

Creating Central Park



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Morrison H. Heckscher

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

Director's Foreword

Reprint of *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
(Winter 2008). Copyright © 2008 by
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Second printing, 2011

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This publication was made possible through the
generosity of the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by
the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*.

Additional support has been provided by
The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation and the
William Cullen Bryant Fellows.

Publisher and Editor in Chief: John P. O'Neill
Editor of the *Bulletin*: Sue Potter
Production: Christopher Zichello
Design: Bruce Campbell

Cover: DeWitt Clinton Hitchcock (active 1849–79).
*Central Park, New York City, Looking South from
the Observatory*, 1859. Lithograph printed in colors
with hand coloring. Museum of the City of
New York, The J. Clarence Davies Collection
(29.100.2299). Frontispiece: *The Mall, Central
Park, New York*, ca. 1870. One-half of a stereo-
graph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert
Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

Cataloging-in-Publication data is available from
the Library of Congress.
ISBN: 978-1-58839-246-6 (The Metropolitan
Museum of Art)
ISBN: 978-0-300-13669-2 (Yale University Press)

Printed and bound in Shenzhen, China.

In 2003 the Metropolitan Museum mounted an exhibition celebrating the sesquicentennial of the legislation authorizing the appropriation of the land for New York's Central Park. Five years later, with this publication, we celebrate the sesquicentennial of the design of that park, the first and, in most people's minds, the most famous of America's urban landscapes. In October 1857 the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park advertised a public design competition for their new park. The winning submission, announced the following April, was that of the English-trained architect Calvert Vaux and the American farmer and writer Frederick Law Olmsted. Their plan, called "Greensward" in recognition of its open areas of rolling lawns, was an immensely imaginative yet intensely practicable treatment of a most unpromising site.

In the following pages Morrison Heckscher, the Lawrence A. Fleischman Chairman of the American Wing, recounts the story of our beloved park, tracing the buildup of the necessary public sentiment, the selection of the site, the design competition, and the actual construction of the park. It is an epic urban story, replete with politics, personal animosity, and repressed desire—but also idealism, self-sacrifice, and artistic genius. Our ability to illustrate the story has been enhanced by Herbert Mitchell's recent gift of his unequalled collection of stereoscopic views of the park.

I am sometimes asked why the Metropolitan Museum chose to build within the natural landscape of Central Park. The answer is simple: we did not so choose. The founding trustees had their eyes on the Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street site of the old Croton Distributing Reservoir, then the fashionable center of the City (and today home to the New York Public Library), but City officials, intent on an ambitious and significant educational component within the confines of the new Central Park, decided upon the uptown location.

The Museum, as a permanent park resident if you will, has a strong interest in the history and ongoing health of Central Park. Accordingly, we are particularly grateful for the dedication of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and Commissioner Adrian Benepe and of the Central Park Conservancy and its President, Douglas Blonsky. The park has never looked better, and we salute its history.

Philippe de Montebello
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A Note from the New York City Parks Commissioner

Central Park is synonymous in the minds of many with the essential urban park. As we mark the 150th anniversary of the competition to design the park, Morrison Heckscher has researched and written a remarkable, scholarly, yet eminently approachable précis of the park's birth, design, construction, and realization. Heckscher brings to life the passionate advocacy and fierce political battles that marked the early years of planning, while animating the men and women behind the sepia-tone drawings and early photographs. Heckscher also documents the lesser-known figures who contributed to the park's creation, the works of architecture and art that were erected, and the almost accidental way that The Metropolitan Museum of Art was brought into the park in 1872. A remarkable, twenty-five-year restoration of Central Park by the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy is nearing its completion; Heckscher and *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* celebrate what may be America's greatest contribution to landscape architecture and urban parks.

Adrian Benepe

Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

A Note from the President of the Central Park Conservancy

We applaud The Metropolitan Museum of Art for dedicating one of its beautiful publications to the 150th anniversary of the design of Central Park, the "Greensward" plan. Central Park is one of the most recognized artistic masterpieces in America and a celebrated "outdoor museum of art."

Yet in its short existence, this treasured landmark has had an unstable history, experiencing several cycles of decline-and-restore—the last decline in the 1970s being the most severe. Today the Central Park Conservancy, established in 1980, is proud to be the leader of the longest period of sustained health and beauty in the park's history and, together with our dedicated staff and members, has made a commitment to sustain this important and beautiful work of art for generations to come.

We congratulate Morrison Heckscher on telling the compelling story of Central Park's creation with his unique perspective as a noted curator and scholar of American decorative arts.

Douglas Blonsky

President, Central Park Conservancy, and Central Park Administrator



Creating Central Park

[Central Park] is of great importance as the first real park made in this country—a democratic development of the highest significance & on the success of which, in my opinion, much of the progress of art & esthetic culture in this country is dependent.

—Frederick Law Olmsted, August 1, 1858

The history of Central Park is, in one sense, all about the creation of the most famous city park in America and the beginning of the nation's urban landscape park tradition. In another sense, it is about the role of open space on the island of Manhattan: the dynamic tension between pavement and pasture, between city noise and rural quiet, between fresh air and foul; between private and public land, between city and state government; between city square and urban park. In yet a third sense, it is about the fortuitous coming together, at the very moment when a challenging park site had been chosen and a vast labor force was at hand, of two gifted men with a shared vision and complementary talents. And, of course, it is the always fascinating story of how an extraordinary work of public art emerged from the crucible of New York City politics.

The Commissioners' Plan and New York's Early Parks and Squares

By 1800 New York City's burgeoning commercial future was clear. Its central location on the Atlantic Coast, its large well-protected and year-round harbor, and above all its location at the mouth of the Hudson River, superhighway to the nation's hinterlands, gave it a huge strategic advantage over other coastal cities. The introduction of steam-powered ships (Robert Fulton's first successful use of the new technology was on the Hudson River in 1807) and the building of the Erie Canal (begun under the aegis of Governor DeWitt Clinton in 1817 and completed in 1825) had much to do with the rapidity with which the City would grow during the nineteenth century.

City officials recognized the need to plan for this growth, if only in order not to impede it. They looked at the patchwork of street grids that then made up the City and saw the folly of allowing such a random pattern to extend the length of Manhattan. But how to control it? The City was ruled by a mayor and the aldermen who made up his Common Council, but ultimately power rested in Albany, where the governor and the New York State Legislature could effectively kill any City bill. The Common Council began to wrestle with the problem of growth as early as 1804. Finally, in February 1807, they presented the state legislature with the draft of a bill that would enable the City to lay out streets and roads. In an accompanying memorandum, they pointed out "the necessity of projecting the streets and roads in such a manner as to unite regularity and order with the Public convenience and benefit, and in particular to promote the health of the City." They were candid about the crux of their problem:

Opposite: Victor Prevost (1820–1881). *Bridge No. 3* (Willowdell Arch), 1861. Photograph. From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 10. The creators of Central Park stand on the bridge: from left to right, Andrew Haswell Green, probably George Waring Jr., Calvert Vaux, Ignaz Anton Pilat, Jacob Wrey Mould, and Frederick Law Olmsted. New York Public Library



The diversity of sentiments and opinions which has heretofore existed and probably will always exist among the members of the Common Council, the incessant remonstrances of proprietors against plans however well devised or beneficial, wherein their individual interests do not concur, and the impossibility of completing those plans but by a tedious and expensive course of law, are obstacles of a serious and perplexing nature. . . . As these evils are continually accumulating by reason of our increasing population, and the rise of frequent subdivisions of property, your Memorialists find it necessary to appeal to the wisdom of the Legislature, for relief.

1. John Randel Jr., cartographer. *This Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan as Laid Out by the Commissioners.* Published by William Bridges, 1811. Engraving with colored wash. New-York Historical Society

For the moment, at least, the legislature supplied that relief: on April 3, 1807, it passed an act “relative to Improvements, touching the laying out of Streets and Roads in the City of New York.” Under it three commissioners, including Surveyor-General of New York State Simeon De Witt, were appointed and given four years to lay out “the leading streets and great avenues, of a width not less than 60 feet, and in general to lay out said streets, roads and public squares of such ample width as they may deem sufficient to secure a free and abundant circulation of air among said streets and public squares when the same shall be built upon.” The act included all of Manhattan except for the already built-up areas below North (now Houston) Street.

The new commissioners chose John Randel Jr., a talented protégé of De Witt, to survey the entire island. Randel recalled in a memoir that he had “superintended the surveys with a view to ascertain the most eligible grounds for the intended streets and avenues, with reference to sites least obstructed by rocks, precipices, steep grades, and other obstacles.” But in the end the commissioners chose a simple grid plan, with absolutely no regard for the underlying natural terrain. Superimposed on the topographical survey on which Randel had labored between 1808 and 1810 was the inexorable grid that has defined the City ever since: 12 north–south avenues, all 100 feet wide, and 155 east–west streets, 15 to be the width of avenues and 140 to be 60 feet wide. After all, they “could not but bear in mind that a city is to be composed principally of the habitations of men, and that strait sided and right angled houses are the most cheap to build, and the most convenient to live in.” The result,



the Commissioners' Plan, was engraved by Peter Maverick and published (without Randel's permission and without his being given any credit) by William Bridges, the city surveyor, on November 16, 1811 (fig. 1).

