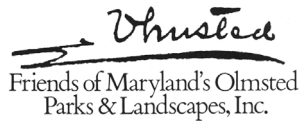


Druid Hill Park

American Parks Movement & the Olmsted Brothers



FMOPL Digest

olmstedmaryland.org

Druid Hill Park, celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, is a majestic model of one of the landscape design traditions of its day—the 19th century English country landscape park. Baltimoreans are sometimes surprised to learn that the park was not designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (FLO), the father of landscape architecture and designer of Central Park, New York, of the same era. Druid Hill's major framework of pastoral lawns, the lake, sublime forest and curvilinear carriageways was molded, rather, by a contemporary of FLO, the "Landscape Gardener" Howard Daniels. Starting in 1860, Daniels oversaw the implementation of his plans for the park at the request of the Baltimore Park Commission. A number of other Baltimore park practitioners had significant influence as well.

The reason for the occasional misattribution of Olmsted to Druid Hill is undoubtedly his legacy of landscape architecture extending from New York across

the nation. Indeed, Olmstedian is part of America's lexicon. From the 1870s to the 1890s, FLO did perform some park work in Baltimore, including the 1875 design for the four parks in Mount Vernon Place.

Complicating the Olmsted influence in Druid Hill Park is the fact that the firm Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects (OBLA), continued after his death in 1903 by his stepson John Charles Olmsted and son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., performed many works in Baltimore. Through their 1904 *Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore*, OBLA had a profound impact on Baltimore's park system, leaving a legacy that continues to inspire comprehensive planning today.

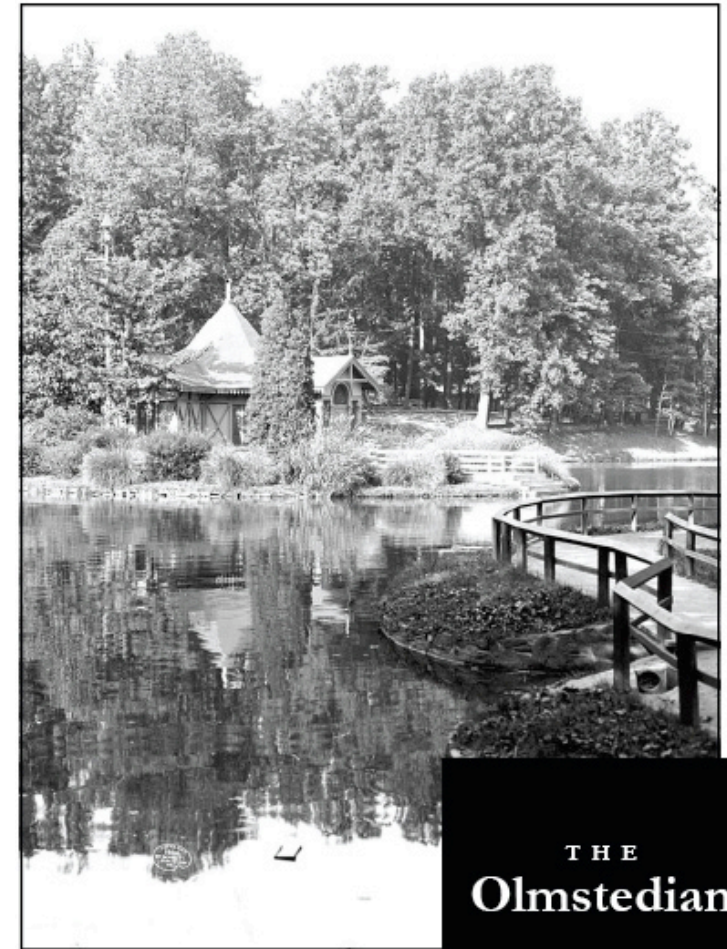
Druid Hill Park, already half a century old in 1904, was recognized in this report as part of a grand interconnected system of open space. Later, the Baltimore Park Commission hired OBLA

to perform various planning and design tasks throughout the city, including isolated projects within Druid Hill Park.

Howard Daniels— A Design Pioneer of the American Parks Movement

The development of Central Park is often recognized as a seminal moment of the American Parks Movement in the 19th century. Public discourse and political will turned to providing large expanses of public open space for the enjoyment and well-being of city residents. Like many movements, popular history tends to distill the agents of change to the names of a few. In reality, movements succeed through the skill and determination of many. Howard Daniels, an architect and landscape gardener relatively unknown today, held his rightful place with FLO and others as a part of the American Parks Movement.

