backed up their command with a pledge of $750 (a handsome sum in those days) to foot the bill for his trip. On August 12, 1868, Dorsheimer wrote to Olmsted inviting him to Buffalo. Olmsted, who had been in the city briefly in 1863 on United States Sanitary Commission business, agreed to stop a few days later on his way to Chicago, where he was to discuss with the Riverside Improvement Company a plan to create a residential suburb on prairie land some twenty miles west of that city.[25]

On Sunday, August 16, Olmsted and John Bogart, the engineer assisting Olmsted and Vaux on the work at Prospect Park, arrived in Buffalo. Dorsheimer guided them around, showing Olmsted sites that had already been proposed for parkland. From the station, Dorsheimer drove his carriage to the center of town, Niagara Square. (Fig. 1.8) Here he no doubt pointed out the spot on the north side of the square where former president Millard Fillmore, the "Sage of Buffalo," resided in a picturesque Gothic Revival mansion. The dwellings of other prominent citizens also overlooked the tranquil open space, which must have reminded Olmsted of town commons in his native Connecticut, for Niagara Square had yet to feel the pressure of urbanization. This would have been an opportunity, too, for Dorsheimer to point out Delaware Street, which proceeded north from the square and was beginning to assume the status of Buffalo's grand residential avenue.

From the square, Dorsheimer took Olmsted along Niagara Street, another important residential thoroughfare, to the place where Fort Porter overlooked the Niagara River and the lake. (Fig. 1.9) Long before the military claimed the site, generations of Seneca hunters had visited the breezy crest to fashion arrowheads from the abundance of good flint to be found there. The open land next to the fort had been spoken of for a park. It was also used by Buffalo's baseball players, who had adopted it as a playing field when the game became popular locally in the 1850s. Although Olmsted was of the opinion that creating a sizable park at this location would prove to be prohibitively expensive, he also saw more here than late-summer drought-parched grounds where the Rochester Alerts might slug it out with the Buffalo Eries. He strongly advised his guide that "the beautiful view of the lake and river from that point were extremely desirable to secure."

Turning away from the waterfront, Dorsheimer

Fig. 1.8. This woodcut by J. R. Chapin shows Niagara Square as it would have appeared to Olmsted in 1868. Millard Fillmore's Gothic Revival residence is shown at the upper center, where Delaware Street leaves the northern border of the square. The horse cars ran along Niagara Street. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* **(September 20, 1873).**

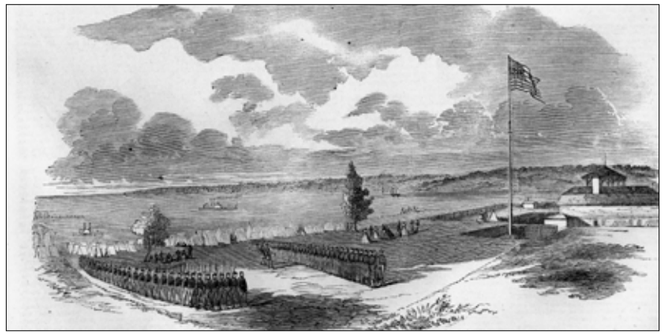


Fig. 1.9. Fort Porter. The beginning of the Niagara River and the Canadian shore are in the distance at the right. *Harper's Weekly* **(September 28, 1861).**

Fig. 1.10. "Here is your park, almost ready made." Photograph by Andy Olenick.

and Olmsted next proceeded inland over York Street and Rogers Street (now Richmond Avenue) and then out Delaware Street to Scajaquada Creek, some two and a half miles north of the center city. Here Olmsted would have seen for the first time the grounds of Forest Lawn Cemetery. The two men would also have inspected the area south of the cemetery, where lay the wooded grounds of Westphal's Garden, the private picnic grove that had been proposed as the site of a public park before the war. Dorsheimer then drove west along Clinton Street (now Potomac Avenue) to inspect land west of the cemetery, in the area that Rogers had recommended for a large park. Unimpressed with what he saw, Olmsted expressed to his host the desire to return to Scajaquada Creek so they might explore the terrain north of the cemetery, gently ignoring Dorsheimer's assertion that there was nothing there to see. As they were going out Chapin Street (a street that no longer exists but once skirted the northern border of the cemetery), Olmsted asked Dorsheimer to stop "on an elevation about one third of the way to Main street." After a moment's reflection, Olmsted declared to his companion, "Here is your park, almost ready made." In his mind's eye he saw in the sunny, tree-studded meadows bordered by deep woods, a fine and extensive park landscape. (Fig. 1.10) The citizens of Buffalo, he said, "could consider themselves fortunate in having so good a ground, so near the city." "A very trifling expense would impart to it a park-like character," he believed.

