

FALL 2010

The Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside is dedicated to sustaining Olmsted's vision for Riverside for generations to come. Its members are guided by his concern for humanity, nature, sense of community, and the innovative and thoughtful essence of his work. The Olmsted Society invites residents and visitors to join us in learning, protecting the environment, and preserving our cultural and physical heritage.

Membership is open to all interested individuals for a \$25 tax-deductible contribution by check or online.

Olmsted Society
PO Box 65
Riverside, Illinois 60546
www.olmstedsociety.org



Image courtesy of the
Riverside History Museum.



A Flyaway Speculation and the Riverside Evidence

The history of America contains many instances of real estate booms and busts. Arguably, the most serious in Riverside's history occurred right at the beginning. Riverside was born in 1868 during a speculative local real estate bubble following the civil war. Frederick Law Olmsted certainly had no illusions about it. In a letter he referred to it as "a regular flyaway speculation managed on Gold Exchange and Erie (RR) principles". Or, in a more modern analogy, we might say Bernie Madoff-type business ethics. Olmsted, like others, was willing to risk participating for the chance to earn up to \$128,000. (Equal to nearly \$2 million in today's dollars) from site planning, construction superintendence, lot sales, and miscellaneous related projects.

It must have been a giddy time, when all things seemed possible, as a large group of invited guests and dignitaries converged on Riverside Farm, site of the future village of Riverside, to celebrate the 4th of July 1868. A special train was chartered, the speeches were many and patriotic, the horse races thrilling, the spiked punch delicious, the card games, political and business discussions spirited, and the possibilities or details of developing Riverside Farm were probably discussed by owner David Gage and some of his guests that day. Was Riverside born on the 4th of July 1868? According to Gage's subsequent court filings, the first formal land sale agreement between Gage and Emery Childs, the fast talking promoter from the east, who became the president of the Riverside Improvement Company, was entered into on July 25, 1868.

It seemed a sure thing. Chicago needed a prestige suburb, with easy access to the city, and yet far enough away for repose and exclusivity. Riverside Farm had the acreage, the location, the railroad and the river. Gage, the wealthy owner of Chicago's Sherman House Hotel, and Chicago's respected City Treasurer, had

NEWSLETTER, FALL 2010

THE FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED SOCIETY OF RIVERSIDE

If you have a question or comment about the newsletter, please direct them to newsletter@olmstedsociety.org.

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PO Box 65, Riverside, Illinois 60546

Dear Friends,

Frequently dubbed the Father of American Landscape Architecture, and one of the most important 19th Century American visionaries, Frederick Law Olmsted rightly deserves sacred status within our village. His artistic achievement in drawing up the General Plan for the Riverside Improvement Company cannot be overstated.

As a Society claiming his name, however, and the significant responsibility that comes by doing so, how well do we actually know his writings and the true intent behind his creation? How many of us in the village can truly claim to be Olmsted scholars?

The November 3 lecture by FLOS member John Kolar is intended to serve as the opening act in a dialogue that ought to blossom in the interest of Riverside.

Olmsted was guided by the principle of long-term investment over short-term effect. As his landscape matured and time went by, it became ever more beautiful. All of us living in Riverside today reap the full benefits of his foresight. Olmsted was about the future, not the past.

As such, the guiding principle behind all of our actions must be the following question: "Are we acting in Olmsted's spirit?" Further, as a Society, have we been proactive enough in defining and articulating ideas and plans for an evolving village, given the rapidly changing world around us?

It is inevitable that we will make mistakes. Perhaps plant a tree in a poor location, or make a short-sighted choice for plant material, but neither event is anti-Olmsted, nor cause for over-reaction. It is part of our living and growing village and community.

The real mistake, I believe, would be to claim Olmsted for the Society only, and to act dogmatically based on a narrow and proprietary interpretation of his intent.

Speaking of spirits.... I have heard that Frederick Law Olmsted attends a spirited picnic on Picnic Island every October 31st. Should you see him, please send him my best regards.

Kim Jacobs

president@olmstedsociety.org

ATTEND THE FINAL RIVERSIDE WALKING TOUR OF 2010

Learn about the history of Riverside and discover the winding roads, delightful parks, beautiful landscapes, and varied architecture that makeup this historic landmark village on Sunday, October 24, our last scheduled walking tour of 2010. The walking tours are an excellent way to share the unique attributes of Riverside with your family, out-of-town guests, friends and others unaware of Riverside's national significance. Conducted by the Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside, this two-hour guided tour will depart from the Riverside Railway Depot and will focus on the south portion of the village.