The genesis of 19th century large urban parks, still ubiquitous in many of America's cities, could



During the early decades of Druid Hill Park, the pastoral beauty of the Boat Lake, Zoo and woodland roadways attracted park visitors from across the Baltimore region.

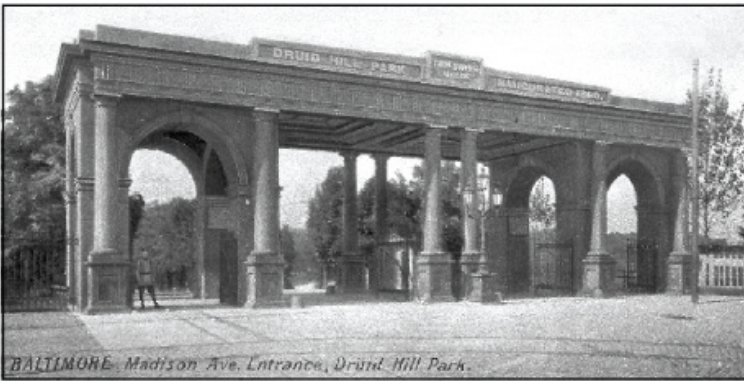
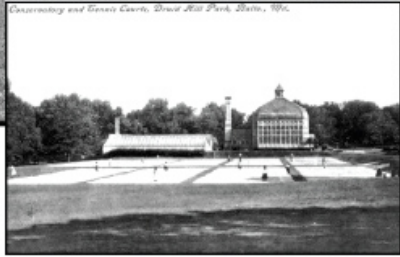
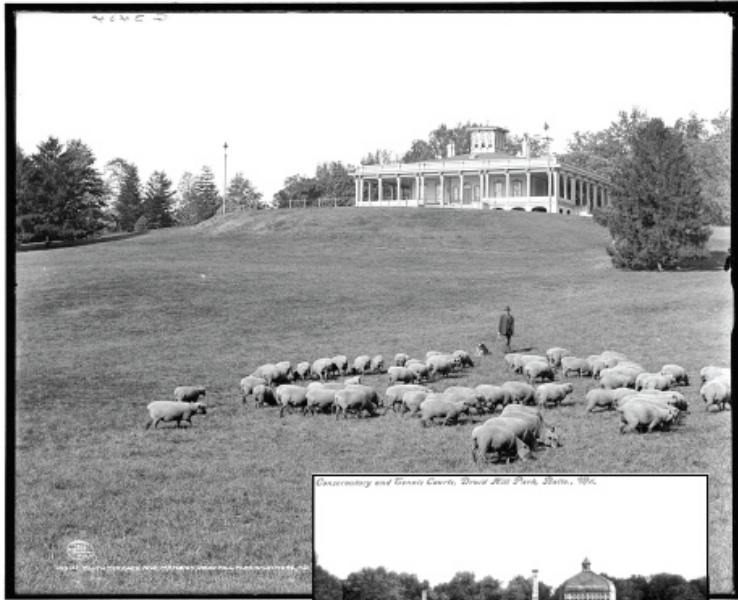
Photo courtesy of Enoch Pratt Free Library, Central Library/ State Library Resource Center, Baltimore, Maryland.

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not have begun without the significant advocacy of influential people such as William Cullen Bryant, poet and editor of the [New York] *Evening Post* and Andrew Jackson Downing, a prominent landscape gardener and editor of *The Horticulturist*. Be-

ginning in the 1840s, these civic leaders lobbied for public spaces in the tradition of Hyde Park in London. During the 1850s, FLO, Daniels, and many others traveled in Europe, and debated and wrote extensively on their ideas concerning the parks of



(Top) Sheep tended the south terrace of the Rogers Mansion, now the headquarters of the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore.

(Middle) A postcard image of two popular park attractions: the Conservatory and the adjacent tennis courts.

(Bottom) The grand Madison Avenue entrance gateway welcomed those who rode the trolleys to Baltimore's metropolitan park.

Photo images courtesy of Maryland State Archives.

Europe and how these ideas should be applied to American cities.

In 1853, the New York legislature designated 700 acres of land for the Central Park project, and in 1857 a landscape design contest was held. Architect Calvert Vaux planned to enter with Andrew Jackson Downing until Downing died in a steamboat accident on the Hudson River. Vaux then paired with Downing's student, Frederick Law Olmsted. Their design, *Greensward*, placed first in the competition, while Howard Daniels' *Manhattan Plan* placed fourth.