Although the 1811 plan is frequently (and not unjustly) criticized for being both unimaginative and dismissive of the natural landscape, it ably served the City's preeminent interest in real estate development and the needs of commerce. The commissioners justified the modest amount of vacant space set aside for fresh air and health needs on the grounds that the surrounding sea provided ample clean air and that land was very expensive. Nevertheless, their plan offered more open space than is generally recognized, providing for nine new squares with a total area approaching 500 acres. Far and away the largest of the spaces was the Parade, 239 acres between Twenty-third and Thirty-second Streets and Third and Seventh Avenues. Had it ever been

constructed, it would have been a true "central park" for the southern half of Manhattan.

Indeed, the prevailing wisdom in 1811 was that the Commissioners' Plan took more land for open space than was needed or could be justified. In February 1812 a committee was formed for the purpose of shrinking the affected acreage. Come 1815, two of the proposed new squares, Union Place and Market Place, were reduced in size. The Parade was cut back in 1814 and again in 1819 and whittled out of existence by 1829. (In 1826 minuscule Washington Square replaced it as the place to parade troops.) Today, only two of the nine parks envisioned by the Commissioners' Plan still exist: Manhattan Square (now home to the American Museum of Natural History) and Union Square.

During the 1810s and 1820s the City continued its inexorable expansion. And by 1833 traffic pressures were so great that the legislature authorized two new avenues, later named Madison and Lexington, to be inserted into the grid. In the face of such rapid growth, public opinion about open space began to shift. In January 1832 the Assistant Board of Aldermen's Committee on Lands and Places went on record about the importance of securing land, while it was still comparatively inexpensive, for squares and public places for parades and festivities and, most important, "to serve as ventilators to a densely populated city. It is worthy of remark," they declared, "that almost every stranger who visits us, whether from our sister States or from Europe, speaks of the paucity of our Public Squares; and that in proportion to its size, New York contains a smaller number, and those few of comparatively less extent than perhaps any other town of importance."

Modest efforts, both private and public, were made to ameliorate this paucity of parks: In 1831 Samuel B. Ruggles donated the land for what was to become Gramercy Park, and in 1836 Mr. and Mrs. Peter B. Stuyvesant gave the land for the square that would bear the family name. The legislature authorized the creation of Tompkins Square in 1833 and Madison Square in 1837. But this hardly addressed the scope of the problem. In 1838 Francis Nicholson, the city surveyor, calculated that the City's eighteen public squares, parks, and places comprised a total of 7,415,739 square feet, or all of about 170 acres. A dozen years later, in 1850, with the urgent need for more open space attracting the press and broad public interest, the Common

Council chose to publish Nicholson's quixotic montage of individual parks (fig. 2), together with a map of the City showing how insignificant they really were (fig. 3).

In the Museum's print collection is an unfinished proof impression (fig. 4) of the center sheet of the large and beautiful topographical map of Manhattan published by J. H. Colton in 1836, precisely twenty-five years after the Commissioners' Plan. It encompasses the area between Nineteenth and 133rd Streets and depicts the City grid's rapid uptown advance. The cross streets are now fully graded and paved to about Twenty-third Street, and all traces of the original topography have been obliterated as far north as Thirtieth Street and the beginnings of Murray Hill. We can see the future, and nature has no part in it. The map depicts, but does not highlight, the uptown public squares that were so prominent on the Commissioners' Plan. Who was it, one wonders, who used a light tan wash to delineate on this map the boundaries of the future Central Park as it would be configured between 1853 and 1859?

The Decision to Build a New Park and the Selection of Its Site

The true visionaries of the great new park for New York City were William Cullen Bryant and Andrew Jackson Downing (figs. 5 and 6), and they came not from the political arena but from the world of arts and letters. Bryant (1794–1878), who grew up and practiced law in western Massachusetts before moving to New York in 1829 to enter the newspaper business, was a renowned romantic poet and the longtime and highly influential editor of the *New York Evening Post*. In the sultry heat of July 1844 he penned an editorial entitled "A New Park" in which he called for "an extensive pleasure ground for shade and recreation" and suggested that there was no "finer situation for the public garden of a great city" than Jones' Wood, a forested tract on the East River. The next summer, in a letter of June 24, 1845, he bemoaned the failure of the city plan to incorporate "a range of parks and public gardens along the central part of the island or elsewhere." In fact, Bryant cared far less about where a park was to be located than about open land being acquired while it was still available.

Downing (1816–1852), a nurseryman from Newburgh, New York, was the popular and persuasive editor of the *Horticulturist*, his journal of "rural art and rural taste." As the principal

4. David H. Burr, cartographer. *Topographical Map of the City and County of New-York and the Adjacent Country* (proof impression of center sheet). Published by J. H. Colton and Co., New York, 1836. Engraving, ca. 1836; park outlined in wash ca. 1858. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924 (24.66.1492)

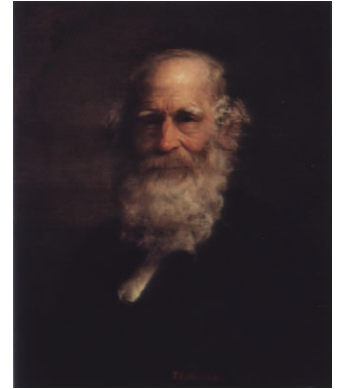


proponent of the art of landscape gardening in America, he published *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America* in 1841. Between 1848 and 1851, in a series of public “letters,” Downing lamented the lack of public parks in America. In his view it was only at public cemeteries like Green-Wood in Brooklyn (begun in 1838) that “untravelling” Americans could get an idea of the beauty of public parks abroad. When comparing London’s enormous parks with Manhattan’s, he was reduced almost to apoplexy: “What are called parks in New-York, are not even apologies for the thing; they are only squares, or paddocks.”

By midcentury the editorializing of Bryant and Downing had had the desired effect. The need for more parks was on everybody’s mind, and no mayor (or mayoral candidate—mayors were elected annually until 1850 and biannually thereafter) could fail to espouse them. Mayor Caleb S. Woodhull, who was elected on April 10, 1849, embraced a policy of encouraging open public squares, proclaiming them “essential aids to the public health . . . , the *great breathing places* of the toiling masses.” Appealing to a downtown population, he promoted the expansion of the Battery as a public promenade.

But it was the next mayor, Whig merchant Ambrose C. Kingsland (elected November 5, 1850), spurred on by Bryant’s *Evening Post*, who took up the cause of a grand new uptown park. In April 1851 he issued a statement about the inadequacy of the City’s public places; in May, in an eloquent oration to the Common Council, he declaimed: “There is no park on the island deserving the name.” The time was right for purchasing the land for a park “on a scale which will be worthy of the city.” Kingsland had something specific in mind. He noted that there were places “easily accessible, and possessing all the advantages of wood, lawn, and water”—a pointed reference to Jones’ Wood, the forested East River estates of James Jones and his son-in-law Peter Schermerhorn of the great shipping fortune family that Bryant had first mentioned in 1844 and that the Committee on Lands and Places had been actively pursuing. The diarist George Templeton Strong described the plot, the only remaining large undivided piece of Manhattan shoreline, as “very beautiful, and strangely intact for the latitude of Sixty-first Street.” On June 3, having tried unsuccessfully to negotiate its purchase from the principal landowners, the committee recommended that the legislature take it by eminent domain. On June 17 State Senator James Beekman, also a Whig, introduced the Jones’ Wood Park Act, which authorized the City fathers to acquire the land for use as a public preserve. The bill passed on July 11.

