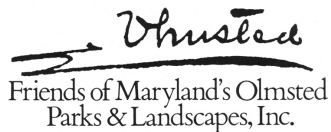


Patterson Park

The Olmsted Role



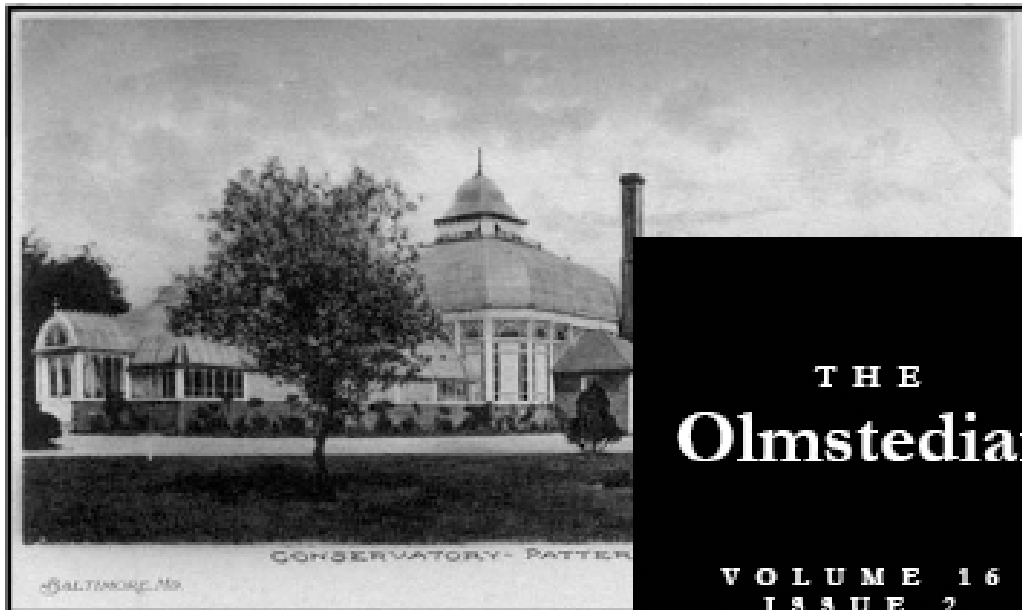
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Patterson Park is an urban oasis—a sacred green space surrounded by brick row houses, diverse cultures and neighborhoods. Generations of Baltimoreans have picnicked under tall tulip poplars, strolled the deeply curved paths and enjoyed the rich architectural design of this 137-acre East Baltimore park.

Patterson Park is more than beautiful landscapes, scenic vistas, and tree lined, languid pathways. This refuge is an urban emerald with many facets. The park was a site of the defenses of Baltimore during the War of 1812 and of a surgical hospital during the Civil War. Home to egrets, herons, wood ducks and painted turtles, the park also serves as a free outdoor gym with tennis courts, volleyball nets, an ice rink, as well as paths for relaxing walks around the Boat Lake. The variety of assets highlights the reasons that parks were created during the industrial age and that parks continue

to play such an important role in our present-day, fast-paced cities. Since its beginnings in 1827, Patterson Park has been a prime example of how urban open green spaces can complete and unify diverse communities.

Though Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s only direct involvement in the design of Baltimore's park lands was Mount Vernon Place, he and Andrew Jackson Downing had a major intellectual influence on the development of parks to serve the needs of nineteenth-century American cities. Baltimore civic leaders were early converts to the urban parks movement, establishing Druid Hill Park in 1860 as the nation's third large, multipurpose park, designed by Olmsted contemporary Howard Daniels. Such green spaces would act as "the lungs of the city" and be central agoras for the developing communities and neighborhoods.



(Above) View of the Boat Lake, centerpiece of the original design for Patterson Park, recently restored. (Below) The Patterson Park Conservatory, demolished in 1948, was the largest of Baltimore's four original conservatory structures. Postcards courtesy of the Friends of Patterson Park.