2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

\$10 per person

(\$7 for seniors and FLOS members)

Special group tours can be arranged at any time upon request.

For more information, please call 708-442-7675 or 708-442-0845 or email tours@olmstedsociety.org.

SC Johnson Company Tour a Success

Frederick Law Olmsted Society's Architecture Committee sponsored a day trip on Friday, August 6 to see the SC Johnson Company campus in Racine, Wisconsin. We were privileged to be able to get a guided tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's spectacular Administration Building, even though it is currently being renovated. The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed research tower was, unfortunately, closed to the public, but we were able to see it from the exterior. Inside the Administration Building, Frank Lloyd Wright's use of glass Pyrex tubes are visually stunning, both inside and out, and the brick and concrete create graceful curves throughout the buildings. Wright designed all of the office furniture, and with a few modern modifications, it is still being used today. What was most amazing was the scale of the Administration Building. In typical Wright fashion, even with the dramatic ceiling height in some locations, the buildings have a human scale to them. We visited Fortaleza Hall as part of the tour, which was designed by Sir Norman Foster and hosts a museum of Johnson's products and his accomplishments. SC Johnson, to their credit, has meticulously maintained all of the buildings designed by Wright and others. Most people may not realize that Wright did very few commercial buildings, so this Wright building is worth seeing and putting on your tour list.

After the tour, the group ate lunch overlooking Lake Michigan and then made a nice surprise side visit to the Wind Point Lighthouse – the tallest lighthouse on Lake Michigan. The trip went well and we had good weather. Stay tuned for our next tour in spring.



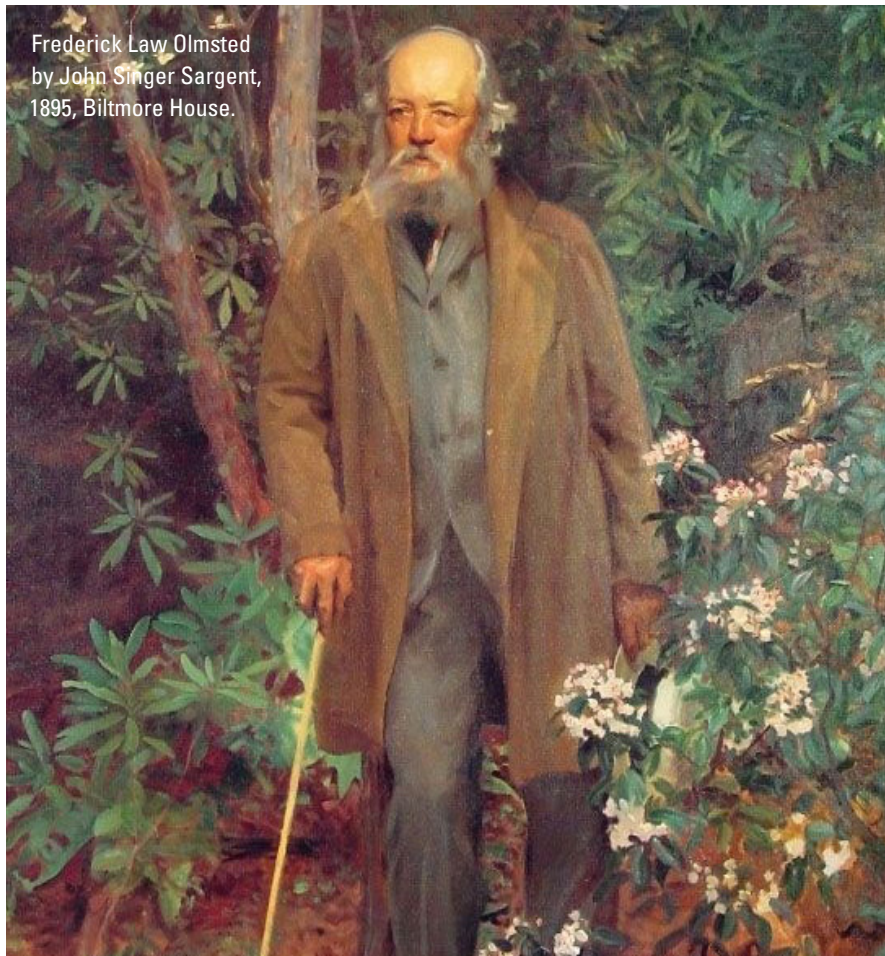
FOR THE COLLECTION: "THE OLMSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE"

"The Olmsted National Historic Site" by David Grayson Allen was donated to the Olmsted Memorial Collection at the Riverside Public Library by Jim and Sandy Petrzilka.