It was just at this moment in 1851 that Matthew Dripps published his two-part map of New York City. On the half representing the area north of Fiftieth Street, he highlighted the proposed Jones’ Wood site by applying a green wash over the printed street grid (fig. 7). The parkland, totaling 153 acres, consisted of ground lying between Third Avenue and the East River and between Sixty-sixth and Seventy-fifth Streets. (An irregular six-acre projection of the Schermerhorn estate extending south two blocks to Sixty-fourth Street between Avenue A and the East River was also part of the site until it was excluded by the Common Council on January 2, 1852.) At its southwest corner Jones’ Wood abutted Hamilton Square, which was first proposed on the Commissioners’ Plan of 1811 and ultimately abandoned in 1868. The map, the first to depict every building in the City, locates and identifies the houses and roads within the site belonging to the Schermerhorns, the Joneses, and others. It also depicts important neighboring properties, including those of James Beekman between Sixty-third and Sixty-fourth Streets and Avenue A and First Avenue. “Mr. Beekman our Senator,” a reader of the *Journal of Commerce* wrote, “is too deeply interested in the neighborhood of the contemplated Park to be an impartial judge of its feasibility. He and his family have a large extent of land there which will be greatly augmented in value by this operation.” Here was



5. Thomas Le Clear (1818–1882). *William Cullen Bryant*, ca. 1876. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1323)



6. *Andrew Jackson Downing*. Photograph. Athenaeum of Philadelphia



7. H. A. Jones, C.E., surveyor and delineator. *Map of That Part of the City and County of New-York North of 50th Street, 1850* (detail). Published by Matthew Dripps, 1851. Lithograph with colored wash. Private collection

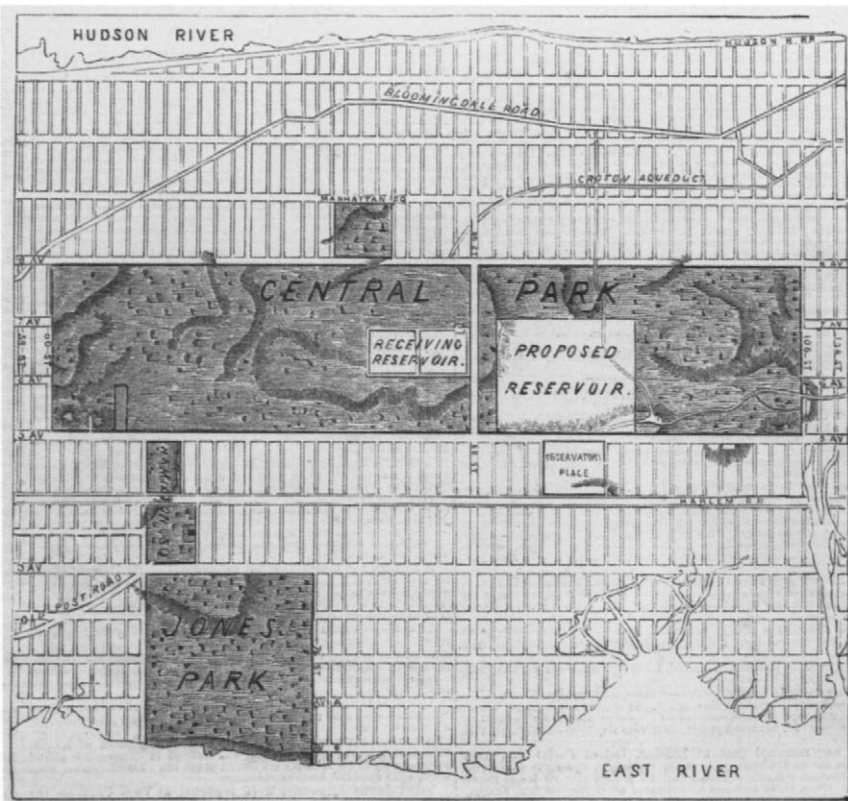
the economic dilemma of taking private land for public parks: the owners of the appropriated land might be only modestly compensated, even if the value of adjacent properties were to rise hugely.

Encouraged by a Whig-dominated Assembly, the Jones' Wood bill had initially encountered smooth sailing. But faced with a Democratic sweep of the Common Council, lawsuits filed by the landowners, and, most significantly, the appearance of an attractive alternate site, it suddenly faced formidable obstacles. On June 28, 1851, the *Journal of Commerce*, which was opposed to parks in general and the Jones' Wood site in particular, published correspondence between Nicholas Dean, president of the Croton Aqueduct Board, and Alderman Henry Shaw extolling the advantages of integrating the new park with the city reservoirs, the 35-acre 150-million-gallon rectangular facility bordered by Sixth and Seventh Avenues and Seventy-ninth and Eighty-sixth Streets that had been completed in 1842. For the park, Shaw recommended a plot consisting of 100 blocks between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and between Thirty-ninth Street and the Harlem River, and Dean proposed 600 acres between Fifth and Seventh Avenues and between Fifty-eighth and 106th Streets. (The land between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, originally the City's Common Lands, had been subject to less subdivision than other areas of the island.) The year before, in June 1850, Dean had reported on the need for adding 500 million gallons of reservoir capacity, recommending a single reservoir of 100–120 acres to be located in low ground just north and east of the existing one. And now he praised the economies that could be achieved by combining all these great public works within one "Central Park." The Dripps map (see fig. 7) identifies the major landowners of this future parkland and shows some of the subdivisions and buildings thereon.

In the August issue of the *Horticulturist* Downing addressed, passionately and at length, "the leading topic of town gossip, . . . the new park proposed by Mayor Kingsland." He was pleased that, finally, New York had awakened and realized that the new park was a necessity. But

one hundred and sixty acres of park for a city that will soon contain three-quarters of a million people! It is only a child's playground. . . . Five hundred acres is the smallest area that should be reserved for the future want of such a city, now, while it may be obtained. Five hundred acres may be selected between Thirty-ninth-street and the Harlem River, including a varied surface of land, a good deal of which is yet waste area, so that the whole may be purchased at something like a million of dollars. In that area there would be space enough to have broad reaches of park and pleasure-grounds, with a real feeling of the breadth and beauty of green fields, the perfume and freshness of nature. In its midst would be located the great distributing [sic; actually the receiving] reservoirs of the Croton aqueduct, formed into lovely lakes of limpid water, covering many acres, and heightening the charm of the sylvan accessories by the finest natural contrast. In such a park, the citizens who would take excursions in carriages or on horseback, could have the substantial delights of country roads and country scenery, and forget, for a time the rattle of the pavements and the glare of brick walls. Pedestrians would find quiet and secluded walks when they wished to be solitary, and broad alleys filled with thousands of happy faces, when they would be gay.

With these words Downing, who had merged Shaw's idea of a narrow strip park with Dean's call for a wider one, accurately reflected the tenor of the times and presciently captured the essence of the future Central Park. On August 5, 1851, acknowledging that "public opinion seems to demand that the City Government . . . should adopt the most liberal and enlightened measures, in order to make the proposed pleasure ground, in its locality, conve-



8. Plan of Manhattan between 58th and 109th Streets, showing alternate sites for the new park. Wood engraving. From *Illustrated News*, June 25, 1853, p. 409. New-York Historical Society

niently accessible to all,” the Democratic-led aldermen referred the month-old Jones’ Wood Park Act to a special committee charged with determining “whether there be not a better locality for such park.” Five months later, and just two days after the formal announcement of the site selected for the massive new reservoir (December 31, 1851), the special committee submitted its twenty-nine-page report, with a detailed comparison of the advantages to the City of purchasing either “Central Park” or what they called “Jones’ Park.” In terms of extent (large), convenience of locality (all that could be desired), availability (land better suited to park use than to building use), and cost (lower amount per acre), they enthusiastically endorsed the Central Park option.

In some quarters, however, opposition to the park remained strong, and it was not until eighteen months later, on June 9, 1853, that the Common Council resolved that, whereas

the proposed Central Park has met the general approbation of our citizens, and the project being more feasible than that of the Jones Wood Park, on the ground that if carried into effect it will embrace within its limits the present and contemplated reservoirs, and be central to the island, where, if a park is wanted at all, would be a proper location for one; therefore, to apply to the Legislature for a law authorizing the opening of such a park.

The popular press did not share the council’s apparent ambivalence to the whole subject of parks. On June 25 the *Illustrated News* reprinted a map (fig. 8) showing the two contending park sites and editorialized: “In common with all other intelligent journals of New York, we are strongly in favor of the selection of Central Park.” The *Journal of Commerce*, apparently not part of that select group and fearing that Central Park would be a burdensome physical barrier to movement about the City, called instead for a series of small parks or squares.

On July 21, 1853, sensitive to the public’s growing impatience, the legislature finally passed the historic Central Park Act, which declared the ground now known as Central Park “to be a public place in like manner as if the same had been laid out by the commissioners of 1807.” The act authorized the appointment of five commissioners of estimate and assessment to conduct land acquisitions and also authorized the City to issue stock for raising money—the Central Park Fund—to pay for those acquisitions.

The enabling legislation for the park specified a parcel of land “bounded southerly by Fifty-ninth-street, northerly by One Hundred and Sixth-street, easterly by Fifth Avenue, and westerly by Eighth-avenue.” This precise size and location, first proposed in a narrower format by Nicholas Dean in 1851, was predicated upon having the existing rectangular Receiving Reservoir, located between Sixth and Seventh Avenues and Seventy-ninth and Eighty-sixth Streets, at the park’s exact center. The southern end of the park was prescribed by Broadway crossing Eighth Avenue at Fifty-ninth Street, two blocks shy of the wider Fifty-seventh Street. A like distance to the north brought that border to 106th Street, which,



though one of the wide streets, bisected a great rocky outcrop. That awkward geographic reality would ultimately require extending the park to 110th Street.

Nothing could have been more fitting than making the reservoir the center of the park. The Croton Aqueduct and the Central Park were the City's first two great public works projects. Both were enabled by acts of the legislature (the aqueduct in 1834) that authorized the taking of private property for a public purpose, both had appointed boards of commissioners, and both were brilliantly realized (the aqueduct in 1834–42) thanks to the extraordinary design and managerial talents of their builders (in the case of the aqueduct, Chief Engineer John B. Jervis).

