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BOOKSHELF

- Becky Homan
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While many other gardens and parks of the 19th century went the way of Frederick Law Olmstead -- designer of idyllic rolling landscapes such as New York's Central Park -- the spaces owned by St. Louis' own Henry Shaw went in a very different direction. Historian and author Carol Grove ably documents them. They were often tropical or desert-inspired but exotic through and through. In her new book, "Henry Shaw's Victorian Landscapes," Grove also tells something of a history of St. Louis as she details Shaw's move here from England, his success in the business community here and then his devotion to the properties that are now the Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park. He became enchanted with botany, as did much of the public. He collected plants from the far corners of the world, just as 18th-century explorers had done. And he displayed them in agave-accented parterres and among ponds packed with exotic lily pads. "Besides representing Shaw's taste," Grove writes, "these early gardens and their aesthetic represent the culmination of a century of experimentation and new plant types and methods of planting that best displayed their unique characteristics." --- "Henry Shaw's Victorian Landscapes, The Missouri Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park" By Carol Grove University of Massachusetts Press, 232 pages, \$39.95