In 1883, Frederick Law Olmsted established "Fairsted" in Brookline, Massachusetts. It was the world's first full-scale professional office for the practice of landscape design. Over the course of the next century, his sons and successors sustained and expanded upon Olmsted's design ideals, philosophy, and influence. His son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., helped to lay the groundwork for the National Park Service in 1916.

David Grayson Allen chronicles the creation and development of the Olmsted National Site in Brookline, Massachusetts, which opened in 1979 after nearly a decade of struggle and controversy and now welcomes thousands of visitors and researchers every year. The site's history is emblematic of the evolving role that landscape architecture plays in modern American lives and reflects the stunning transformation that has taken place within the National Park Service itself in the last quarter century. Original, sophisticated, meticulously researched and well written, this book will resonate with readers interested in historic preservation and landscape architecture.

Frederick Law Olmsted
by John Singer Sargent,
1895, Biltmore House.



Join us for "Olmsted Straight – No Chaser"

A LECTURE BY JOHN KOLAR

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2010, 7:30PM
RIVERSIDE TOWNSHIP HALL AUDITORIUM

Long-time Olmsted scholar and former Olmsted Society President John Kolar posits that in recent years, the sacred name of Frederick Law Olmsted has taken on an aura of mythic proportions. On questions pertaining to Riverside and in support of disparate causes alike, Olmsted's endorsement is frequently invoked. We hear of his enthusiasm for baseball and petunias, as well as his abhorrence of alien trees and gaps in our parkways. Curiously, only the fewest of such thesis are supported by quotations of Olmsted himself.

One reason for the paucity of citation may well be Olmsted's writing style. Laura Wood Roper, in her biography of Olmsted, wrote: "Admittedly, he was not very good at it (educating the public) himself. The style of his professional papers was labored. Try as he might, he could not say just what he meant clearly and gracefully."

In his lecture, Kolar will set out to transcribe Olmsted's own words into plain American English in order to distill the intent of the creator of our Village.

Refreshments will be served.

“What We Do For You” or “Reasons to Renew”

To our members: The board of the Frederick Law Olmsted Society of Riverside would like to express a hearty thank you for making it possible to fulfill our mission.

The Olmsted Society was founded in 1968 by a small group of Riverside residents trying to get Riverside listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Having succeeded in the original goal, and with your help, we have continued on for more than 40 years with our mission to preserve the Olmsted landscape that makes Riverside special. Our mission is both preservation and education when it comes to Riverside's landscape and history.

Here are a few things that your contributions and hard work have made possible over the years:

60 TREES PLANTED on public property in the last 5 years

500 VOLUNTEER HOURS PER YEAR through our Landscape Workdays

\$15,000 DONATED TO SPECIAL PROJECTS such as the restoration of the water tower, planting of the Central Business District and planting at the Riverside Public Library

\$3,000 PER YEAR TO THE RIVERSIDE BROOKFIELD HIGH SCHOOL ECOLOGY CLUB to help restore Waubensee Preserve and Zoo Woods

\$1,200 PER YEAR TO THE VILLAGE to purchase chemicals needed to protect our elm trees

CONDUCT WALKING TOURS OF RIVERSIDE throughout the summer attracting tourists from as far away as Manitoba Canada.

PROVIDE HISTORIC TOURS OF RIVERSIDE for our eighth graders from Hauser

278 CHILDREN INSPIRED TO WRITE POETRY about the natural beauty of Riverside

844 VOLUMES DONATED TO THE OLMSTED COLLECTION in the Riverside Public Library by and pertaining to Olmsted, 117 of which are rare books

Please continue your support of our mission to preserve Riverside's Olmsted landscape and to encourage appreciation and understanding of its unique beauty.

Renew your tax-deductible membership for the 2011 membership year now. You can do it by mail using the attached membership form or visit our web site at www.olmstedsociety.org.



FLOS CONTRIBUTES TO CBD PLANTING

On May 29, 2010, the Olmsted Society was out in full force supporting the Riverside Landscape Advisory Committee and their “Riverside Springs Ahead” project by planting perennials in the central business district. More than a dozen FLOS board members, supporters and their families planted perennials along Burlington Street and Riverside Road. Many varieties were planted, so watch them grow and mature over the next couple of years. Thank you to all the volunteers who lent a much-needed hand.

