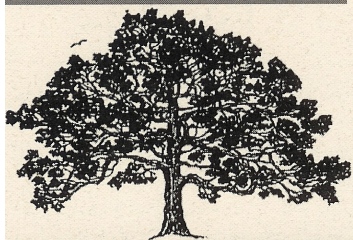


WINTER 2009



FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED SOCIETY OF RIVERSIDE

Newsletter

RIVERSIDE'S EARLY ROADS,

WHAT LIES BENEATH?

By Jim Petrzilka

Everyone loves a mystery, but some historical mysteries can be vexing because of the likelihood that they will never be solved. One such mystery concerns the details of the initial execution of Frederick Law Olmsted's masterful plan for the village of Riverside. The great Chicago Fire of October 1871 destroyed the Riverside Improvement Company's office at No.73 Clark St. in downtown Chicago. The office contents apparently included all documents pertaining to Olmsted, Vaux & Co.'s 1869 construction superintendence of Riverside, for none has been found. Olmsted, Vaux & Co. had totally separated from the project by Nov.1870, but in 1869 they were going all out to develop the village, racing to develop a sufficient revenue stream to offset the heavy expenditures of construction. Recently a tiny bit of history has surfaced that sheds some light on this period, specifically on the material used to build Riverside's first roads. It is a small clue with poignant implications.

Of all the charms of Riverside the curving roads command the most comment and praise. Indeed, Olmsted emphasized the importance of good all weather roads and roadside drainage in his preliminary report. The roads may be said to "make" Riverside. But who actually made the roads? How were they carved out, graded, surfaced? What implements were used? How was the work force organized? Where did the materials come from? We have had, until now, few specifics, although we know a good deal about standard practices of the day and Olmsted's stated intent.

The recovered history turns out to be as charming in its own way as the subject to which it pertains – for it gives the source and tragic provenance of the original gravel used on Riverside's roads..

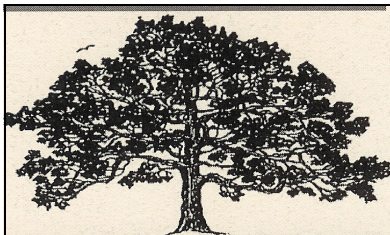
On June 4th 1869 the Riverside Improvement Company published a classified ad in the Chicago Tribune. It was a request for bids for the transport of gravel. The gravel, sifted to a size no greater than 3 inches, was to be obtained from the Joliet Mound Company and transported from Joliet via the Illinois and Michigan canal to Summit, Illinois and subsequently hauled to Riverside. Compacted gravel from Joliet covered Riverside's first roads. This tiny and prosaic bit of history would not otherwise be worthy of much note except that further investigation reveals a deeper significance. For not all gravel is alike.

The Joliet Mound, a large ice age geologic remnant, was at that time just one and one half miles southwest of the town of Joliet, located on the northwest side of the Des Plaines River. It was oriented north east to south west, flat topped, steeply sided, 60 ft high, 1350 ft long, 225 ft wide, and was the source of the gravel to be transported to Riverside.

Of historical note, Marquette and Joliet, for whom the town is named, had camped at, and mapped, the mound in 1673 on their famous exploratory journey; the great Native American chief Pontiac was reported to have been slain atop the mound during a tribal dispute over hunting rights in 1769; it was for many years a key reference point for Des Plaines river navigation; and it was an early 19th Century tourist attraction because of its beautiful and lofty views.

Because of the many Native American remains and artifacts found in its gravels, as described in an 1868 letter to the Assistant Geologist of Illinois, it had certainly been heavily used for hundreds of years by the areas pre-historic Native Americans. Indeed, since geologic structures of this type are normally round topped, it seems likely that at some point in the past Joliet Mound had been modified, flattened, and converted to a platform mound similar to those found at famous pre-historic sites like Cahokia. Why build a mound when one is available largely ready made?

Continued on Page 4



www.olmstedociety.org

The Frederick Law Olmsted
Society Of Riverside

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2009

Founded in 1968, the Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the original village plan, developed in 1868 by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux. Membership is open to all interested individuals. Annual Membership is available for a \$25.00 (tax deductible) contribution.

