

A CLEARING  
IN THE DISTANCE



*Frederick Law Olmsted and America  
in the Nineteenth Century*

WITOLD RYBCZYNSKI

SCRIBNER

538. Witold Rybczynski  
A Clearing in the Distance  
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Hartford b. 1822 April 26  
d. Aug 28, 1903 (81) Waverly  
MASS  
Oliver - age 21  
Co-founded The Nation  
voice against slavery  
Gen. Sec. US Sanitary Commission  
precursor of Red Cross  
Central Park - 1500's of employees  
300,000 trees and shrubs

Oliver left school early  
he was a great reader  
he devoted 7 years to founding  
Politics beckoned - they wanted him  
to run as a Whig for town clerk  
He wrote an article on  
Birkenhead Park  
Then a full length book

His father-in-law P229  
Thomas Hart Benton  
Stroll in Park P317  
1874 - Marion 12 year old  
Henry  
Charlotte  
John - at Yale  
Dover  
Oliver - has rare cigar



Ryft - spent 20 years in Montreal - "The Mountain" designed by Olmsted  
Christant Hill, Phil.

John died 1920

Rick " 1957

tragic loss of Olmsted's mother

Jan 1851 - engaged Emily Baldwin Perkins - she broke it off  
he didn't become involved for next 8 years.

TA - great white plague - Thoreau - 44 - Emerson - 78 - his brother John

1859 - Fred. <sup>(37)</sup> married his brother's wife Mary (29) - had 4 children  
she was less than 5'

Central Park - most workers 3600 (1858) Purpose (p177)  
#13 million - largest public works

1857 - hired by Commission for Central Park (p155)  
Nov. his brother John died - 32 yrs old Public competition - Olm + Vaux won - Republican Party lines

Colbert Vaux  
Andrew Jackson Downing

Central Park - impressions for 2 neophytes - no narrative thread  
Golden Gate Park - nothing from Olmsted p273

1879 - 12 years had been devoted to Central Park - moved to Cambridge for 2 yrs. - suffered depression. (p341)

Olmsted - opposed abolition p191

Fall off of a horse  
Resigned from Central Park Jan 1861 - at loggishness with Commissioner Green.



Vignettes — his words are his own  
O'neal's thoughts and feelings are ~~his~~ imagined

(11)

- P 70 Great Point, Sachem's Head, CT.  
P 109 The Mississippi, north of New Orleans  
P 149 Morris Cove, CT.  
P 187 Mt. Saint Vincent, Central Park  
P 227 Bear Valley, CA.  
P 283 The Narrows, New York  
P 317 The Mall, Central Park  
P 344 Cottage Street, Brooklyn, MASS.  
P 365 Faunstead, Brooklyn, MASS.  
P 393 The Concert Hall, Madison Square Garden  
P 411 Prospect Park, Brooklyn



Sanitary Commission

Olm. promoted use of sanctuaries  
for slaves - same banner  
Lincoln was not supporter of  
S. Commission



"Olmstead was lucky"

P222

- All came  
to him  
unsolicited
- ① Raymond's offer to write about the South
  - ② Elliot's suggestion that he might make  
a good superintendent for Central Park
  - ③ Vaux's proposal to collaborate on  
Greenward
  - ④ Bellow's invitation to lead the  
Sanitary Commission
  - ⑤ Meeting Charles Dana who turned down  
chance to run CA Gold Mine  
Mariposa Estate - Olmstead is  
offered
- (44) 1864

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Central - 1st Murder Oct. 1872

William Boss Tweed - took over and then  
indicted - Olm. back in.

Father dies in Hartford after fall at 81 (1872)

~~John~~ John Stewart Mill - his new die earlier

Olmstead - saw things differently than most p 316



Sanitary Commission

Sanitary Commission  
for the relief of the  
suffering in the  
city of New York



1862

"United we stand"

Sanitary Commission  
for the relief of the  
suffering in the  
city of New York

1st World's Fair

① Chicago Fair - open 1893  
Jackson Park

② Codman's death

③ European Trip - sick for 3 months

④ Rich graduates from Harvard

OTHER BOOKS BY WITOLD RYBCZYNSKI

PAPER HEROES

TAMING THE TIGER

HOME

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOUSE IN THE WORLD

WAITING FOR THE WEEKEND

LOOKING AROUND

A PLACE FOR ART

CITY LIFE

1881 - Owen dies in Albany, N.Y.

*In Brooklyn* Olmstead falls off a horse - broken breastbone  
60 years old 2 grandchildren by Charlotte  
At age 7 Henry (son) renamed Frederick

1890 - Charles Brace dies

Olmstead 70 enjoys his children



BOOKNOTES  
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Sickness -

fatigue

depressions

fell off a horse

enlarged heart

Olmstead 1885 - 63 - 1st Photo

front photo

Trask

Brace

Kingsbury

Olmstead

John Olmstead

P 89

Olmstead - 1860 (38)

P 153

John Olmstead - father 1860

May Cleveland Olmstead

P 267

Calvert Vaux 1868

P 339

Richardson

Olmstead 1890 (68)

Charles Eliot Norton

P 415

Olmstead 1890 -

making note

Author at 22 graduated  
with a degree in architecture.  
Spent 6 months Spanish Bahian Island P57  
visited Sachems Head, Ct.

Andrew Jackson Downing in 1841 he was 26  
"The Horticulturist" - first to publish Olmstead

Best friends - Frederick Kingsbury  
Charles Brace

1850 - With brother Laversham for six months in England  
England becomes touch stone for Olmstead's ideas  
about rural scenery

Religion -

Slavery - Supporters - American Colonization Society  
he wanted gradual emancipation  
found it natural that freed slaves 2nd class citizens

Whig views  
farming background  
travel - writing, experience

Yeoman - how he signed his articles from the South P116  
Slavery - he wanted to save the Union  
① free labor was cheaper  
② slavery corrupted society



trip with  
Schuyler Colfax

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Vaux's client  
Samuel Tilden

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Stanford design  
he was a senator and  
Governor

Olmstead left the  
project - didn't attend  
opening -

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residence in  
Vanderbilt in  
Asheville, N.C.

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The Nation - 1867  
associated editor (44 yrs.)  
owner

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Mary's sixth child  
dies - a boy doesn't  
live long enough  
for a name p284