Daniels' career as a landscape gardener spanned 20 years. His first major design on record, Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati (nearly 800 acres and 14 lakes), predates Olmsted's work on Central Park by 13 years. The romantic picturesque design tradition of the rural park cemetery was a precursor to the American Parks Movement, and this period is when Daniels' practice was most prominent. Daniels called the rural cemetery a "peculiarly American institution." Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore, established in 1839, is part of this tradition.

In 1860, the Baltimore Park Commission hired Daniels to survey property and lay out walks, drives and lakes for Druid

Hill Park. He oversaw the park's development over the next three years at the rate of 10 dollars per day. Writing in *The Horticulturist*, Daniels promoted the development of large urban parks as "the next great step in rural progress." Sadly, Daniels died in Baltimore in 1863 at the age of 48— 32 years before FLO, Sr. would retire after a long, fruitful career. Daniels is buried in a cemetery of his design— Greenlawn in Columbus, Ohio.

Annual reports from the Baltimore Park Commission (BPC) summarize the early development of Druid Hill Park, but there are no known drawings of the improvements attributed to Daniels. The earliest known drawing is an 1871 lithograph of existing features. According to these reports, the Rogers estate was already "laid out in the best style of English landscape gardening . . ." At the time of Daniels' death the park consisted of roads, walks and lakes. Druid Lake Dam— at the time the largest earthen dam in the country (now a National Historic Engineering Landmark)— was completed in 1872. The only architectural elements were the Rogers estate Federal style mansion and Silver Spring, a Gothic ornamented springhead north of the mansion. Daniels is credited with designating the mansion and its south lawn as the heart of the park.

Park Engineers and Architects Continue the Work

After Daniels' death, Park Engineer Augustus Faul continued to supervise the development of Druid Hill Park. An obituary in the *Gardeners Monthly and Horticulturist* referred to him as head of landscape engineering. Influencing major design elements in the park were George A. Frederick, architect; John H. B. Latrobe, park commissioner; and Charles H. B. Latrobe, engineer.

George A. Frederick, Park Architect from 1862 to 1895, in consultation with John H. B. Latrobe, designed many of Druid Hill's structures in picturesque Gothic Revival and Exotic Revival styles. One of Frederick's earliest improvements to the park, under the direction of John H. B. Latrobe, was to add a 20-foot wide, open-air porch around the estate mansion, with Victorian detailing, transforming the mansion into a massive park pavilion. Frederick is famous for designing Baltimore City Hall (1867) and the park's Mount Royal Boulevard entry pylons (c.1880) in the ornate French Empire style. Originally, the pylons framed an entryway that skirted the now extinct round reservoir of Reservoir Hill. During construction of the Jones Falls Expressway, the pylons were removed and stored. The Historic Mount Royal Community (Reservoir Hill) advocated for their reinstallation at North Avenue

by the expressway ramps in 1988. Frederick's grandest gateway to Druid Hill Park stands at Madison Street (Avenue) to commemorate the building of the park and was inspired by the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

