

MARJORIE SEWELL CAUTLEY

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT FOR THE MOTOR AGE

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For Cautley, who joined the project in its later stages, participating in the success of Sunnyside Gardens was a practical introduction to the world of city planning. Although she did not consider herself the landscape architect of the development at the time, her planting plans would not only launch her career as a town planner but also give this modern housing project its appealing “garden city” character.¹⁹ The commission probably came to her through Robert Kohn, who would have known of her plans for Roosevelt Common and the Bolton town park. Regardless of their friendship, Cautley was an ideal choice for the project. A decade younger than Stein, she had grown up in a generation that accepted the “new woman” and came of age at a time when opportunities in all professions were becoming increasingly available to women who were willing to challenge traditional gender roles. As a young mother, she had no intention of giving up her life’s work, only a greater sense of what could be done to improve the lives of working families, particularly mothers with young children. At Sunnyside, she planned gardens that considered family privacy as well as the need for social space; paid attention to the location of laundry facilities and other areas devoted to domestic tasks; and enhanced the garden city pedestrian paths with plantings, both for safety of the residents and for aesthetic enjoyment. Stein and Wright approached planning



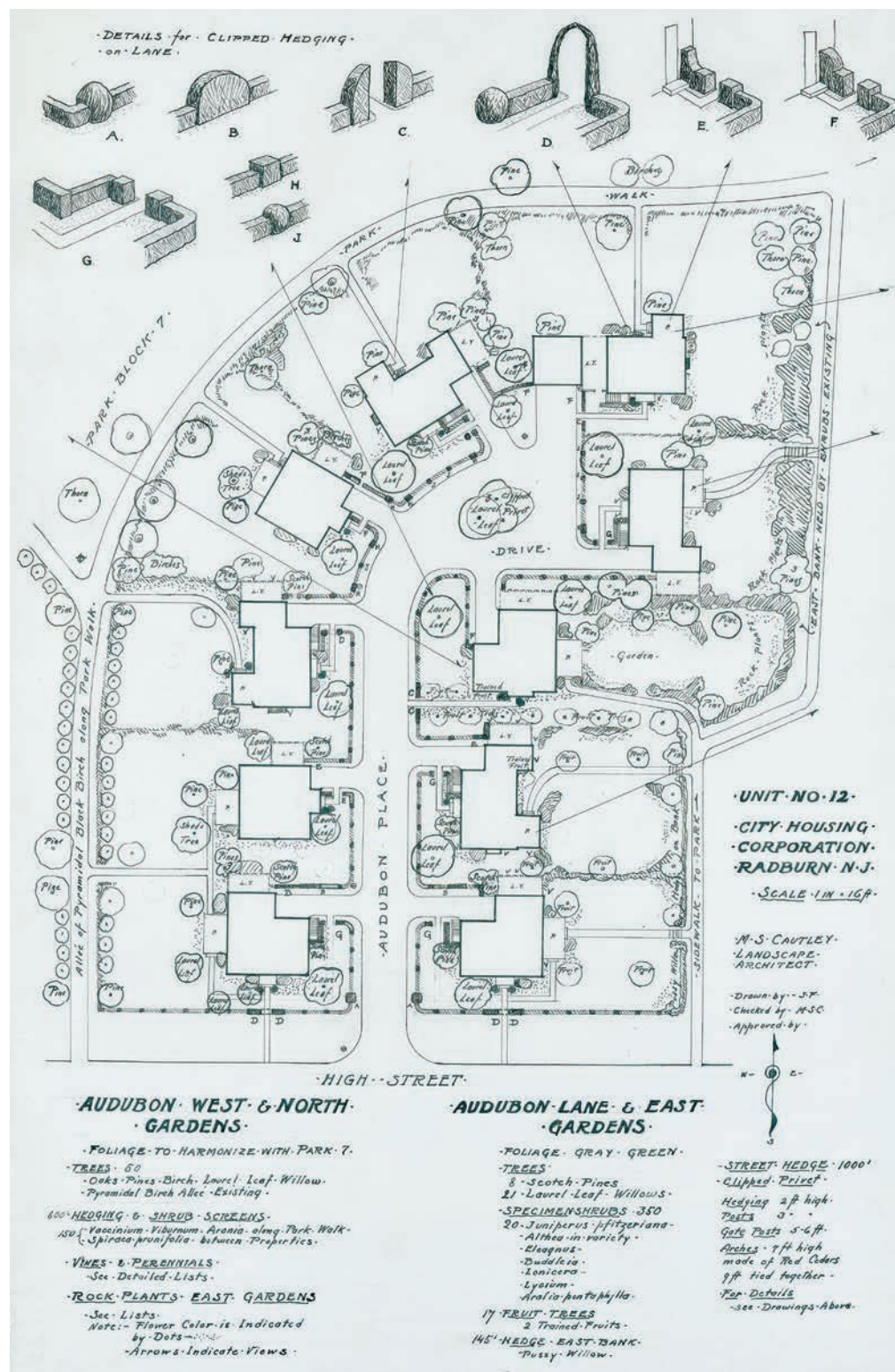
Woman and child in playground shelter at Sunnyside. CSP Cornell.



