

PIONEERS OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA and Robin Karson, editors.

(New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. 486 pp. \$59.95 cloth)

Weighing in at a substantial 486 pages, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* is the culmination of more than a decade of research into the history of landscape architecture and its practitioners in America. This volume, with 162 entries, is the most comprehensive biographical encyclopedia of the men and women who shaped and designed our cultural landscapes. The entries include not only landscape architects but also horticulturists, planners, writers, and educators who have influenced the physical world we inhabit. Through this effort, the authors hope to “encourage readers to become better stewards of the American landscape and . . . act to preserve the extraordinary legacies that survive.”

The effects of planned actions on the American landscape date from the earliest settlements of European colonists to contemporary subdivisions. To be included in this volume, subjects must have had a significant impact on the American landscape. The National Park Service, in conjunction with the CATALOG of Landscape Records in the United States project of Wave Hill in the Bronx, has amassed a phenomenal amount of information, some of which was published previously in two soft-cover volumes by the Government Printing Office. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, lovingly illustrated with dreamy, unpopulated, historic photographs of parks, cemeteries, and private gardens, draws the reader into landscape history almost incidentally. The book functions as both an A-to-Z encyclopedia and a cutting garden of biography. A cover-to-cover read provides a comprehensive, though necessarily superficial, look at the history and effect of the professional hand on the American land.

This is a grand book for dipping into, and the illustrations tempt one to read particular passages to discover the mind behind the plan. However, the emphasis is on the people, not the places, of landscape design; names marked with asterisks in the essays have separate entries of their own, highlighting the interconnections and influences among American landscape designers.

The book contains several entries on designers and planners who helped shape Missouri's landscape. The entry on Harland Bartholomew emphasizes both the national impact of his plans and writings and his astute realization of the connection between ideal plans and political mechanisms such as zoning and urban redevelopment corporations, a realization required to implement paper plans in cement and steel. The well-written and informative essay also treats Bartholomew's influence on national highway design. Appointed to the national Interregional Highway Planning Committee by President Roosevelt, Bartholomew was a major author of the 1944 plan that gave rise to the U. S. Interstate Highway System. Other entries highlighting Missouri landscape history include George Kessler, an influential figure in early twentieth-century plans for St. Louis and the 1904 World's Fair and the man behind the Kansas City parks and boulevards system; Sidney J. and S. Herbert Hare, influential Kansas City planners; Henry Wright, designer of several exclusive subdivisions in St. Louis County; and George E. Burnap, an MIT-trained landscape architect responsible for the St. Joseph parks, as well as the cherry trees that line the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C.

The editors have included many entries on women landscape architects and designers, bringing to light a hidden history of these professionals, the majority of whom worked in the first quarter or half of the twentieth century. The fact that fewer entries cover women is not surprising; women who worked in the offices of male designers are hard to track, unless they became partners. It was curious to find fewer women working in the later years of the twentieth century, but this may be a question better addressed in a separate volume.

Overall, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* provides a well-researched, beautifully illustrated biographical encyclopedia of an area of American cultural studies that deserves our attention. The lack of an index is tempered by an alphabetical-by-designer appendix of sites open to the public, complete with addresses and phone numbers. The combination of background information with directions to “field research” sites provides a three-dimensional view of the men and women who literally have shaped the world around us.

—Kirsten Hammerstrom