Officers

President: Kimberly Jacobs

Vice President: Tim Ozga

Treasurer: Theresa Pelletier

Secretary: Cindy Kellogg

Committees

Architecture: Sander Kaplan

Housewalk: Constance Guardi,
Kimberly Jacobs

Landscape: Cindy Kellogg,
Holly Machina

Library: Jane Kunka

Long Range Planning & Lectures:
Thomas Jacobs

Membership: Joanna Beaumont

Newsletter: Chandra Reynolds

Tours/Education: Tony Pecelunas,
Lonnie Sacchi,

Website: Tim Ozga

Honorary Directors: Ted Smith,
Mike DeLise, Geri Tauber

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Olmsted Society of Riverside
PO Box 65, Riverside, Illinois 60546

A Letter From The President

By Kim Jacobs

As my first year as Olmsted Society President comes to a close, I reflect upon the goals I had stated in last spring's newsletter, which were:

To improve our research and knowledge, thus remaining relevant
To stay true to our mission to preserve and protect our legacy
To continue respectful dialogue and collaboration with the village
To continue our strong ethic of volunteerism.

I am pleased to report that our landscape workdays, poetry contest, walking tours, and lectures have all enjoyed great participation. But the first goal, remaining relevant by improving our research and knowledge, came from the History Museum as a rediscovered master's thesis from 1981 by University of Michigan graduate student Paul A. Sieron, titled "Riverside IL - Reconstruction within the Historic Landscape".

In the introduction, Mr. Sieron, who today is a partner at Peter Walker & Associates, a pre-eminent landscape architecture firm, affirms, "*The intent of this study is to discover the means by which Riverside can recapture its original rural, natural scenery. Because a landscape is never static, an exact restoration of a natural landscape has merit only to the extent a research methodology is developed.*"

Historically, the Olmsted Society has been guided by the "Preliminary Report upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside," written by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1869 to the investors of the Riverside Improvement Company. It has been and will remain to be the most important and relevant source describing Olmsted's vision for Riverside. Sieron's thesis, on the other hand, is written 112 years after Olmsted's Preliminary Report. It is a scientific assessment and survey of the Riverside landscape in 1981, and is a roadmap for a responsible way forward in sustaining our Historic Landscape.

To note, several other reports and studies were formulated during the 1980's. Ed Straka wrote "*The Riverside Landscape.*" There is another master's thesis. This one from the University of Illinois titled "*Historic landscape evaluation and conservation plan / prepared for the Village of Riverside, Illinois;*" (Cairns, Kesler, & Merkel, 1985.) These documents are available at the Riverside Library. Also, FLOS Board member John Kunka, then a member of the Forestry Commission, created planting plans for the village, which are available to view at www.olmstedociety.org.

29 years have passed and today we do not have a comprehensive landscape maintenance plan. As a result, the village will continue to get bogged down with discussions like the one over cultivars versus native plant materials. Such disagreements would be preempted if a comprehensive landscape maintenance plan were in place. Without a landscape plan, the decision for tree and shrubbery placement is left arbitrary and open to interpretation. Without a plan, we will not know whether our landscape maintenance supports or detracts from Olmsted's concept of tree groupings, outdoor rooms (meadows,) and picturesque vistas. Without the benefit of a plan that is developed and embraced by all stakeholders, individual issues of secondary importance drain us of energy and goodwill.

The History Museum has distributed the Sieron Report to our Trustees, the LAC, and the FLOS Board. I challenge all to read it and to begin collaboration towards the much-needed comprehensive landscape maintenance plan. (Send me an e-mail if you would like to receive an electronic copy.)

Let us create a new roadmap to sustain our continued landscape legacy. Let us recapture Riverside, as Mr. Sieron suggested 29 years ago.

Thank you for your support. I am humbled to be of service to you.

Kim Jacobs president@olmstedociety.org

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

By Tim Ozga

Newcomers to Riverside often comment on the refreshing tranquility they experience when they move into their new home. A look out the window offers views of openness, a pastoral landscape not often encountered so close the busy streets of downtown Chicago and its surrounding suburban sprawl. Returning from a busy day at the office, they are greeted by the winding roads and soothing vistas of the Riverside landscape. If you have ever experienced this calming effect, you are not alone...and if at first this feeling seems somewhat inexplicable, it is by no means unintentional. Frederick Law Olmsted, heralded as one of America's greatest landscape architects, worked with the Riverside Improvement Company to create this suburban retreat. His plan was to provide the beauty and repose of a rural setting while offering access to modern amenities necessary for daily living. Today the impact of his creation is still felt nearly 150 years after its initial conception.



Many of Olmsted's original design elements are key to the overall calming effect. Included are the winding roadways which were originally built several feet below the landscape to offer the illusion of a continuous greenscape from your doorstep to the home of a neighbor across the way. Between the winding roadways we find the many commons, parkways and triangles so integral to Riverside. As a landscape architect, Olmsted crafted the placement of these features much the way an artist paints a scene or an architect scales his buildings. Landscape features are painted across the canvas of Riverside. With each stroke, the thoughtful placement of these many greenspaces offers an inviting sense of nature awaiting visitors around every turn.