Sunbather on the lawn at Sunnyside, c. 1949. CSP Cornell.

from a similar perspective—with residents’ needs and lifestyles foremost in mind.²⁰

Years later, in her book *Garden Design*, Cautley described Stein and Wright’s solution to the problem of creating green space in the city: “Each house has a private garden surrounded by a hedge, which opens on a central court of grass. Walks are shaded by trees, along which children play in perfect safety, and there is a delightful spirit of rivalry between the residents of different blocks in the upkeep of their gardens and greens.”²¹ A film she made in the early 1930s shows this mature landscape and its occupants enjoying tunnel-like walks through hedged gardens, playgrounds, and public areas.²² The film depicts the housing development around 1932, when the design was praised as an exemplar of modern community planning in the catalog for the Museum of Modern Art’s *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*. In his essay for the catalog, resident Lewis Mumford emphasized the economic value of Stein, Wright, and Ackerman’s decision to shift “the garage from the backyard to a corner of the tract and . . . creating a maximum amount of handsome private and communal gardens in the space between, the upkeep of the latter being charged as an original cost of the house.”²³ Twenty years later, Stein commented on the contrast between the brick walls of the buildings and the “setting of natural green,” noting that “the street trees that were so thin and scraggly when Marjorie Courtley [*sic*], the Landscape Architect, planted them



"Details for Clipped Hedging on Lane." MSCC Columbia.

transform American living—by using fewer resources, maximizing public open space, and minimizing the threat of traffic—never came to fruition, Stein and his colleagues made the most of what they had achieved at Radburn, seeing it as a step forward to future planning ideals.⁵⁰

In part because of its own publicity—and an advisory board including John Nolen, the newly elected president of the American City Planning Institute; Eleanor Roosevelt; and Raymond Unwin—the CHC managed to keep the "Radburn Idea" alive as a model plan of particular relevance to the modernizing world. The economist Richard T. Ely, also a member of the CHC board of directors, Henry Wright, and Cautley's friend Tracey Augur, now a TVA planner, wrote extensive articles on the innovative project in the early 1930s. Lewis Mumford not only extolled Wright in the 1932 *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* catalog for doing away with "the wasteful rectangular city plan" and "securing the domestic environment from invasion by completely separating the garden walks from the traffic system," but also promoted the RPAA's work in his exceptional role as an urban critic and writer.⁵¹ Despite its lasting presence in the history and theory of planning, however, Radburn never became a model for American developers. Among the elements that planners would subsequently employ were the interior park and the pedestrian underpass— aspects of the Radburn plan that were given their fundamental character through Cautley's choice of landscape design, plants, and materials.⁵²

Cautley's article on Radburn's garden walks appeared in the same issue of *Landscape Architecture Magazine* as A. D. Taylor's "landscape construction notes" on stone pavements and just a few months before Gilmore Clarke's description of the footbridge construction used by the Westchester County Park Commission. Her essay was indexed under "planting design," together with the landscape architect Frank A. Waugh's article on "natural plant groups."⁵³ As recreation engineer in the Forest Service, Waugh revised the regulations for building and landscape design in the national forests, offering a technical checklist for designers like Cautley. The list emphasized preserving existing trees, using simple fences of native materials, and adapting buildings to the terrain; flower beds and exotic plants were prohibited as inappropriate, but exceptions might be made for "inconspicuous" rock gardens composed of native plants or wild gardens.⁵⁴ Like her peers, Cautley designed along these precepts, many of which she would employ in her future designs for New Hampshire state parks.⁵⁵