From this historic vantage point, Olmsted and Dor-

far more respectable place than it had been. The new designs, which arrived in Buffalo in January 1896, were greeted with special pleasure by East Side residents. (Fig. 4.8) "They felt that at last the Park Board, which they had considered an enemy to their section of the city and a friend only to the West Side, had taken notice of them, and was going to do something for them," reported the *Express*.[29]

The firm's plans called for the creation of outdoor and indoor flower displays and significant water features consisting of three shallow basins on the former parade ground. The largest of these was a reflecting pool five hundred feet in diameter and nearly five acres in extent, located at the eastern end of the green. (Fig. 4.9) Newfangled electric light standards would ring the basin with a nocturnal necklace of lights, and an opulent candelabra fountain would spray and sparkle in the center. In summer, the shallow water welcomed wading children; in winter, the ice hosted skaters. Between the reflecting pool and a smaller circular basin, the firm placed a 275-foot-long rectangular basin for aquatic plants. (Fig. 4.10) A stone buffalo, carved by Buffalo's own budding young sculptor Charles Cary Rumsey, surveyed the lush lily pond from the center of the far wall. Jets of water animated the third basin (175 feet in diameter), which was apparently intended to be used as a bathing pool. (Fig. 4.11) Together with the construction of these revisions, many new shrubs, trees, and flowerbeds would be planted throughout the park. The Parade had been reinvented, and the strictly decorous character and arrangement of the water features, colorful flowers, and exotic plants signaled the taste for formality that was fast gaining ground in American park and garden design. Following the Buffalo example, in the early twentieth century the Olmsted firm would install similar basins in other parks, notably Volunteer Park and Cal Anderson Park in Seattle and Riverside Park and Forest Park in Springfield, Massachusetts.