The upper left corner of a panoramic bird's-eye view of New York published in 1854 (fig. 9) offers a unique pictorial rendition of upper Manhattan and the future site of the Central Park. The view is from the southwest, with the Hudson River and Manhattan in the middle ground and the East River and Blackwells Island in the background. At the right is the growing city, with Waring Latting's 315-foot-high wooden Observatory Tower hovering over the domed central building of the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1853. East of the tower is the Distributing Reservoir at Forty-second Street. The viaduct of the New York and Harlem Railroad, in the middle of Fourth (now Park) Avenue, extends far into Harlem. But the center of the island is largely empty of improvements. Three landmarks within the future park are readily recognizable: to the left, at the north end of the park site, is the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent (founded in 1847 by the Sisters of Charity of New York to provide higher education for women); to the south is the castellated bulk of the State Arsenal (completed in 1851 to the designs of Martin E. Thompson); and between them are the two joined rectangles of the Receiving Reservoir.

By itself, passage of the Central Park Act was no guarantee that the park as proposed would ever be built. It took four months (until November 17, 1853) for the State Supreme

9. John Bornet, delineator and lithographer. *Panorama of Manhattan Island, City of New York and Environs* (detail). Published by Nagels and Weingärtner, 1854. Colored lithograph. New York Public Library

Court to appoint commissioners of estimate and assessment to determine the awards (more than \$5 million) to which the 561 different owners of some 7,250 building lots within the new Central Park site would be entitled and the assessments (\$1.7 million) to which the owners of adjacent lands would be subject; twenty months (until July 2, 1855) for those commissioners to complete their work; and another seven months (until February 5, 1856) for the Supreme Court to confirm said work. According to *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* for February 2, 1856, "the three-year delay in implementing the Central Park legislation" illustrated the way "objects of great public utility can be postponed or defeated by official corruption and legal chicanery."

During this time of endless delays, drastic reductions in the size of the park were proposed. Faced with a softening economy (which culminated in the Panic of 1857) Mayor Jacob Westervelt, a reform Democrat elected November 2, 1852, distanced himself from the idea of a large park. In March 1854 a majority of the Committee on Lands and Places, finding neither need nor justification for Central Park to be so large, voted to remove the southern twelve blocks (from Fifty-ninth to Seventy-second Streets) together with 400 feet from each side. A minority of the committee, considering this a bit drastic, recommended leaving intact the south end of the park as well as the east side above Eighty-sixth Street (to encompass the site of the new reservoir). Either way, the park would have been eviscerated. But then entered a new mayor, Democrat Fernando Wood, elected November 7, 1854. In March 1855 Wood boldly vetoed the council's park reduction resolution, claiming that any interference with the original park plan would put in "jeopardy the success of the most intelligent, philanthropic and patriotic public enterprise, which has been undertaken by the people of this city, since the introduction of the waters of the Croton river. . . . To assert that this [park] will be too large is entirely unworthy of even the present position of this metropolis, to say nothing of a destiny now opening so brilliantly before us." Irony of ironies, Central Park owes its very existence to a mayor whose administration, even in its own day, epitomized municipal corruption. In the words of author and critic Clarence Cook: "Mr. Wood's public record is everyway so unhandsome that we are glad to be able to give him credit for one creditable act."

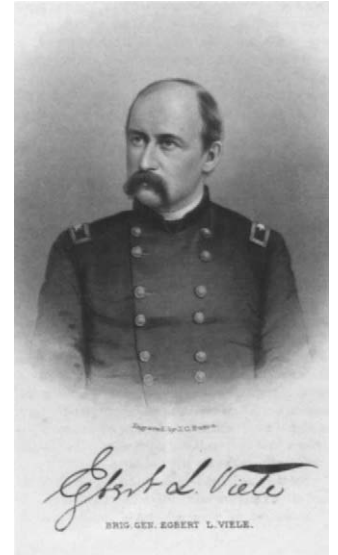
In the spring of 1856 the City sought state approval for the mayor to appoint a five-man commission to administer the park, but the legislature, controlled by the newly established New York Republican Party, tabled it. On May 19, impatient with Albany, the Democratic Common Council appointed Mayor Wood and Street Commissioner Joseph Taylor commissioners of Central Park, "with power to employ the necessary persons to execute the repeatedly expressed wishes of the people." The two officials promptly created a consulting board of distinguished citizens—including author Washington Irving, historian George Bancroft, and bibliophile James Lenox—"to advise as to the plan of the park improvement." And they engaged Egbert Viele, a Democrat like themselves, as engineer in chief to build it.

Egbert L. Viele and the First Park Plan

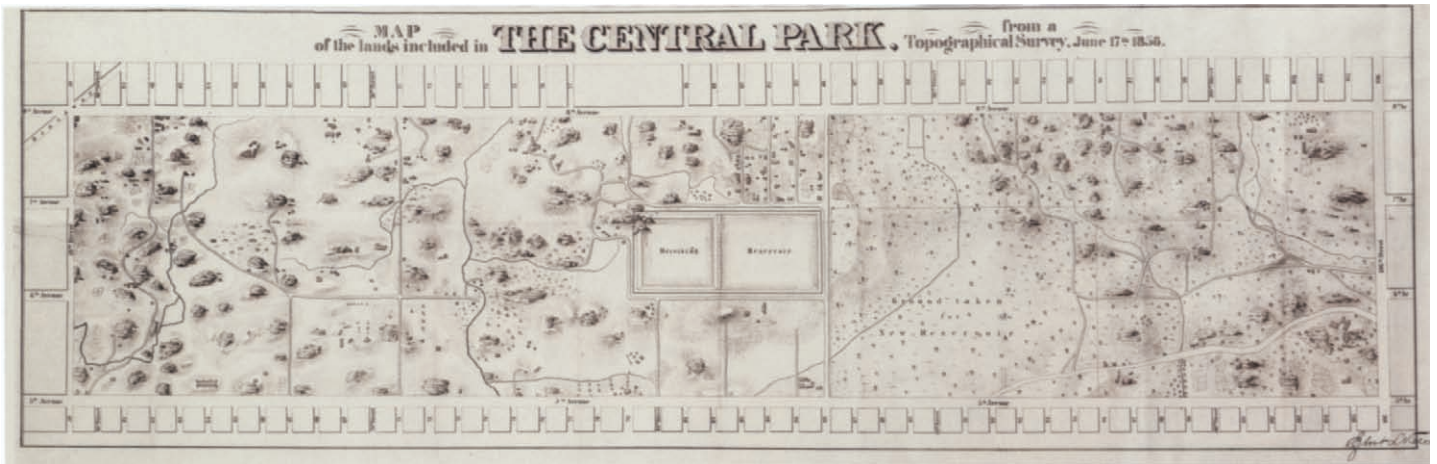
Egbert Ludovicus Viele (1825–1902) is something of an *éminence grise* in the history of Central Park. Viele (fig. 10) aspired to be to midcentury New York what John Randel had been fifty years before: an ambitious and talented topographical engineer with vast knowledge of the geology and topography of the island of Manhattan. The detailed land surveys of the Central Park site (including all buildings and other improvements) upon which the assessments were based look to be largely Viele's work. Viele's background was in the military. He graduated from West Point, where he studied engineering, in 1847 and was on active service until

resigning his commission in 1853 to enter civilian life. Viele was employed as topographical engineer to the State of New Jersey from 1854 to 1856 and as engineer in chief of Central Park between May 1856 and June 1858, when he was fired. In 1860 he sued the City for wrongful dismissal and for not having been paid for the design he had prepared for the park. Between 1861 and 1863 he served in the Union Army, attaining the rank of brigadier general.

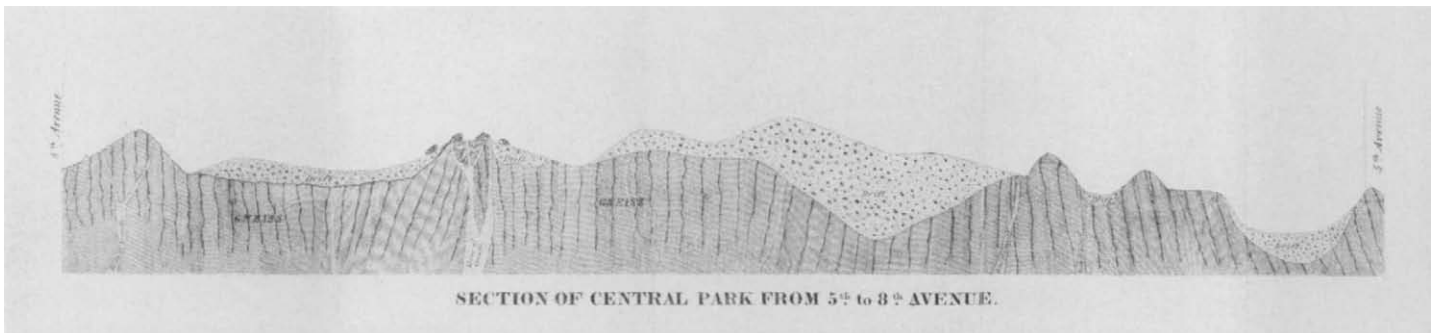
Once he was hired by the commissioners in 1856, Viele set to work with a will. On June 13, under his supervision, four separate teams of surveyors began their fieldwork, surveying park boundaries and determining their grades, dividing the land into fifty-foot-square plots in order to minutely delineate the topography, surveying watercourses for purposes of drainage, and surveying and furnishing profiles for geological examinations. Viele's report on the progress of the survey was published in the first annual report of the Commissioners of Central Park, dated January 1857. How then to explain that this same annual report included a complete topographical survey of the park signed by Viele and dated June 17, 1856 (fig. 11), just four days after he had deployed his surveyors? A survey that depicted, among other things, Seneca Village, a community of more than 250 persons, the majority of them African American, within the area bounded by Eighty-third and Eighty-sixth Streets and Seventh and Eighth Avenues. For an answer we must turn to testimony given in Viele's 1860 lawsuit against the City, from which we learn that Viele had begun making surveys of the park in 1853, as soon as the site had been finally determined, devoting as much time as he could spare from his official paid position in New Jersey. For nearly three years he had worked