Over the next year, Cautley wrote *Building a House in Sweden*, a children's book based on her study of Swedish housing practices and informed by her experience at Radburn.⁵⁶ Her sister Helen provided the illustra-

were as varied as the patrons they attracted. She urged her colleagues to consider the needs of “expert sportsmen and helpless city folk,” and to offer recreation throughout the year—difficult ski runs in the winter and bathing beaches for people with small children, who could come from the city and “stay through the cool of the evening.” Her recommendations included such details as a basket checking system in the bathhouse, lights in parking lots, and various types of signage.⁶⁰

Attention to such utilitarian issues was clearly necessary; Wadleigh had opened at the beginning of the month, and on one Sunday in mid-July, fifteen hundred visitors enjoyed the park. Park management noticed license plates from eleven states, including Florida and California. Although pleased with the visitation, Cautley continued to voice her concern over the future of the parks—particularly in terms of encroaching private enterprise, spurred on by the popularity of the new destinations. Observing people “flocking to the park projects like bees to honey,” she recommended the governor acquire additional adjacent properties to preserve the natural beauty of the parks at North Sutton, Dorrs Pond, and Kingston.⁶¹ By July the governor had decided to resume work on the Peterborough pool before winter set in and added Wentworth to the list of special projects.⁶²

Even before the parks were officially completed, they were wildly popular with tourists. When the new pool at Rock Rimmon was opened for testing over Labor Day, an estimated six thousand people visited and two thousand bathed in the pool. During the 1934 season more than twenty-four thousand visitors enjoyed the bathing beach at Kingston, the majority with license plates from Massachusetts, leading Cautley to recommend charging a small fee for out-of-state vehicles.⁶³ The parks were in such demand that when the CWA term expired, the state stepped in to fund those projects still under construction. Foremost among these were Dorrs Pond, expected to be completed that fall, and Kingston Park, which state supervisors now envisioned as a five-year effort.⁶⁴

Although she kept an address in Jaffrey, during the summer and early fall Cautley sometimes wrote to the governor from Ridgewood. It is unclear how she divided her time between the two locations, but throughout her tenure in New Hampshire, Catherine Dodd Cole maintained Cautley’s private practice in New Jersey.⁶⁵ For at least part of the summer, ten-year-old Pat Cautley stayed with her mother in Jaffrey. They traveled together to Concord, and Pat read *Bambi* outside of the statehouse while her mother was working.⁶⁶ By this time, Cautley was accustomed to moving between two very different worlds—the routine domestic and professional respon-

sibilities of her home/office and the less predictable challenges of supervising park design in a temporary camplike setting.

In early fall, Cautley prepared a final exhibition of the crew’s achievements for display at the statehouse. Before she left New Hampshire, she hosted a staff party with a “recreation program adapted to recreational experts” and “distilled H₂O, reinforced concrete, crank case oil and soda mints” as refreshments. The handwritten invitation she sent to the governor described her “informal frolic.”⁶⁷ As a parting gift for him, Cautley and her staff prepared a permanent record of their work—a set of plans, mounted photographs, and blueprints of construction drawings. She described her appointment as a privilege and acknowledged “the fine spirit of enthusiasm and cooperation on the part of every member of the Recreational Development Office.” Despite the many hardships and potential personnel conflicts inherent in such a supervisory position, the forty-three-year-old Cautley excelled in her role as landscape consultant. Her final advice to Winant was to retain the trained men as the core of a permanent recreation commission responsible for ongoing development and maintenance.