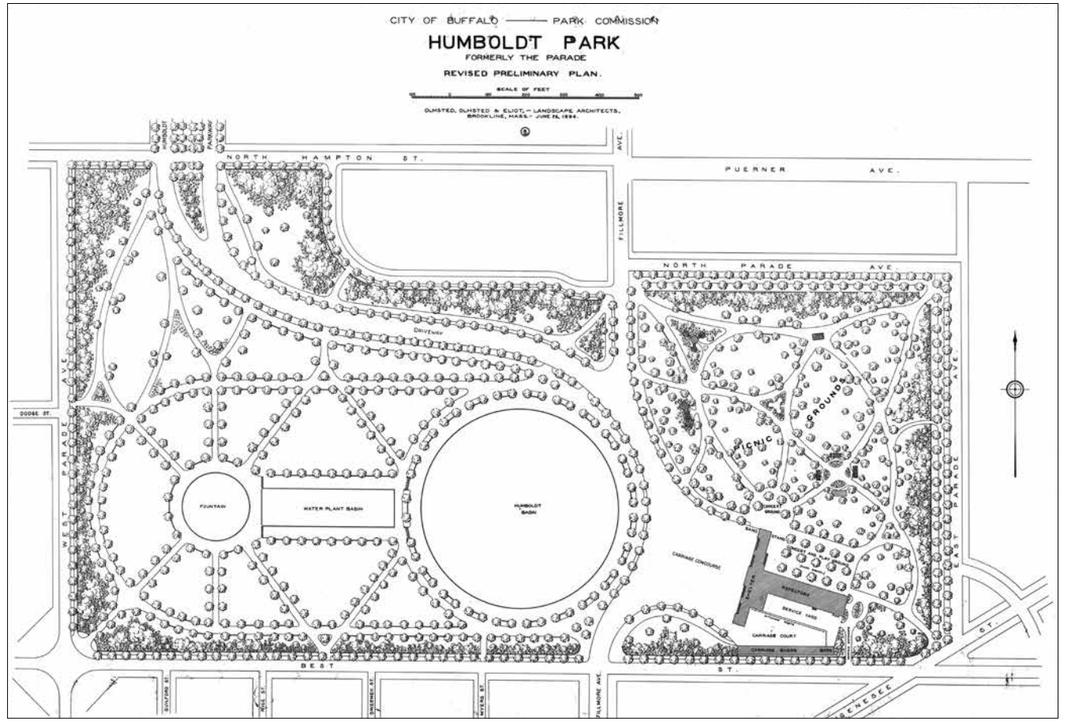


Fig. 4.8. Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot's revised preliminary plan for Humboldt Park, 1895. Courtesy National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

Fig. 4.9. The large basin in Humboldt Park, c. 1900. Courtesy James Mendola.

Inspiration for the park makeover seems to have come from the example of London's Metropolitan Public Gardens Association. Founded in 1882, the association promoted the creation of gardens and playgrounds in London's underprivileged East End. By 1892 the association had laid out sixty-five attractive gardens. It also lobbied for public gymnasiums and for outdoor public swimming pools. Under the leadership of the earl of Meath, the group and its allies came to exert considerable influence on the redesign of older public parks. Additions to Victoria Park, the major East End park, which had been created as a country park in the 1840s,

Fig. 4.10. Aquatic garden in Humboldt Park, c. 1900. Courtesy James Mendola.

FIVE

Parkways, Circles, and Squares

If an artist had *carte blanche* . . . [and] the good fortune to be able to plan a future city, I would recommend the study of the beautiful plan of the able American landscape architect Mr. F. Law Olmsted for the city of Buffalo. The diverse parts of town are bound together by a system of parks and shaded boulevards that is most grand and sensible. —Édouard André, *L'Art des jardins,* 1879

In the spring of 1876 Olmsted wrote to William F. Rogers, who was then secretary of the Buffalo park commission, explaining his plan to prepare a map and several characteristic views of the Buffalo park system for the Centennial Exhibition being held later that year in Philadelphia. In addition to showing the location of recreation grounds, the map would highlight the city's exceptional "convenience of street arrangements." The map and explanatory text would illustrate how Olmsted and Vaux's "late additions" of the parkways to Joseph Ellicott's original plan of wide radial "trunk thoroughfares" combined to make the city a model of urban engineering. "Whether used for pleasure travel, or for general traffic," Olmsted declared, "the fortunate location and liberal width of the trunk thoroughfares of the older portion of the city most happily exemplify the wise forethought of Mr. Ellicott. The parkways provide equally liberal accommodation for travel through the newer sections, and simply supplement the original plan in fit accordance with the general design." This included the "advantages which the city will possess in respect to fire risks, the parkways having an important bearing in this regard."[1] Presumably he meant that, as with Haussmann's Paris boulevards, the exceptional width and geographical span of the parkways would speed the arrival of emergency vehicles to scenes of trouble. For the same reasons, they might also serve to limit the spread of building fires, one of the now forgotten menaces of earlier urban life. Together with the parks, the system of parkways, circles, squares, and avenues one hundred feet wide would serve as a example to other cities of how to promote the public well-being through thoughtful planning.

Buffalo was justifiably proud of being lauded by Olmsted as "the best planned city in the United States, if not the world." In September 1881 the *Express* published its own updated version of Olmsted's vision of the city.[2] The pamphlet included a color-coded map titled *Olmsted's Sketch Map of Buffalo,* which graphically depicted how the entire vast low-density residen-