His planting plan for these green spaces was carefully thought out to provide a 'room with a view' wherein one could lose themselves in a more peaceful, countryside setting. To achieve this effect, planting principles were recommended to combine the use of ground cover, understory and shade trees. Open spaces were framed in picturesque fashion by grand shade trees, capturing the eye and keeping one focused on the openness below. Understory trees and shrubs playfully adorn the landscape in whimsical fashion to create the illusion of a grander space while the eye moves from one object to the next. Openness is essential to the perception of space as green pockets of grass offer an invitation to play and walk and enjoy the beauty of nature around you.

Blended together in such fashion, the story of our landscape unfolds in which trees, shrubs, grasses and pathways all play an important role. Artfully framed commons and triangles become windows into natural rooms, offering a continuous expanse of greenspace beyond your own front yard. By design they create natural windows to a pastoral retreat from the rigors of everyday urban life. As we look through these windows, we can take comfort in the tranquility which Riverside provides, for that is her essence...and if you decide to walk amid her winding roads be sure to take a few minutes to stop and enjoy one of her many rooms...a room with a view.





“Reflections on Riverside” . . . Here at Last!

The Olmsted Society is thrilled to announce the arrival of **Reflections on Riverside** at the Riverside Public Library. This anthology of youthful verse was penned entirely by local children for the Olmsted Society’s annual “Reflections on Riverside” Student Poetry Contest.

The poetry contest began in 2007 as a way to get kids thinking about their natural surroundings and the significance of the Riverside experience. It is held each April to coincide with the advent of spring and National Poetry Month. After three years, 140 unique expressions had been created by our aspiring young poets: The time had come to publish.

Upon perusing **Reflections on Riverside** you will find that the poems are arranged topically, rather than by year, to demonstrate just how remarkably one child’s perception, experience and expression can vary from the next. Part of the difference, of course, can be attributed to age: the poem of a five-year old may appear next to that of a thirteen year old. But the way each child experiences Riverside is highly individualized and that, in itself, is thought provoking.

So that all may experience Riverside through new eyes, the Olmsted Society has gifted two copies of this professionally bound anthology to the Riverside Public Library. One will be maintained for permanent reference in the Olmsted Collection and the other, available for circulation, can be found in the Local Authors section.

If you happen to be at the library, pick up a copy and wander through. Chances are, you will know some of the authors. It is our hope that their reflections on Riverside spark some of your own reflections, and that you will feel a bit of that “happy tranquility” intended by Olmsted.

Our Capitol Grounds: A Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow Story

Annual Meeting Lecture by Matthew Evans

Please join us for the highly anticipated keynote lecture by Senior Landscape Architect and Horticulturist of the U.S. Capitol Matthew Evans, who joins us from Washington DC the evening of the Annual Meeting on January 15, 2010 at 7pm at Riverside Township Hall Auditorium.

Currently in his 17th year of public service with the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, Mr. Evans follows in the footsteps of Frederick Law Olmsted as Landscape Architect for the United States Capitol.

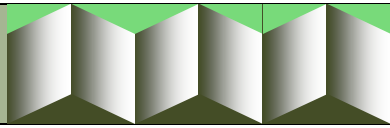
In his lecture, Mr. Evans will address the history of the Capitol Grounds as designed by Olmsted, and reflect on the challenges of the present and future in maintaining this national treasure.

***RIVERSIDE’S EARLY ROADS, WHAT LIES BENEATH* Continued from page 1:**

Unfortunately, the 19th century attitudes on Native American heritage and significant geologic prominence were not what they are today. There was money to be made, and the Joliet Mound Company was in business from the mid 19th century specifically to quarry the Joliet Mound for its fine gravels, pure clay for making drainage tile, and limestone. This was done so thoroughly that the mound was totally destroyed by the 1930’s, and the Joliet suburb of Rockdale presently occupies the site.

The gravels for Riverside, according to the Tribune request for bids, were to total 18,000 cubic yards, and were to be delivered at a rate of 180 cubic yards, or two boat loads, per day, commencing within 14 days of the date of contract. They were undoubtedly laid on Riverside’s first roads. Also, undoubtedly, included in the gravels from Joliet Mound were myriad small artifacts and remnants of a vanished Native American civilization. Indeed anything of less than three inches in diameter that would fall through the sifting screens would go unnoticed, in furtherance of such a large scale industrial operation, and would have found its way to the roads of Riverside.

So, one hundred and forty years later, it gives one pause for reflection. A tiny bit of Riverside history has been recovered and now it seems likely that the roads, or at least any remaining buried remnants of the early Riverside roads, are doubly historic. They are the Olmsted roads containing Joliet Mound gravels. In the case of the Joliet Mound gravels we might wish it were not so, and that the Mound was still a lordly presence along the lower Des Plaines valley.