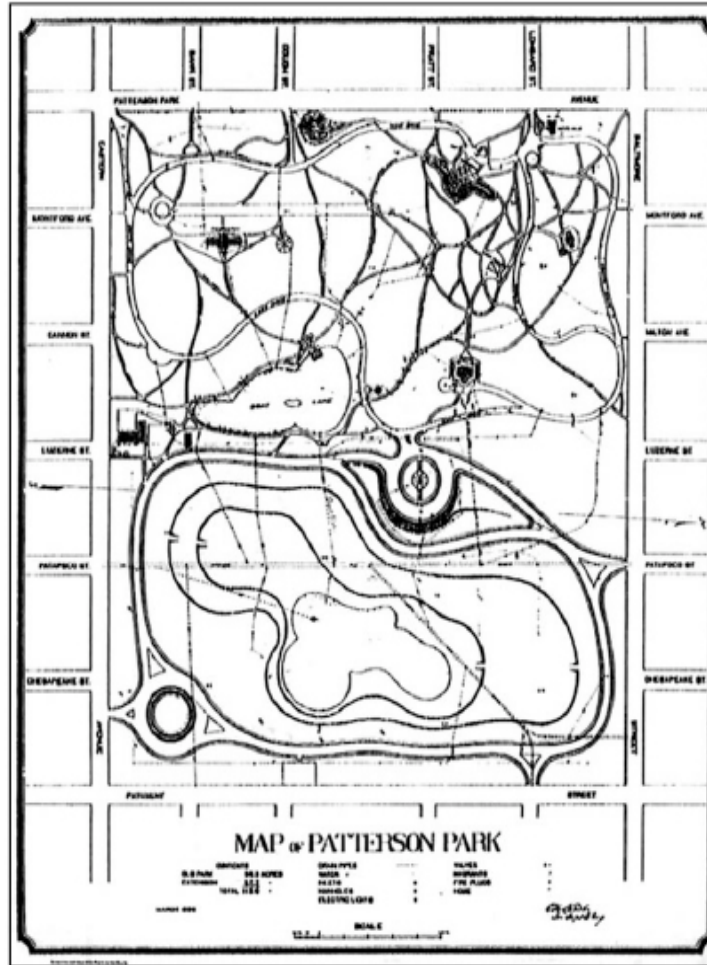
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Early Patterson Park History

In 1827, William Patterson donated to Baltimore six acres of his property to be used as a “public walk.” This site included the redoubt of Rodger’s Bastion on Hampstead Hill, where 12,000 citizens, most of them volunteers, had set up breastworks and 100 cannons to repulse the British during the Battle for Baltimore in 1814. William Patterson foresaw Baltimore’s expansion as a city and knew that a park would serve a bustling community.

In 1853 Patterson Park was designated a formal city park. After the Civil War encampment was razed, work began on creating a larger community park for the surrounding neighborhoods. Slowly, land was acquired and new facilities were built in the style of the “Country Park,” following the precedents set by Downing, Olmsted, and Daniels. Baltimore architect George Aloysius Frederick, designer of City Hall, was hired by the city’s Board of Park Commissioners to develop plans for the park’s first structures: the marble fountain, the gate house, and the Lombard Street entrance pillars. The park of this era featured tranquil, curving walkways; a skating pond; and a formal promenade. Major land acquisitions in 1873 and 1893 greatly expanded the size of the park, which now extended from the high grounds of the early portion to the low (and some-



Charles H. Latrobe’s 1899 map for Patterson Park. Courtesy of Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks & Landscapes Archives.

what marshy) terrain drained by Harris Creek. During the 1890s park superintendent and engineer Charles H. Latrobe provided plans for the remediation of the east side’s marshlands and designed impressive new structures: the Observatory (Pagoda), two storm shelters, and the Casino.

The Olmsted Brothers

At the turn of the twentieth century the country park tradition, with its emphasis upon the passive enjoyment of green spaces, was giving way to new recognition of the need for more active forms of recreation for urban dwellers. The Public Athletic League, led in Baltimore by Robert Garrett,

*Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. observed: “the feeling of relief experienced by those entering them, on escaping from the cramped, confined and controlling circumstances of the streets of the town; in other words, a sense of enlarged freedom is to all, at all times, the most certain and the most valuable gratification afforded by a park.”*¹

¹ Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. referring to Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY.

campaigns for playgrounds and playfields, based on the belief that such sports and recreation promoted discipline, moral improvement, and social cohesion. At this critical juncture, members of the Municipal Art Society funded the first major comprehensive study of Baltimore’s parks to serve the growing city’s needs at a time when annexation was also anticipated. They engaged the leading park architects of the day, the firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted and continued by his sons Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and John Charles as the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. Their 1904 *Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore* balanced these competing goals for the city’s park system. In addressing Patterson Park, the report recognized that the former open spaces to its east were rapidly being developed and urged extension of the park to “offer the working people of East

Baltimore a conveniently accessible body of refreshing scenery, retired to a great degree from the turmoil of the city.”