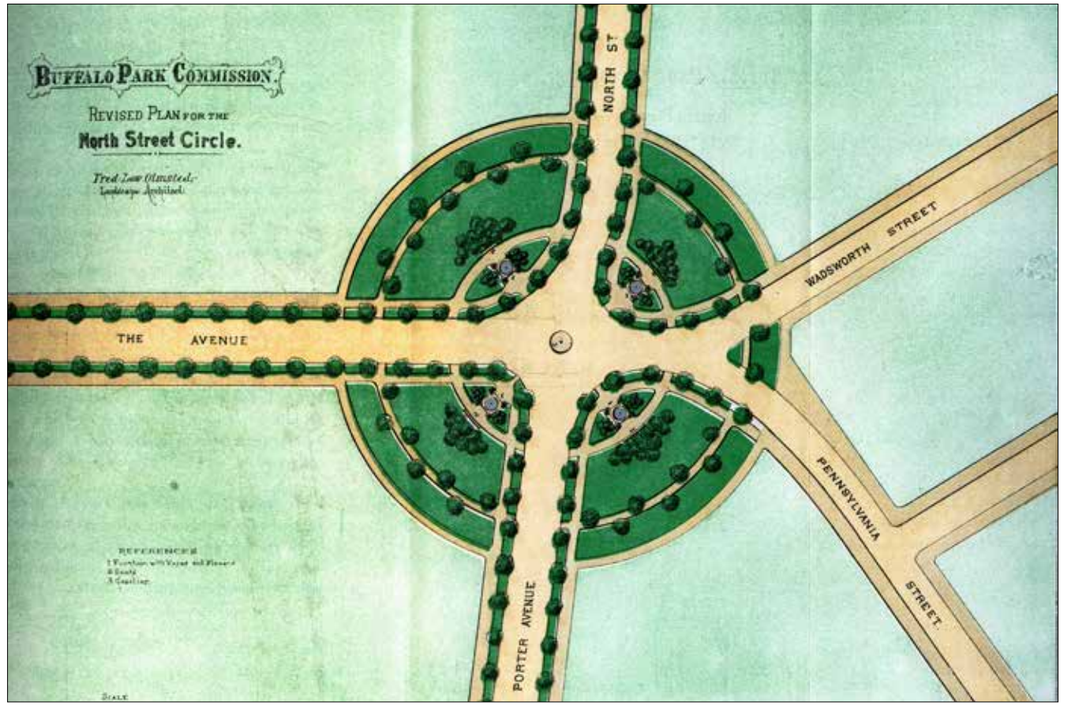


Fig. 5.23. Olmsted's plan for the Circle, 1874. Courtesy Buffalo State College.

Fig. 5.24. Symphony Circle today (formerly the Circle). Photograph by Andy Olenick.

fountains and gas lamps, and sixty trees, all at least twenty-five feet in height, had been transplanted to the site by two tree-moving machines.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Circle became another desirable parkway address. (Fig. 5.25) In 1885 Jane Mead Welch informed the readers of *Harper's* that it was one of those places in town where men of wealth were prepared to "erect a palace of medina sandstone, or a cypress-shingled villa rivaling those of Newport or the famous Jerusalem Road."[52] Two prominent residents of the Circle were George K. Birge, proprietor of a nationally known wallpaper firm, who in 1896 erected a Georgian Revival house to the designs of Boston architects Little & Brown, and Truman G. Avery, local businessman and philanthropist, whose imposing Neoclassical mansion was the largest dwelling on the circle. In 1939 the Avery residence was torn down to make way for Eliel and Eero Saarinen's Kleinhans Music Hall. (In 1958 the Circle was rechristened Symphony Circle in deference to this national historic landmark.) The scale, proportion, and setback of the great concert hall did little to disturb the architectural character of the Olmstedian space.