In addition, FLOS donated \$500 to assist the Landscape Advisory Committee with purchasing mulch and other needed items for this project.



INDEPENDENCE DAY HOMAGE

On July 3, the Frederick Law Olmsted Society participated in Riverside's beloved Independence Day Parade. Proudly donning Olmsted-inspired facial hair and glasses and newly designed “Olmsted Homestead” t-shirts, 14 folks (with healthy senses of humor) walked the parade route sharing boxes of Ferrara Pan Appleheads and a more lighthearted side of the organization. Thanks to all who participated and to those who shouted words of support.

Riverside Farm. Childs had, so he said, the eastern money connections needed to help fund the development. He also may have suggested enlisting a prestigious and respected name like Frederick Law Olmsted to help plan, develop and sell the project.

Unfortunately, Riverside almost died soon after, following the Chicago Fire of 1871 and a nationwide financial panic that followed in 1873; although troubles and chicanery began almost immediately. Some of the sordid details leading to the ultimate bankruptcy of the Riverside Improvement Company may be found in two thick volumes in the library of the Chicago History Museum, labeled, appropriately enough, *Riverside Evidence*.

It is a fascinating, though convoluted, story, replete with echoes of our own time: real estate troubles, Ponzi schemes (although Ponzi was not yet born), charges and counter charges. Evidence there certainly is, concerning the grandiose plans; obscure, increasingly frantic, financial manipulations; myriad lawsuits, and complex legal proceedings that ended, some thought, the dream of a model suburb on the outskirts of Chicago, all of it culminating in the indictment and trial of the Chicago City Treasurer himself.

It was a portent of things to come when, early on, Olmsted discovered that the market value of the lots he had accepted as initial payment might actually be worth less than one quarter of their value as stated by Mr. Childs. Then, in addition to the Riverside Improvement Company, there were conjured up the Riverside Gas and Water Company, the Riverside Hotel Company, the Chicago & Great Western Railway Company, The C&GWR Land Company, and the Riverside Normal (Teachers College) School, some actually realized and some not, all of them linked with a dizzying array of stock and bond issues, loans, commingling of funds, side agreements, recruitment of new investors, fallings out among old investors, vendors suing for payments due, lawsuits, lawsuits, lawsuits.

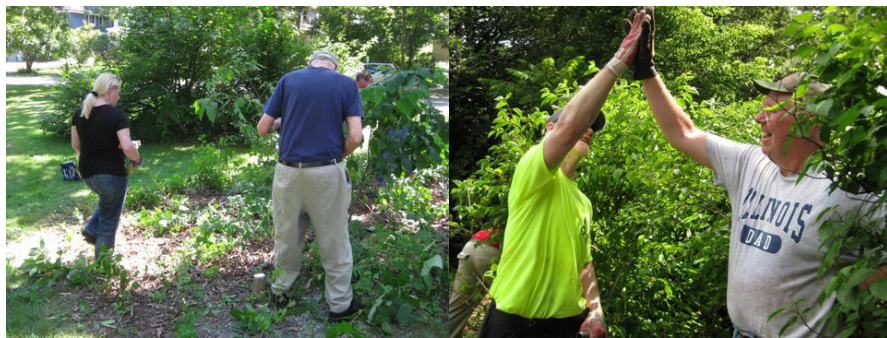
The culmination, of sorts, is a lawsuit filed by David Gage, on July 22, 1874,—against 50 individuals six companies and four banks—which runs to 160 dense pages and is much beyond the scope of this short piece. Unfortunately, Mr. Gage could not outrun an indictment for misappropriation of funds in his role as Chicago City Treasurer. He apparently was “loaning” city funds on his own recognizance to prop up some of his Riverside endeavors. This may or may not have

been illegal at the time, as city government finances were run fairly “loose,” with the interest on such loans, amazingly, sometimes pocketed by the Treasurer. Gage’s “defalcation” was the relatively modest amount of \$400,000, and he was even chided by one commentator for being accused of stealing such a small amount for a man of his stature and position. This was, after all, Chicago, where if you couldn’t steal at least several millions you just weren’t in the running. He was acquitted. Mr. Childs, it seems, went in search of greener pastures. The 1880 census finds him back in New York, still in real estate, still fending off Riverside-related lawsuits. Mr. Olmsted, as we all know, went on to many other very great things and much acclaim.