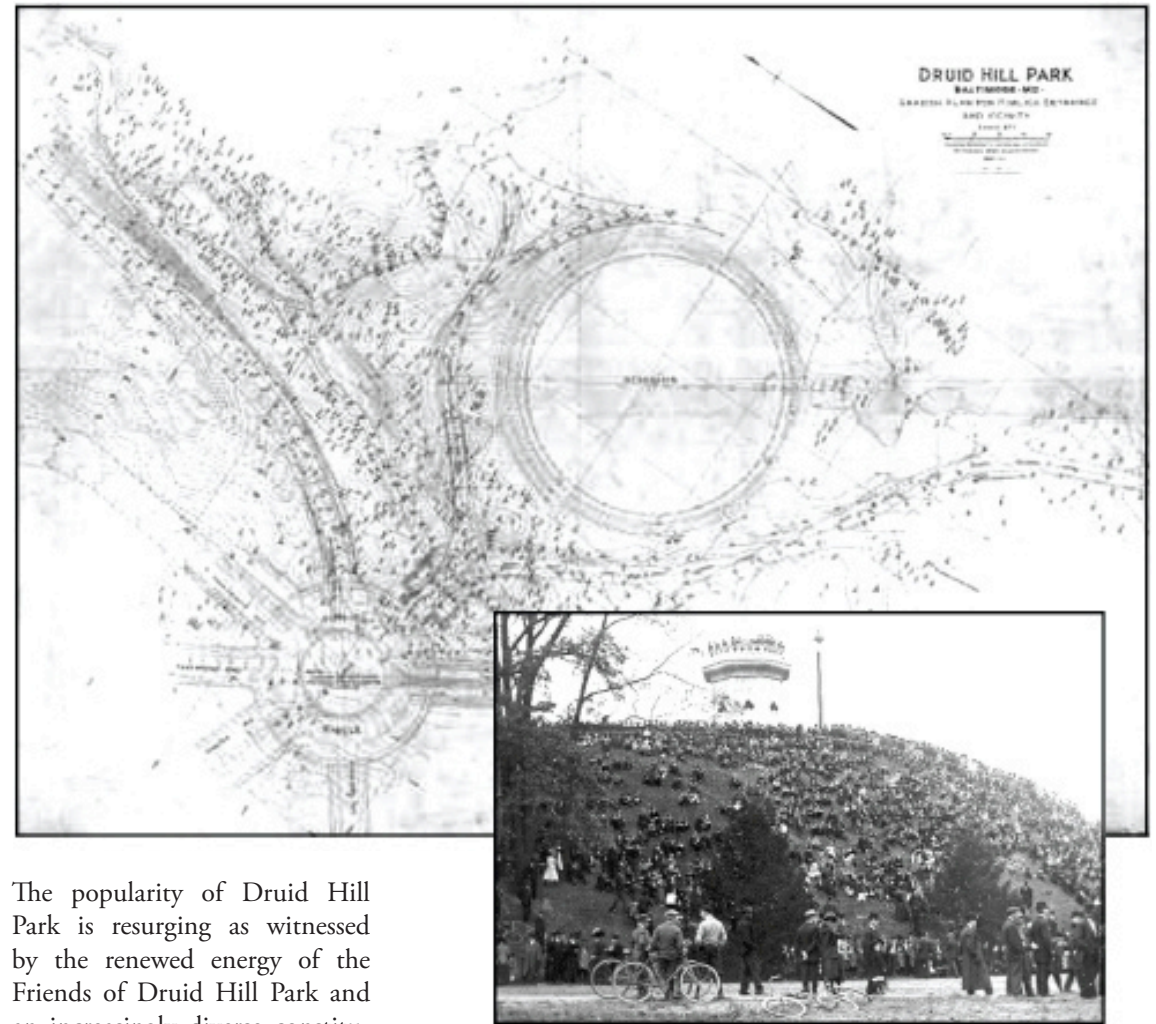
Charles H. B. Latrobe, Park Engineer, designed the large octagonal rain shelters throughout the park. The iron trusses under the massive round roofs reflect his bridge expertise and aesthetic. Latrobe also designed the graceful iron arches for the original Cedar Avenue Bridge (the remaining fence now stretches along Pratt Street by the National Aquarium), constructed in 1890 to span the Jones Falls east from Druid Hill Park.

Role of Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects

The 1904 *Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore* marked the beginning of years of collaboration between the Baltimore Park Commission and OBLA, including a variety of projects in Druid Hill. In 1995, Patricia O'Donnell, Fellow, American Society of Landscape Architects, reviewed correspondence from the Library of Congress and drawings at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts for the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks. She reported that OBLA developed ex-

tensive planting, grading and circulation plans, details for walls, paving, and fencing, in addition to settings for sculpture and swimming pools. Not all OBLA projects were implemented, and some no longer survive. One of the most recognizable remaining projects is the paving pattern of yellow brick on the mall behind the conservatory.

Much of OBLA's work involved improvements to the southern edge of the park where the firm proposed walks and planting strips to create a separation between the park and the Brooks estate to the immediate south of Druid Lake. The entryway at Fulton Avenue was substantially enhanced under the direction of OBLA. At the base of the Druid dam, OBLA sited the large bronze Union Soldiers and Sailors monument, dedicated in 1909, and now located in Wyman Park Dell at the corner of N. Charles and 29th Streets. Sadly, construction of Druid Park Lake Drive in 1947 and the Jones Falls Expressway in the 1960s degraded the edges of the park where many of these OBLA improvements were built. In 1915, OBLA proposed studying Druid Hill Park as a whole instead of continuing the piecemeal approach to park projects, but the Parks Board voted against comprehensive planning.



The popularity of Druid Hill Park is resurging as witnessed by the renewed energy of the Friends of Druid Hill Park and an increasingly diverse constituency. This grand lady deserves the stewardship of all Maryland citizens. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places signifies that Druid Hill Park is indeed a culture landscape of national importance.

—Myra Brosius,
Landscape Architect

This OBLA drawing of the Pimlico Circle entrance demonstrates the firm's concentration on the edges of the park. In 1909, the dedication of the Union Soldiers and Sailors Monument, sited by OBLA, drew a crowd to the east slope of Druid Hill Lake. Drawings from FMOPL Archives. Photo images courtesy of Maryland State Archives.