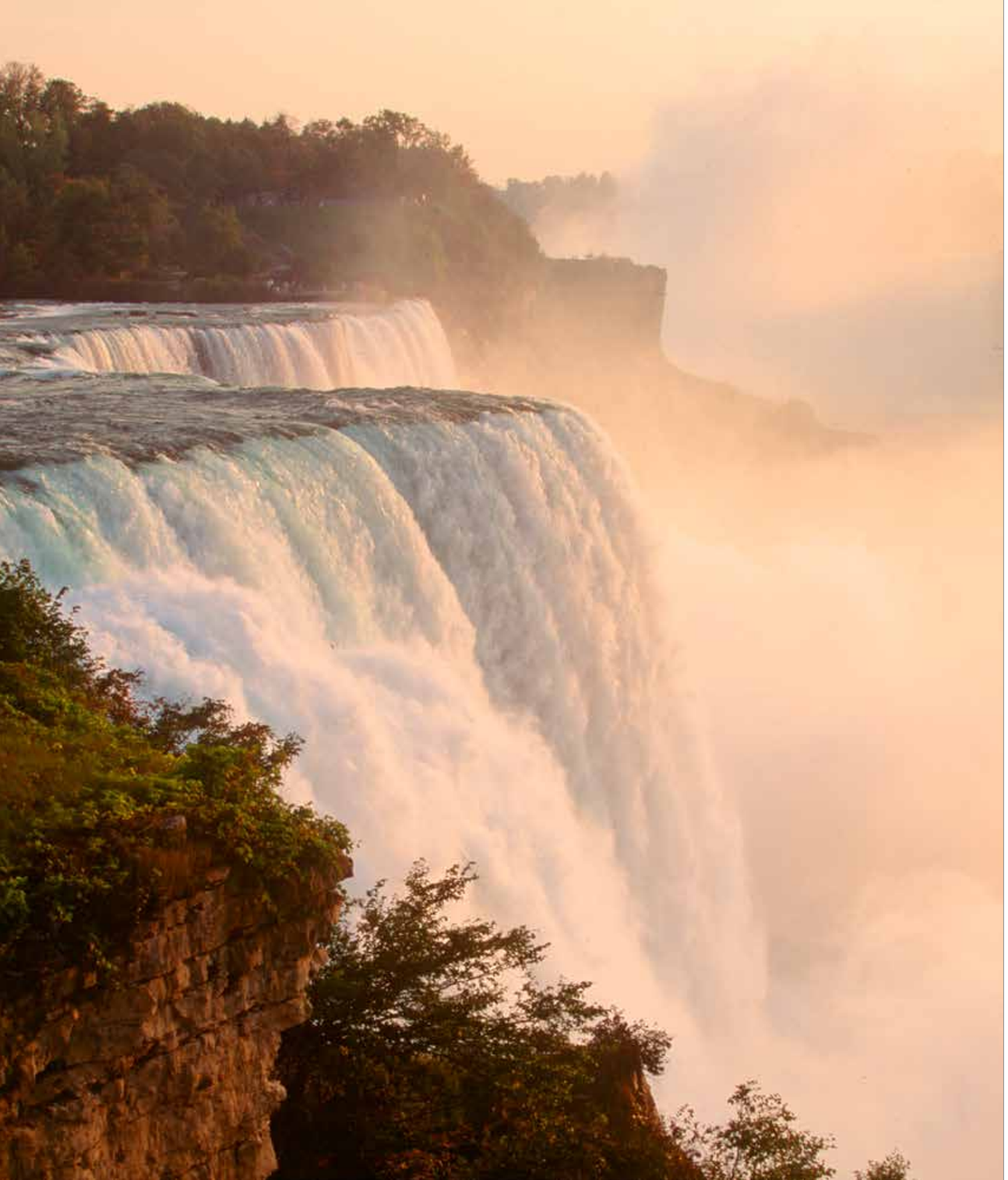
Fig. 5.25. Nineteenth-century houses on Symphony Circle. Photograph by Andy Olenick.

NIAGARA SQUARE

Together with fashioning pleasant residential squares for the new parkway system, Olmsted was asked in 1874 to redesign the central element of Joseph Ellicott's city plan, Niagara Square. (Fig. 5.26) At this time Niagara Square retained much of the residential character it had had since the early days of the nineteenth century, but this sleepy transplanted New England common was being transformed by the press of prosperity into a busy urban crossroads. By the 1930s, all the houses had given way to large public buildings. From this downtown nexus eight major thoroughfares radiated, most of them away from the waterfront. Olmsted and Vaux had designated several of them as direct links between the center city and their new parks: Sixth Street led westward to the Front, Genesee Street led eastward to the Parade, and Delaware Street led northward to the Park. The challenge for Olmsted was how to improve the historic square to better reflect its central importance in the city.