In the end, Frederick Law Olmsted made the right decision regarding Riverside, and the big speculation turned out all right, although he might not have fully agreed with that assessment during his lifetime. But thanks to the combined efforts of one genuine landscape genius and his colleagues, some flyaway hucksters, many honest investors, and a lot of back-breaking work by mostly unknown laborers Riverside got established. Since then it has blossomed over time through the steady application and creativity of many involved and fiercely protective residents, public servants, architects, developers, landscape designers, and local businesspeople who recognize a special place when they see it and will do what it takes to preserve, protect and enhance it.

Whether or not Riverside was born on the 4th of July 1868, its modern spirit was probably most apparent on the 4th’s of July 2009 and 2010, when the community, despite severe economic difficulties, would not be denied its annual observance. In like manner, citizen volunteers of all ages, and village officials and staff, have led the current efforts to save the historic Arcade building.

So, from our current perspective, what is the final verdict, the judgment of history, on all the Riverside Evidence? It is favorable and self evident. It is Riverside itself.



Lend a Hand at Our Last Landscape Workdays

The Landscape Committee has been busy this summer and has had lots of volunteers to help beautify Riverside.

Eight volunteers battled the heat during the June 26th workday on the Longcommon Common near Addison Road. Here, volunteers continued to weed, trim trees and apply mulch. Please join us at the other end of the Longcommon near Downing Road on November 6th.

On July 17th, 15 volunteers met at Scottswood Common near Millbridge Road where they systematically weeded and trimmed bushes. Again, on September 11th, eight volunteers returned and finished the weeding of this large triangle.

Eight eager and cheerful volunteers attended the August 7th workday along Riverside Road near Gage Road. The large bed that was worked on was covered in Poison Ivy. If you think this weed is more prevalent and toxic than past years, you are correct. Experts agree that the elevated levels of CO₂ are the culprit. Adaptive weeds like Poison Ivy thrive with elevated amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere. The CO₂ strengthens the oil in the plant that causes the itching when it touches your skin. Also, heavy rains and warmer temperatures increases pollen count. If your allergies are worse this year, that might be why. Riverside Forester, Michael Collins, plans to herbicide this weed along Riverside Road in the fall. We can all help reduce CO₂ levels by walking or biking when possible and adding more vegetarian meals to your diet (factory farms are #1 in CO₂ emissions; all vehicles combined are #2). We will return to Riverside Road on October 23rd, but will work along the sidewalk where Poison Ivy is less prevalent and easier to see.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE LAST FEW LANDSCAPE WORKDAYS OF 2010:

OCTOBER 23	9 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Riverside Road (at Olmsted)
NOVEMBER 6	9 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Longcommon Common (at Downing)

FLOS DONATES TO ECOLOGY CLUB

The Olmsted Society's Landscape Committee has continued its commitment to the Riverside Brookfield High School Ecology Club by contributing \$3000 toward the management of Zoo Woods and Waubensee Preserve. The club will use it this fall and winter by hiring Audubon Society interns, who, unlike Ecology Club members, have the option of using chainsaws and other "heavy" tools. What the interns can take down, the Club members can drag and stack and (finally, at a later date) burn.



Jack-in-the-Pulpit as seen at Waubensee Preserve.



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED SOCIETY OF RIVERSIDE

Your support will help promote the progress of Riverside, educate residents about the history and significance of the Village, and support active involvement in the Village's needs. Membership covers a calendar year and entitles you to participate in the Society's functions free-of-charge or at discounted prices, reimbursements in Riverside's co-op tree planting program, and the quarterly newsletters. Sign up online or return this form with your check payable to the Frederick Law Olmsted Society, PO Box 65, Riverside, Illinois 60546. Please contact membership@olmstedociety.org with questions or see our website at www.olmstedociety.org.

MEMBERSHIP

- | | |
|--|----------|
| <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+) | \$ _____ |
| Total Enclosed | \$ _____ |

- ☐ New Member ☐ Renewal ☐ Gift Membership

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please provide your email address so we save paper and trees!

COMMITTEES

Put your talent to work
and your energy to good
use by joining a committee!

- ☐ Architecture
☐ Landscape
☐ Housewalk
☐ Membership
☐ Library
☐ Public Relations
☐ Newsletter
☐ Website
☐ Tours/Education
☐ Other Talents _____