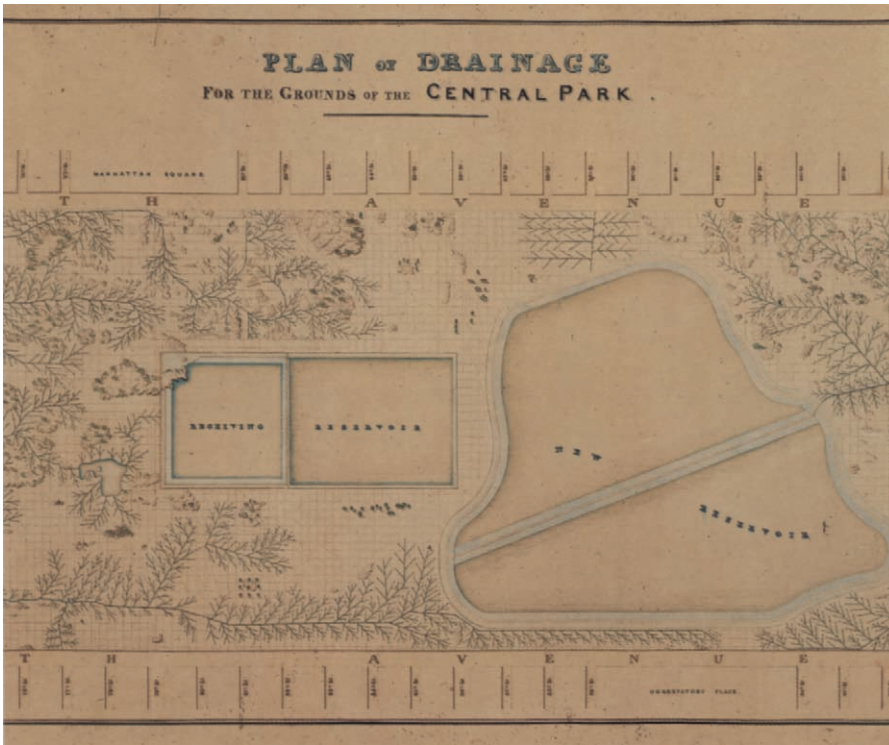
10. J. C. Buttre. *Brigadier General Egbert Ludovicus Viele*. Print. New York Public Library (EM11582)



11. Egbert L. Viele, chief engineer. *Map of the lands included in The Central Park, from a Topographical Survey, June 17th 1856*. From the first annual report of the Commissioners of Central Park, January 1857. Lithograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



12. Egbert L. Viele, chief engineer. *Section of Central Park from 5th to 8th Avenue*. From the first annual report of the Commissioners of Central Park, January 1857. Lithograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



13. Egbert L. Viele, chief engineer. *Plan of Drainage for the Grounds of the Central Park*, 1856–57 (detail). Pencil and colored inks. New York Municipal Archives

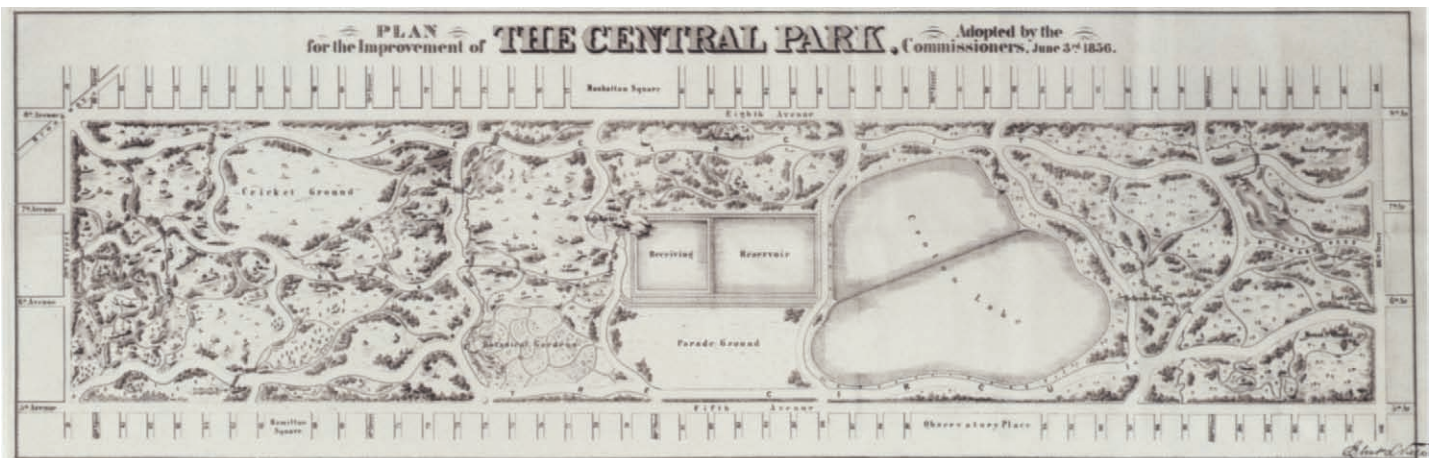
14. Egbert L. Viele, chief engineer. *Plan for the Improvement of The Central Park, Adopted by the Commissioners, June 3rd 1856*. From the first annual report of the Commissioners of Central Park, January 1857. Lithograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

postdate the printed version in order to conceal his unofficial early preparations to secure the park commission?

Viele was also responsible for preparing geological profiles, such as a *Section of Central Park from 5th to 8th Avenue* (fig. 12), which depicts the Manhattan mica schist (there called gneiss), the principal rock underlying Manhattan Island below 110th Street, together with “granite in numerous intrusive veins; diluvial or drift deposits, including boulders; and soils derived from the decomposition of the gneiss and associated rock.” For Viele, who blamed human fevers on “miasmatic odors” emanating from excess moisture in the ground, good drainage was a matter of public health. Thus it is fitting that the most impressive of his surviving park drawings is the eleven-foot-wide *Plan of Drainage for the Grounds of the Central Park* (fig. 13), signed “Egbert L. Viele, Chief Engineer.” On it the park is squared off, as on his earlier drawing, in pencil in fifty-foot increments, and the topographical features are depicted in brown ink, the drains in blue-green. The drains are laid out like the boughs of a fir tree, with the smallest pipes being the needles. (This arrangement is unlike what was ultimately executed

without a contract and without payment, in anticipation of his plan being adopted. He had gambled everything on becoming the designer and builder of the park.

The printed survey of June 17, 1856, was thus based on a large-scale topographical study of the park site, documenting every building and every other manmade improvement, that Viele had completed on his own before his appointment as engineer in chief. In his *Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498–1909* (1915), I. N. Phelps Stokes reproduced a photograph of the original drawing (now lost) that shows it to have incorporated the lines of the fifty-foot squares he employed in making the survey and to have borne Viele’s signature, the generic title “Topographical Engineer,” and the date June 17, 1855—one year to the day earlier than the date on the survey in his report to the commissioners. Did Viele



by George E. Waring Jr., a twenty-four-year-old whom Viele hired as superintendent of draining in August 1857; see fig. 39).

The overall design for the park that Viele published in the first annual report of the park commissioners, ostentatiously subtitled *Adopted by the Commissioners, June 3rd 1856* (fig. 14), was clearly intended to suggest a *fait accompli*. (In fact, there were but the two commissioners—Mayor Wood and Street Commissioner Taylor—and Viele had only verbal assurances from the mayor.) Viele’s plan displays familiarity with the site and an awareness of the natural landscape tradition—his accompanying description refers to the “natural” style, to the important “circuit” drive, and to five transverse roads—but there is an unimaginative sameness about the layout, with its series of equal spaces and the gratuitous wiggles in the drives. Years later, in 1869, Clarence Cook recalled it dismissively as “just such a matter-of-fact, tasteless affair as is always produced by engineers (begging pardon of the whole useful body), when they attempt anything in the way of ornamental design.”