The Book Corner

By Jane Kunka

New Additions to the Olmsted Collection - Check them out!

The Library Committee recently added "At Home on the Prairie; The Houses of Purcell and Elmslie" by Dixie Ledler and Christian Korab. This book was donated to the collection by John Kunka. It includes biographies of both men, and has many beautiful color photographs of their work. The firm collaborated on the service buildings for the Babson Estate on Gables Road, that though altered for adaptive reuse as private homes, are still intact.

The Society purchased a new biography "John Evelyn: Living For Ingenuity" by Gillian Darley. The biography of John Evelyn (1620-1706), diarist, scholar, and intellectual virtuoso, is the first to make full use of his enormous unpublished archive, deposited in the British Library in 1995. This crucial material permits a broader and richer picture of Evelyn, his life, and his friendships than even that of his own celebrated diaries. Evelyn lived through some of England's most tumultuous history, through five reigns, the civil war, the Restoration and the Revolution of 1688. He was author or translator of countless publications on varied contemporary issues. He tackled questions ranging from smoke pollution and the environment, gardening and architecture, to town planning and popular science, libraries and fashion, politics, trade and the visual arts. Olmsted named one of Riverside's roads for him because of his writings on botany and landscape architecture. This biography is fascinating, and captures the story of an amazing intellect, who was also a good and decent man. I really loved this book.

Jane Kunka



2009 Donations Are Bringing Back Our Landscape

In July 2009, the Olmsted Society donated \$320 to the RBHS Ecology Club for the propagation of seeds native to Waubensee Woods. During the school year, the RBHS Ecology Club & students from the SEE program collected seeds from remaining native understory in and adjacent to Waubensee Woods. Possibility Place Nursery provided the propagation of two flats each of New Jersey Tea & American Wahoo, and one flat of Prickly Ash. These seedlings have been planted at the borders of Waubensee Woods by volunteers from the High School and summer interns from the Audubon Society. The prairie at Waubensee Woods is coming back to life (& is beautiful!) thanks to Cook County Forest Preserve District Master Stewart & FLOS member, John Kolar, & his enthusiastic volunteers.

Nominations for Frederick Law Olmsted Board Announced

The following nominations are made for the Olmsted Society Board for the calendar year 2010:

Officers nominated for one year terms:

President: Kim Jacobs

Vice President: Tim Ozga

Secretary: Cindy Kellogg

Treasurer: Fred Kitch

Directors:

The following nominations are for three-year term:

Yvonne Lucero and Jim Harrington

Holly Machina and Jason Kinnan

Fred Kitch

Tony and Phyllis Pecelunas

Jim and Chandra Reynolds

Lonnie Sacchi

Dorie (Lidd) and Stephen Skiest

The following nomination is for a one year term: Sally Faust

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Kellogg, Chair, Robin Benoy, Ralph Harast, Jason Kinnan, Eric Zuschlag

Annual Meeting

Of the
Frederick Law Olmsted
Society

January 15th, 2010

7 pm

Township Hall

Guest Speaker:

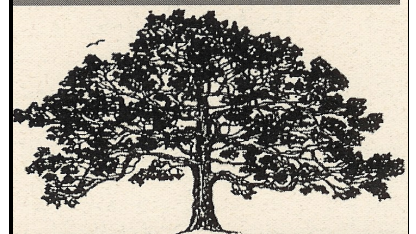
Matthew Evans,

The landscape architect of
the United States Capital
Grounds

All Are Welcome!

SAVE THE DATE:

Olmsted Housewalk
Sunday, May 16th, 2010



2010 Membership

Membership is for the calendar year. If you have not renewed your membership for 2010, please return this form with your check payable to: Frederick Law Olmsted Society, P.O. Box 65, Riverside, Illinois 60546

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable Redbud | \$25-\$49 | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hearty Hickory | \$50-\$99 | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sugar Maple | \$100-\$249 | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mighty Oak | \$250 and up | \$ _____ |
| Total Enclosed: | | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal | <input type="checkbox"/> Gift Membership |

The Olmsted Society welcomes your participation in our ongoing activities. Put your talent to work and your energy to good use by joining a committee! Check off the committees that interest you. The Chairman will contact you with more information.

| | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housewalk | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tours/Education | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Talents _____ | |

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

www.olmstedociety.org

Please give us your email address, so we can save paper and trees!

Contact Joanna Beaumont at
membership@olmstedociety.org



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The Annual Meeting of the
Frederick Law Olmsted Society
is January 15th, 2010
7 pm
At Township Hall
P.O. Box 65
Riverside, Illinois 60546

