen professionals who worked there (xxiii), including Myrl Bottomley, Warren H. Manning, and Arthur Shurcliff.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many women began to achieve success as landscape architects. Beatrix Farrand and Ellen Shipman are probably familiar names to readers of the *JSAH*, but many of the female landscape architects discussed in this book will not be so well known. Their inclusion greatly enhances the interest of this book and attests to the thoroughness of the research. It also suggests that landscape architecture, perhaps more than architecture—and, indeed, more than most professions other than teaching—was an occupation accessible to women. Many of them excelled in garden design. Nellie B. Allen attended the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women in Groton, Mass., and during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s laid out splendid gardens for many well-to-do clients; Rose Ishbel Greeley enjoyed a wide reputation for her abundantly flowered city gardens; and Marian Cruger Coffin, who studied at MIT before opening her office in New York in the early 1920s, topped the list of her many accomplishments with her 1928 plan for the grounds of Winterthur. One of the most influential women included here relied on the pen rather than the spade—Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer’s writings on landscape architecture are among the most perceptive and articulate in the literature. Her *Art-Out-of-Doors* (1893), says Kate Laliberte, “was so successful and influential in landscape gardening theory, addressing the relationship between fitness and breadth of design and finer details such as roads, formal flower beds, and trees, that in its 1925 reprint, Van Rensselaer added three chapters and an appendix of other books on landscape architecture” (403).

By the mid twentieth century, a wide range of engineers, planners, authors, and educators shared responsibility with landscape architects for shaping America's outdoor spaces. The number of people involved in designing the landscape grew considerably over the previous decades. *Pioneers* chronicles many who were hired by public agencies and private developers to lay out streets and highways, grounds around public and institutional buildings, military installations, international expositions, shopping centers, and residential suburbs. And while there is little critical analysis in these largely laudatory biographies, one can sense the onset of concerns about urban sprawl in a number of them.

Pioneers is itself an outgrowth of several pioneering efforts begun in the last decade to preserve and study designed landscapes. The major impulse came from preservationists who asserted that designed landscapes merited preservation on equal terms with architectural and historical landmarks. The CATALOG of Landscape Records in the United States, the National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative, and the American Library of Landscape History started collecting information on historic landscapes and their creators. The book developed out of these worthy endeavors, and in fact was anticipated by several earlier NPS publications. Given the fact that these important data bases exist, it is lamentable that no Web site addresses are given anywhere in this volume.

Still, there is very little to be critical of in this fine book. Its usefulness as a reference tool and guide might have been improved by an index rather than the listing of sites open to the public that appears at the end. The small color photographs, which repeat black-and-white views found elsewhere in the text, add little but expense. But these are minor complaints. The editors, Birnbaum of the Historic Landscape Initiative and Karson of the American Library of Landscape History, and the small battalion of authors they have assembled have done an admirable

job of balancing breadth with depth. Their book marks a new level of scholarship in a field that has long been a stepchild of architectural history. We await a full narrative history of landscape architecture in America. But *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* will be for many years the authoritative source we will turn to for essential information on the men and women who molded so much of America's outdoor space.

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