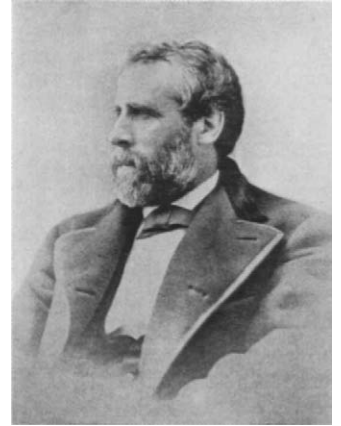
The governing structure under which the park would actually be built was finally established on April 17, 1857, more than a year after the Committee on Assessment’s report was confirmed. On that day the new Republican-controlled legislature passed an act creating an eleven-man Board of Commissioners of the Central Park that superseded the duet of Mayor Wood and Street Commissioner Taylor. The first appointees, who worked without pay during their five-year terms, consisted of six Republicans, among them Charles W. Elliott, John A. C. Gray, and Charles H. Russell; four Democrats, including Robert Dillon and Andrew Haswell Green (fig. 15); and Waldo Hutchins of the American (Know Nothing) Party. Green (1820–1903), a distinguished lawyer and preservationist, is best remembered today as the father of the consolidation of New York’s five boroughs in 1898. He was the first president and treasurer of the Park Board, and as treasurer and comptroller (beginning in September 1859) was to dominate it for more than a decade.

In June 1857 the new board rejected Viele’s park plan but retained him as engineer in chief and authorized him to hire the first group of workers. In August it reorganized the senior management of the park, adding the position of superintendent, who was to be responsible for managing both the workforce in the park and the park police and would report to the chief engineer. On September 11 the new post was given to Frederick Law Olmsted.

The Design Competition

But for the dedication to the memory of Andrew Jackson Downing by one of his acolytes, Viele’s undistinguished plan for Central Park would very likely have been executed. That man was Calvert Vaux, a young architect Downing had met in London in 1850 and immediately encouraged to come work for him in Newburgh. Downing, leader of the natural landscape movement in America and an early champion of a New York park, would have been the obvious choice to design Central Park. But he had died tragically in 1852, at the age of thirty-six, in a steamboat mishap on the Hudson River. Vaux looked upon Viele’s plan as an affront to Downing’s memory. “Being thoroughly disgusted with the manifest defects of Viele’s plan,” he later recalled, “I pointed out whenever I had a chance, that it would be a disgrace to the City and to the memory of Mr. Downing (who had first proposed the location of a large park in New York) to have this plan carried out.”

Vaux “had a chance” to mention his opinion to two Republican park commissioners with whom he had past associations: John Gray, a banker for whom he had built a town house, and Charles Elliott, an erstwhile Downing pupil and landscape gardener who shared his admira-



15. Andrew Haswell Green.
Photograph. New York Public
Library (1247668)

tion for Downing. Vaux persuaded both men to lobby against the Viele plan. Accordingly, in June 1857 the new board accepted Elliott's recommendation that the matter of the park design be opened to a public competition. On July 10 Elliott proposed soliciting plans. On August 25 the board resolved to advertise the competition and to offer cash prizes for the four winning entries, and on October 13 they agreed to order 500 copies of an advertisement for distribution. A committee consisting of Gray, Elliott, and the all-powerful Andrew Green proceeded with the campaign, distributing circulars and buying newspaper classifieds (fig. 16).

There were precise specifications for the submissions. The designs were to be at a scale of 100 feet to the inch, or 10 feet 2 inches by 2 feet 3 inches. They were to be finished with India ink and sepia, not with colors, and accompanied by a "well-digested" written description, with a sealed envelope containing the designer's name. (In the event, eleven competitors signed their entries.) The designs were the property of the board, which specifically reserved the right to alter any winning ones. There were also a number of programmatic requirements, some obviously taken from Viele's earlier proposal: four or more cross streets, east to west; a twenty- to forty-acre parade ground with arrangements for spectators; three playgrounds, each three to ten acres; and specific sites for a future exhibition or concert hall, an observatory, fountains, towers, entrance arches, flower gardens, and a skating ground—all within the legislature's \$1,500,000 budget. Topographical plans and "photographic sketches" of the park site were available to be studied. (On January 13, 1858, Mathew Brady was paid \$150 for "photographic maps," presumably referring to photographs of Viele's 1855 topographical map like the one bound in with the volume of competition entries at the New-York Historical Society.)

The deadline for submissions was March 1, 1858. In February the competition rules were expanded to require specifications and costs for building roads and preparing the land, and the deadline was extended to April 1. As the submissions were received, they were numbered and locked up in a rented room at 637 Broadway. On April 6 they were opened and arranged for study. To aid the board in its deliberations, a summary *Catalogue of Plans for the Improvement of the Central Park* was prepared and the full text descriptions that accompanied the plans were printed. Three weeks later, on April 28, the board voted on the thirty-three formal submissions and decided to put the four winning entries on public view during the first two weeks of May. Admission was 25 cents.

Of the thirty-three entrants, seventeen were from New York City and four were from the surrounding environs. Twelve were employed in the park in some capacity and so enjoyed the obvious advantages inherent in their familiarity with the site, and all but one of the six entries in the runoffs were the products of park employees. (It was an open competition, and the commissioners were so disappointed that no leading international figures had participated that in December they approved fees to bring consultants over from Paris's Bois de Boulogne and suburban Liverpool's Birkenhead Park. As it happened, none came.)

Few of the entries exhibited much professionalism or serious preparation—more than half submitted but a single drawing. Most simply gave lip service to the prevailing taste for a natural style. The five entries for which plans or drawings have survived run the

16. "Plans for the Central Park . . ." Advertisement for design competition, *New York Herald*, Friday, October 30, 1857, p. 3. New-York Historical Society

PLANS FOR THE CENTRAL PARK.—THE BOARD OF
 Commissioners of the Central Park offer the following premiums for the four designs for laying out the Park, which may be selected:—

| | |
|---------------------|---------|
| For the first..... | \$2,000 |
| For the second..... | 1,000 |
| For the third..... | 750 |
| For the fourth..... | 500 |

The plans to become the property of the Board.
 Topographical plans may be consulted and particulars obtained at the office of the Board, room 10 Bank of Commerce Building. A limited number of photographic sketches of the ground may be obtained by applying to the Clerk of the Board.
 All designs must be presented to the Board by the first day of March, 1858.
 The Board reserve the right to reject any or all plans.

JNO. A. C. GRAY,
 CHARLES W. ELLIOTT, } Committee.
 ANDREW H. GREEN.



gamut. Verging on the outlandish is entry no. 4, the plan by John Rink, a Central Park engineer who submitted “two different designs, one in sepia [now missing], and one colored [fig. 17], accompanied by description.” Rink claimed that the natural contours of the land and the existing trees and shrubs were the basis of his plan, but his drawing offers a broadly symmetrical arrangement of rounded forms described as arbors and glades, each bordered with formal sequences of trees, shrubs, vines, and flowers. In keeping with his stated goal that “all and every part of the Park be, as far as necessary, named,” the islandlike planted areas bear descriptive names such as “spring ground” and “spike ground” and the gateways the names of national heroes such as Adams and Washington.

Altogether more plausible is no. 25, the workmanlike entry by another park engineer, Roswell Graves Jr. Four of the thirteen views and designs with which Graves supported his master plan survive: two pairs of “before and after” views of the entrances into the park at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue (fig. 18) and at 105th Street and Sixth Avenue. His “before” view from the entrance at Fifty-ninth Street shows an expansive panorama all the way to the reservoir, a vista that is totally lost in his “after” landscape, with its maze of sidewalk-lined roadways. In order to produce a surplus in the Central Park Fund, Graves enthusiastically endorsed the idea of lopping off a few blocks at the south end of the park.