Niagara Square, wrote Olmsted in December 1874, when he had finished his plan for its renewal, "is first of all a place of thoroughfare . . . and nothing should be done which will seriously injure its character in this respect." He actively resisted suggestions that this downtown junction, like the Circle in the new residential quarter of town, should be treated as a "public garden." Instead, he proposed that the main part of the space be left open to facilitate the free movement of traffic, which included a trolley line. Such a large open area, he acknowledged, would need "some effective decoration" in the center, but it should neither interrupt the view nor hinder traffic. Olmsted proposed placing there a low fountain basin, one hundred feet in diameter, from which several water jets would rise. He had in mind stocking the water with luxuriant aquatic plants like those that he and Vaux had installed recently in a similar basin in New York's Union Square. In the angles between the various streets, Olmsted proposed to create small triangular plats of grass and trees. At the head of each of these shaded triangles, seats, "the backs of which connected by railings will protect the turf and trees from injury," would invite pedestrians to sit and watch activity in the square.[53]

The most important feature of the remade square,



SEVEN

The Emancipation of Niagara

The lesson of which Niagara Falls may be said to have been a pioneer teacher, is the State's right of eminent domain over objects of great scientific interest and natural beauty—the inherent right of the people to the free enjoyment of the wonders of nature.

—Andrew Haswell Green, "The Last Public Address by the Late Hon. Andrew H. Green, Concerning the State Reservation at Niagara," 1903

Already before the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, Niagara Falls, some seventeen miles downriver from Buffalo, was an important tourist destination. (Fig. 7.1) The opening of the canal brought more visitors, both American and foreign, and the development of rail lines to the town in the 1840s significantly boosted their numbers. Among those making the pilgrimage to this great natural wonder was the young Olmsted. In 1828 his scenery-loving father took him there after a stay with his uncle Owen Pitkin Olmsted in Geneseo, in upstate New York. In later life Olmsted remembered how in those early days of tourism "a visit to the Falls was a series of expeditions, and in each expedition, hours were occupied in wandering slowly among the trees, going from place to place, with many intervals of rest. . . . People, then, were loath to leave the place; many lingered on from day to day after they had prepared to go, revisiting ground they had gone over before, turning and returning; and when they went away it was with grateful hearts and grateful words."[1]

In 1868 Olmsted returned to the falls while on one of his early trips to Buffalo. What he found there was deeply dismaying to him, for the desire for amusement clearly dominated the way tourists were encouraged to spend their time at the site. Sightseers paid handsomely to ride the *Maid of the Mist* boats that dared the torrents at the base of the falls, to climb a tower perched precipitously on the brink of Horseshoe Falls, to become drenched while walking on rickety boardwalks along the base of the American Falls to see the Cave of the Winds, and to negotiate slippery stairways, steep walks, and crowded outlooks to view the spectacle from all angles, near and far. Additionally, a privately owned place of amusement called Prospect Park (opened in 1872) included Prospect Point, where, proclaimed the proprietor, "shielded by a stone parapet wall built upon the edge of the high bank," visitors might enjoy the best view of both the American and Canadian falls available on the American side. It was