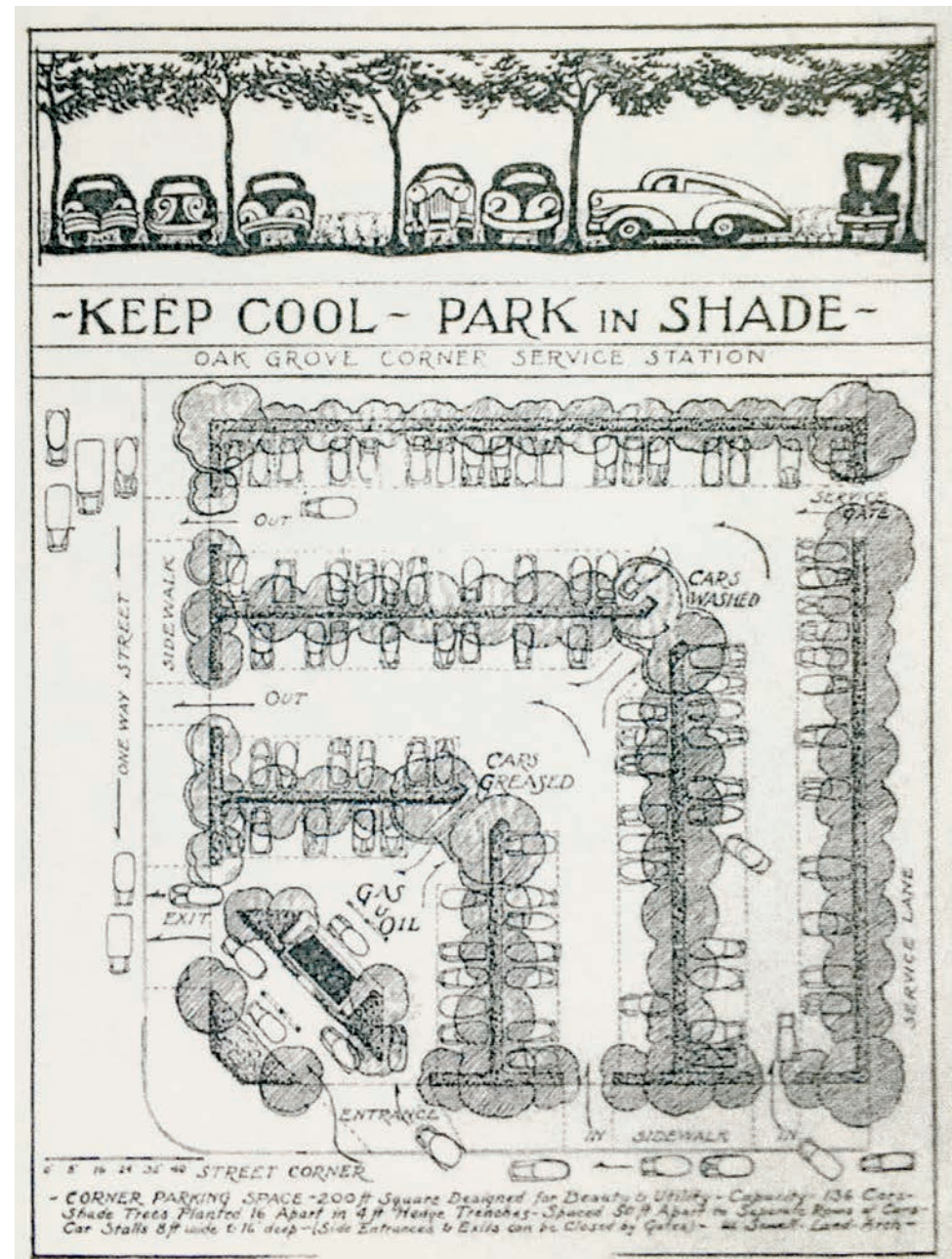
Livingston Park (Dorrs Pond). Photo by Carol Betsch.

received OCD certificates, but those who did “would likely be drafted.” In Sewell’s case, there was a chance she might serve as a “camoufleur” if the United States were to come under attack.²¹

Now qualified in the field of industrial camouflage, Sewell became an advocate for the cause and wrote about its value to the war effort. In an article for *The American City* magazine, she placed landscape architects at the forefront of national defense as experts in choosing plants according to their growing patterns and shapes when viewed from above. Readers were assured as well that “whether bombs fall or not,” the planting of trees was a long-term community asset. She recommended that the country’s successful “beautification” organizations employ camouflage planting along roadsides “to protect our civil and military population in wartime—and for all time!” Her article included sketches of a “canopy of Giant Willows” and an “evergreen flat top of pines” shading and disguising parked cars. Covering parking spaces was a key aspect of concealing factory buildings, which always required large lots. Sewell also considered her plan for a “Corner Service Station and Tree-Shaded Parking Space,” designed for “beauty and utility,” part of the war effort. The shaded (or camouflaged) parking lot for 136 cars included a gas station with areas for fueling, greasing, and washing the vehicles.²² Surprisingly, Sewell’s article attracted the attention of the press and circulated to newspapers throughout the state. Some papers ran the article without criticism, but it evoked negative responses as well. In “Trees as Camouflage for Autos,” in the *Pittsburgh Press*, George Harding



“A canopy of Giant Willows,” *The American City*, April 1943.



“Plan for Corner Service Station and Tree-Shaded Parking,” *The American City*, April 1943.

of the National Park Service describes the damage to cars caused by the sticky juice of the wood aphid, the mess caused by willows, and the possibility of branches falling on parked cars during storms. The *Daily News Journal* of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, refuted Sewell’s faith in this organic means of protecting cars while improving the national landscape.²³