Entry no. 29 (fig. 19) was the work of George E. Waring Jr., whom Viele had recently hired as the park’s drainage engineer. Waring signed his text “A./ H. N: Art the Handmaid

17. John Rink. *Central Park Competition Entry No. 4: Plan of the Central Park, New York*, March 20, 1858. Ink and colored washes. Private collection



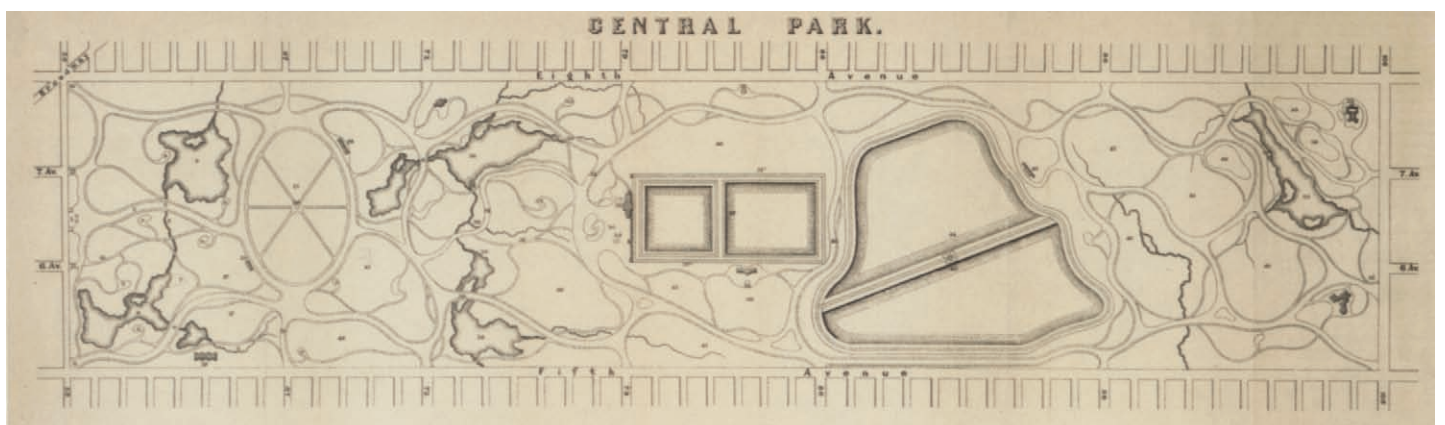
18. Roswell Graves Jr. *Central Park Competition Entry No. 25: Before and After Views of the Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue Entrance*, September 1857. Sepia watercolor and graphite. New-York Historical Society

of Nature,” a reference to his claim that his plan was “true to the existing natural conformation and character of the land.” Indeed, Waring proposed few changes in the topography, instead laying out “roads and walks, where nature seems to have provided a proper course for them: to see trees, water, and open spaces, according to the character of the soil.” The result is a maze of footpaths crisscrossing rough and irregular ground. Waring saw little need for open space. He proposed a hierarchy of foot, horse, and carriage roads, the latter a grand route running close to the outer limits of the park. The design, in black and tan wash, is notable for its topographical detail, particularly showing the elevated hills of the northern portion and how they end abruptly at 106th Street. But Waring’s submission, which included a drainage plan, was the work of an engineer, not a landscape designer. Like the other programmatic requirements for a concert hall and a flower garden, the Crystal Palace (relocated in Waring’s plan from Forty-second Street to the middle of the park at Sixty-sixth Street) is simply plopped into an available space.

Voting for the park designs was almost exclusively along party lines. Viele, who resubmitted his 1856 design (entry no. 28; see fig. 14), was a sore loser, claiming that politics, not merit, determined the winners. In at least two instances, judging from their descriptive texts, he was doubtless right. Howard Daniels, author of the entry that took fourth place (no. 26), proclaimed that “all existing parks should be discarded as models,” that “art should everywhere be avowed and recognized,” and that the park should have one grand central



19. George E. Waring Jr. *Central Park Competition Entry No. 29: Art the Handmaid of Nature*, 1858. Ink and wash. New-York Historical Society



20. Samuel J. Gustin. *Central Park Competition Entry No. 30: Central Park*, 1857. Published by Narine and Cos, 7 Broad Street, New York. Lithograph. Central Park Conservancy

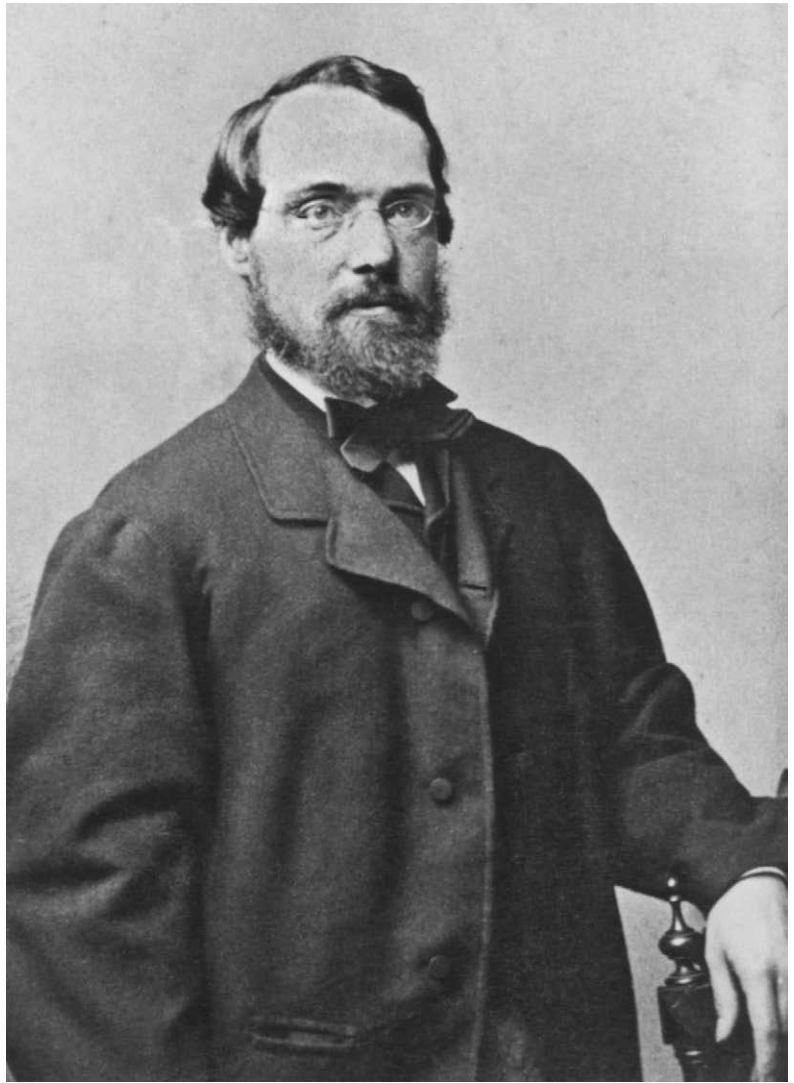
avenue. Third-place winners Lachland McIntosh and Michael Miller, both park clerks, offered an abbreviated entry (no. 27) based, as a matter of economy, on the natural features of the land. For them the priority was a public resort in the shortest possible time.

Second place was won by entry no. 30, the work of Samuel J. Gustin, the park's "nurseryman and superintendent of planting" under Viele. Gustin, a Democrat and a horticulturist of considerable standing, had testified in 1853 about the problems inherent in transforming the mature forest of Jones' Wood into parkland. The plan Gustin submitted for Central Park included an overall design, which survives as a small lithograph (fig. 20), and two twenty-two-foot models, one of the park site as it was, the other as it would be if his plan were adopted. In his text Gustin said that the natural formation of the ground, with its variety and mix, was admirably suited for a park, and he argued convincingly for extending the northern boundary to 110th Street. His design is notable for the gracefully flowing curves of the extensive pattern of drives, which echoed the drives in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Alone of the surviving entries, Gustin's manages to tie the transverse roads to the large crosstown streets. The numbers on the plan refer to various features identified on a list included with the entry's commentary. The large oval at Sixty-ninth Street, for example, is an equestrian parade ground.

For this very professional presentation Gustin employed experienced engineers and architects to estimate the road and building work. Three of the four Democratic commissioners voted for his entry. Only Green broke with party discipline, voting instead for entry no. 33, the work coauthored by his Republican superintendent, Frederick Law Olmsted.

Vaux, Olmsted, and the Greensward Plan

Entry no. 33, the winning design, was delivered to the Arsenal on the competition's final day, March 31, 1858. Entitled "Greensward," it was the work of Calvert Vaux (1824–1895) and Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903). Vaux (fig. 21) had been instrumental in instigating the competition in the first place. Between 1843 and 1846 he had been articled to Lewis Nockells Cottingham, an accomplished Gothic Revival architect in London. In the summer of 1850 he met Andrew Jackson Downing, who was in London looking for an architectural assistant, and immediately agreed to move to the United States to work for him. In September the two men sailed together from Liverpool, and by year-end Vaux had become Downing's partner in a rapidly growing country house practice in Downing's hometown of Newburgh, New York. In 1852, just before Downing's untimely death, Frederick Clarke Withers, another



21. Fredericks and Company, New York. *Calvert Vaux*, ca. 1860. Photograph. Historic New England



22. Frederick Law Olmsted,
ca. 1860. Photograph. Frederick
Law Olmsted National Historic
Site

young architect from Britain, joined the firm, as, briefly, did Clarence Cook, who was soon to become a leading art critic. In 1854 Vaux married Mary McEntee, sister of the landscape painter Jervis McEntee. He and Withers carried on the practice in Newburgh until moving to New York City in 1856.

