

The Warren H. Manning Research Project

from the Library of American Landscape History

Warren H. Manning (1860–1938), an important American landscape architect and planner, spent his early years as an assistant in the Olmsted firm. During this time, Manning was particularly influenced by Charles Eliot's pioneering system of data collection, leading him to develop his own resource-based planning techniques. This methodology laid the groundwork for later practitioners such as Ian McHarg, and eventually the development of the contemporary mapping software ArcGIS. Manning left the Olmsted firm in 1896 to establish his own national practice in Boston.

A founding member and an early president of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Manning played a vital role in the establishment of the profession of landscape architecture. His firm logged more than 1,600 projects through five decades of practice, from private estates to golf courses, subdivisions, campuses, and company towns. Manning's office was responsible for training some of the twentieth century's leading practitioners, including A. D. Taylor and Fletcher Steele, who worked as assistants in his office before opening their own practices.



Buttermilk Falls State Park, Ithaca, NY



Among Manning's firm's most important projects were his designs for urban parks in several cities including Harrisburg, Pa.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Youngstown, Ohio; and Ithaca, N.Y. Manning also worked extensively in upstate New York on state parks. Throughout his career, Manning undertook large regional mapping projects, culminating in his National Plan, which synthesized regional data and made recommendations for the protection of scenery and recreational land.

Manning published articles on a wide range of topics. The underlying themes of his writings addressed intensifying urban development and its potential threat to the health and well being of America's growing population. He was also an early and passionate advocate for land conservation. Despite his extensive body of work and influence, Manning's work had lapsed into obscurity by the mid-twentieth century.



Stewart Park, Ithaca, NY



Project Objectives

The quantity and far-flung locations of Manning's work inspired LALH to develop a nontraditional research model to harness the talents of research volunteers in many states. Two new publications will incorporate data gathered by this national network of volunteers. The history of this ambitious project began almost a decade ago.

Phase I: 2004–2005. LALH Executive Director Robin Karson and key staff members determined the concept, scope, and logistics of the project. This team:

- designed a landscape site survey to be used by research volunteers
- assembled a national advisory team of landscape historians and landscape architects, chiefly academics, for overall project guidance, article contributions, and peer review
- identified suitable products in which to present information acquired during the project

Phase II: 2005–2007. LALH staff:

- identified Manning sites meriting research
- located prospective research volunteers
- developed the technical research tools for research (disseminating the landscape site survey to volunteers via survey software, designing spreadsheets for tracking progress, and creating GIS maps of Manning project locations)
- investigated archival sources of primary data, including plans, photographs, and reports
- organized extensive paper files of Manning's writing, project data, and scholarly articles on his work
- identified potential sources of funding.

Phase III: 2008–2010. LALH staff:

- compiled the approximately 125 completed electronic surveys
- transferred data to spreadsheets
- developed criteria for projects to be included
- selected extant sites for original photography
- identified prospective funding sources



Cascadilla Creek, Ithaca, NY



Cascadilla Park, Ithaca, NY

Phase IV: 2011–2013. LALH staff:

- selected approximately seventy projects for inclusion in Volume I
- identified and assigned authors for entries on these projects
- compiled a database of illustration sources for these projects
- completed original photography for the selected sites
- managed editing of entries

Phase V: 2013-2014 Tasks include:

- transferring all content-edited entry to copyeditor
- developing illustration program:
 - selecting illustrations for each entry
 - securing publication-quality images and permission to publish
 - composing captions and photo credits
- supervising book design
- transferring digital design files to the publishing partner.

Goals:

- to record as much information as possible about Manning’s work and make it accessible to the general public as well as to professional planners and landscape architects;
- to explore and interpret Manning’s influence on the profession of landscape architecture and the development of the American landscape.

Products:

- an online database (target completion 2015) that will provide public access to additional project information, including Manning’s client list, extant work, and links to archival sources.
- two volumes documenting Manning’s projects:
Volume I (target completion date 2015) will comprise brief, illustrated entries on projects selected for their significance to Manning’s contributions to the profession.

Volume II (target completion date 2016) will present a biographical overview of the practitioner and essays about aspects of his work written by landscape architects and historians.

The volumes will be copiously illustrated with historical photographs, plans, and drawings as well as newly commissioned photographs.

The Library of American Landscape History, Inc., founded in 1992, is a not-for-profit organization that produces books, films, exhibitions, and web-based resources about North American landscape history.



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