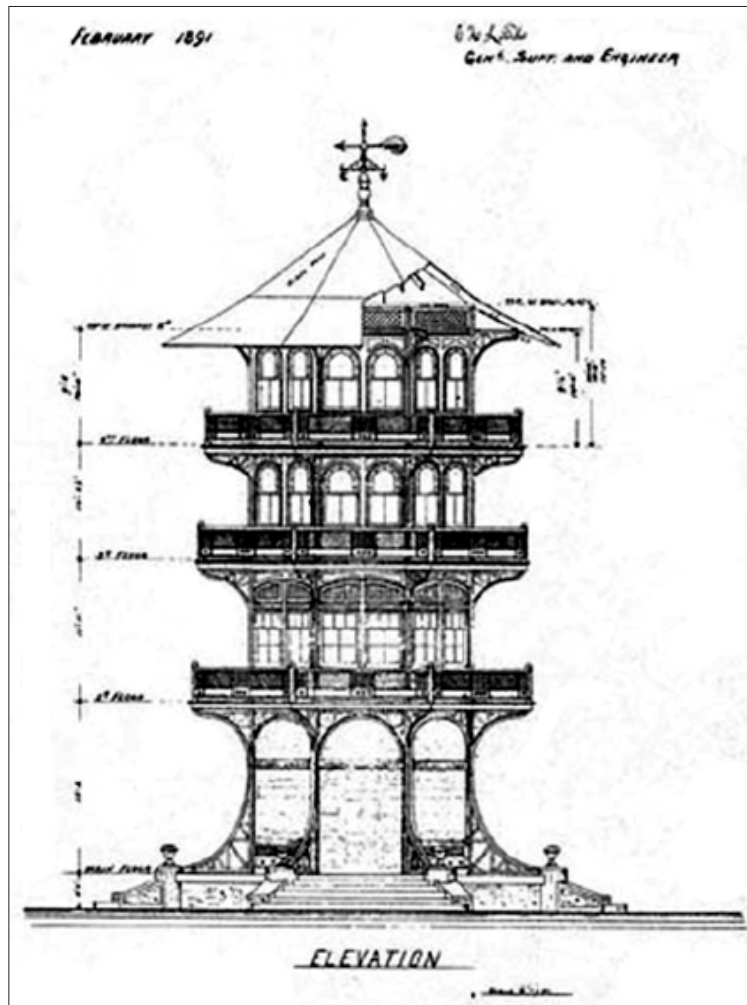
In response to the recommendations of the Olmsted report, a 20-acre extension was acquired, consisting of relatively level landscape to the east of the older section’s pastoral slopes. Between 1905 and 1918 the Olmsted Brothers’ firm developed plans for the new section of the park, where their principal designs were for active recreation facilities: a field house, swimming beach and bath house, playground, field house, and ball fields.

In Patterson Park one can see the two sides of the Olmsted vision: the pastoral vistas and sweeping hills championed by the senior Olmsted and carried on by his sons, as well as the recognition by the younger Olmsteds of the features required by the active

recreation movement. While the Country Park style of the Gilded Age envisioned parks as an escape from the frenetic life of urbanization, the Progressive Era advocated for outdoor recreation and a new focus on community hygiene and social development. The 1998 Master Plan for Patterson Park, citing historic preservation consultants Lampl Associates, asserted that the Olmsted Brothers may have favored the former but “recognized the role of active recreation in urban environments, and were responsive to the Commission’s priorities to make Patterson Park a pioneer in the active recreation movement.”

Patterson Park Today

A century later modern cities have new challenges as well as innovations. Parks are as important as ever to the urban fabric today. The role of Patterson Park in creating social cohesiveness and quality of life is still paramount. The recent renaissance of Patterson Park has excited an entire community. Once again, there is a vitality to the park and to the neighborhood. People are using the park more than ever—families coming together to plant trees and gardens, friends and neighbors gathering for concerts on Pagoda Hill, and communities connecting with their history. Realized from the Olmsted’s enduring ideals, a symbiosis exists between urban green spaces and surrounding communities.



Above: Charles H. Latrobe, General Superintendent and Engineer, City Parks Engineer, designed the landmark Patterson Park Observatory, now known as The Pagoda, shown in this February 1891 drawing. Drawing courtesy of the FMOPL archives. Above right: Generations have cherished the recently restored fountain as a meeting place for friends and families to gather. Right: The Boat Lake has been central to the park’s history.

—Timothy Almaguer, *Friends of Patterson Park*

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