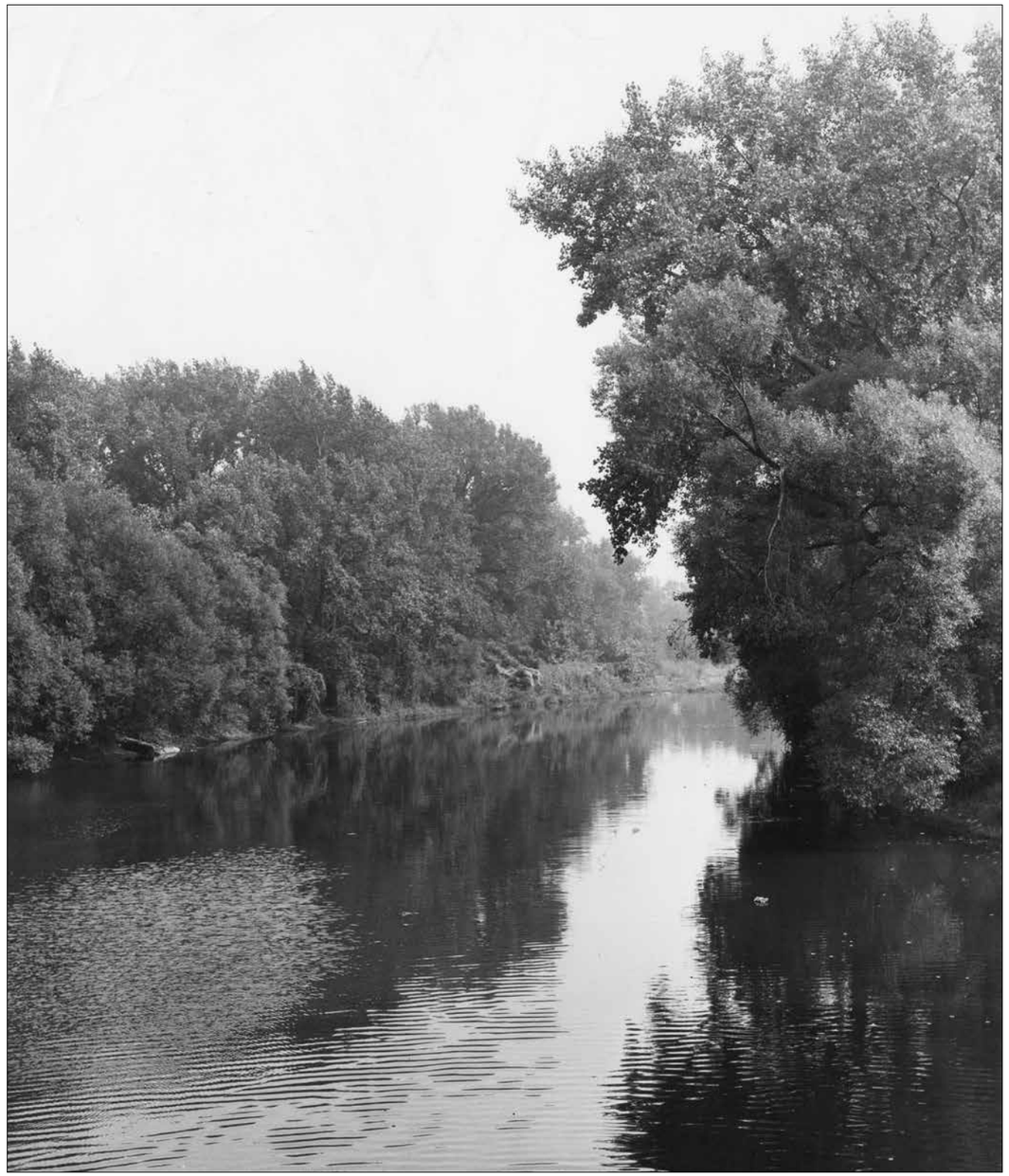


Fig. 8.16. The Cazenovia Park lake in 1857. Courtesy Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

developed into a popular venue for baseball players and their fans. Tennis, football, and softball also brought many to the park over the years, up to the present day. In 1895 the commissioners opened proceedings to acquire the additional upstream property that the firm had included in its extended plan. The city, however, had no success in this endeavor until 1907, when the Olmsted plans were finally realized. Further expansion of the park upstream took place in 1925, when another eighty acres were acquired for a new golf course. The boathouse, which included a small refectory as well as facilities for storing boats, went up in 1912 to designs by the local architectural firm of Esenwein & Johnson.

Fig. 8.17. The Cazenovia Park lake, c. 1910. Courtesy James Mendola.

Later in the twentieth century, Cazenovia Park underwent numerous changes. A continual source of maintenance problems, the lake and the dam that created it disappeared in the 1970s, and the creek, partly redirected from its original course, now flows once again through the landscape. Today the boathouse sits high and dry on the edge of the spacious lawn that occu-

Fig. 8.18. Cazenovia Park, 1920s. Courtesy James Mendola.