Olmsted (fig. 22) was born in Hartford, Connecticut. He attributed the origins of his intense interest in parks to his early excursions in the Connecticut Valley with his parents, who had “a rare fondness for natural scenery.” In 1844 he decided to take up farming and immersed himself, with time out for the occasional class at Yale, in learning the business. His father indulged his interest by buying him, in 1847, a small farm in Guilford, Connecticut, and the next year a larger one on Staten Island, which he operated, principally as a nursery, until 1854. In 1850 Olmsted and his brother John hiked for six months through northern Europe and the British Isles, and from this experience he began another career as a writer. His first book, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, appeared in February 1852. In December, as a correspondent for the *New York Daily Times*, he toured the South, and he later

traveled to Mexico, California, and elsewhere. From these adventures came *Seaboard Slave States* (published in 1856), *Journey to Texas* (1857), and *Journey to the Back Country* (1860). In 1855 Olmsted purchased a partnership in the publishing firm of Dix, Edwards and Co. and became managing editor of *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*. When the firm went bankrupt in 1857, he no longer could afford to write for a living. That August, by chance, he met his longtime friend Charles Wyllys Elliott, one of the new Central Park commissioners, who encouraged him to try for the recently created position of park superintendent. Olmsted put in his bid on August 12 and won the posting (to which only Republicans needed apply) a month later, in part thanks to a timely word of support from Washington Irving.

Olmsted’s tragic and unfulfilled personal life may help to explain the intensity with which he worked. In November 1857 his beloved brother John succumbed to tuberculosis, and the next June, out of a sense of duty, Frederick married his widow, Mary, taking on the responsibility for her three children. Years later he wrote Vaux regarding that first job as superintendent of Central Park:

It is impossible for you to estimate the strength of my devotedness in the matter. There was no hope on earth that I would not have sacrificed to my desire to hold that position. . . . I am capable of stronger passions than many men and I never had a more desperate



passion than that. . . . A great deal of disappointed love and unsatisfied romance and down trodden pride fastened itself to that passion.

Olmsted and Vaux had first met, as Vaux later recalled, “at the house of Mr. Downing at Newburgh,” probably when Olmsted visited Newburgh in August of 1851. “I was led to ask him,” Vaux remembered,

to cooperate with preparation of a competition design for Central Park partly because I was interested in Mr. Olmsted’s book “Walks & Talks” but mainly because at that particular time his days were spent on the park territory where he was in the City’s employ. . . . In this way, Mr. Olmsted, without expense to himself or to me, was so situated that he could bring and did bring to my house where the study was prepared accurate observations in regard to the actual topography which was not clearly defined in the survey furnished to competitors by the Board.

“This design,” he continued, “was prepared at my house in [136 East] 18th Street New York conjointly with Mr Olmsted, the drawings being all made at night after the regular work day was over.” Vaux’s son, Downing, recalled that “there was a great deal of grass to be put in by the usual small dots and dashes, and it became the friendly thing for callers to help in the work by joining in and ‘adding some grass to Central Park.’”

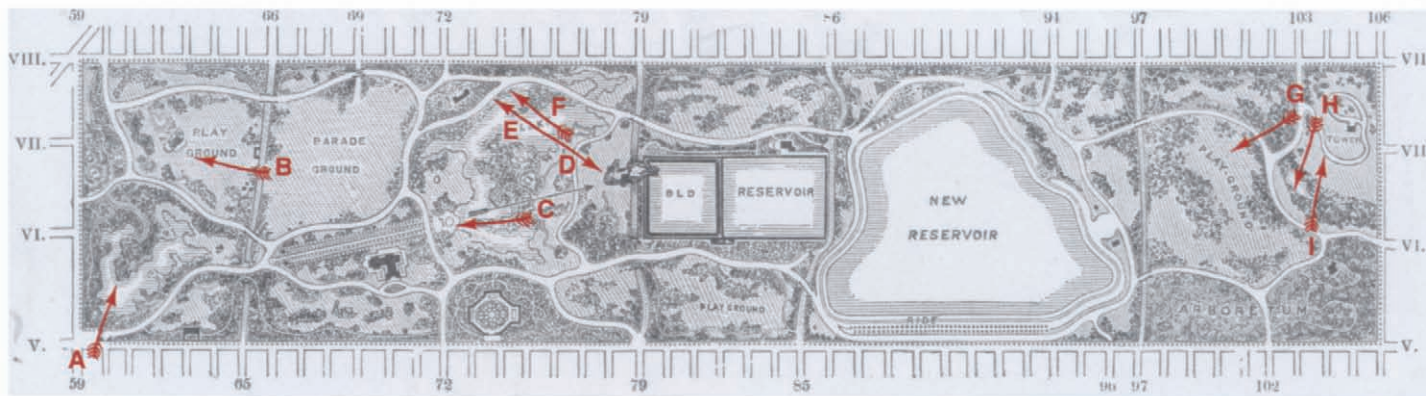
The elements of the original Greensward Plan competition entry survive almost entirely intact: the large-scale master design with all that grass (fig. 23), eleven of twelve illustrative boards (figs. 24–35), and the printed texts (“Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park ‘GREENSWARD,’” and “Particulars of Construction and Estimate”). The



23. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. *Central Park Competition Entry No. 33: The Greensward Plan of Central Park*, 1858. Brown ink on paper. Parks and Recreation Department, City of New York

whole was carefully thought out, meticulously prepared, and cogently presented. Yet the written description is very politic. Specific programmatic requirements were cheerfully agreed to and inserted in the plan. Almost everything else—even something as uncontroversial as the obvious benefit that would come of extending the park to 110th Street—was left out.

Vaux and Olmsted had no illusions about the site. “It would have been difficult to find another body of land of six hundred acres upon the island,” Olmsted once said, “which possessed less of . . . the most desirable characteristics of a park, or upon which more time, labor, and expense would be required to establish them.” Yet without the extraordinary challenge the site presented, it is fair to say that there would have been no extraordinary achievement. Like a number of the other submissions, Vaux and Olmsted’s plan saw the site as inevitably comprising two distinct areas, demarcated by the reservoirs: a varied and complex lower park and a bold and open upper park. But their design premise was unique and based upon a broad and thorough study of the City and its patterns of growth. They looked at New York’s history and saw that time and again the extent and rapidity of its growth had been underestimated. They recognized that the City would expand dramatically around the park and that eventually heavy traffic would need to move freely across it. Their solution was twofold: first, to submerge the four required east–west transverses (something then widely believed to be impossible), thereby providing permanently open streets, or thoroughfares, for nonpark traffic; and second, to carry the park drives over the transverses “without obvious elevation,” thereby achieving a “unity of effect” for the five separate park sections created by the transverses. This triumph of the imagination instantly secured for their design a practical virtue found in no other.



24. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. *Greensward Plan for Central Park*. Wood engraving, 1858. Red arrows with letter codes indicate the locations of the views shown in figs. 25–35. New York Municipal Archives

Some of the other programmatic requirements were easily accommodated in the Greensward design: the largest open field was called the Parade Ground, three smaller areas were designated playgrounds, and the larger of two lakes became the Skating Pond. But some were not. A number of structures, which the authors politely referred to as “called for in our instructions,” were at odds with the Greensward’s intended scenic character. As Vaux told Clarence Cook, “Nature first and 2nd and 3rd—Architecture after a while.” In the southeastern part of the park the existing Arsenal Building (at Sixty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue) was given over for the museum, a site at Seventieth Street was reserved for the music hall, and the formal flower garden and fountain at Seventy-fourth Street (see fig. 35) were, like many of the required buildings, discreetly located on low ground.

The Greensward Plan called for the outer perimeter of the park to be lined with trees, forming “a continuous exterior mall” intended to block the view of the buildings across the street. The authors recommended sacrificing a few feet of the south end of the park in order to broaden Fifty-ninth Street to the size and dignity of an avenue. Within the park itself, the plan sought to create a series of landscapes that would offer scenic views from the paved carriage drives and gravel footpaths. Nine of the twelve presentation boards illustrated by Vaux that were a principal part of the Greensward submission (figs. 25–33) show the “Present Outline” and the “Effect Proposed” for what must have been considered the most aesthetically satisfying views in the park. At the top of each board is a miniature wood-engraved plan of the park on which a painted red arrow signifies the location and direction of the view (see fig. 24, on which all nine arrows are superimposed). Simple pencil outline sketches capture the barren emptiness of the existing denuded park acres. Carefully composed and fully rendered pencil drawings, some with white lead highlights, imagine the future. In two instances (figs. 28 and 29), greater realism was achieved with photographs of the present outlines and oil sketches of the effects proposed.

In all these drawings raw land, for the most part barren and unclothed except for scrub undergrowth, is transformed into landscapes where a mixture of mature hardwoods and evergreens clothe the earth, but always with provision for open space, be it water or grassland. According to the authors, “the planting generally is designed to give from the greatest number of points of view, within the park, the broadest effects of light and shade which can be obtained upon the ground, and to produce the impression of great space and freedom.” They go on to say that “townspeople appear to find, in broad spaces of green sward, over which they are allowed unrestricted movement, the most exhilarating contrast to the walled-in floors

25. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with “Present Outlines” (above) and “Effect Proposed” (below): *No. 1. From Point A* (view at Fifth Avenue entrance), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives

26. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with “Present Outlines” (above) and “Effect Proposed” (below): *No. 2. From Point B* (lower playground), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives



25.



26.

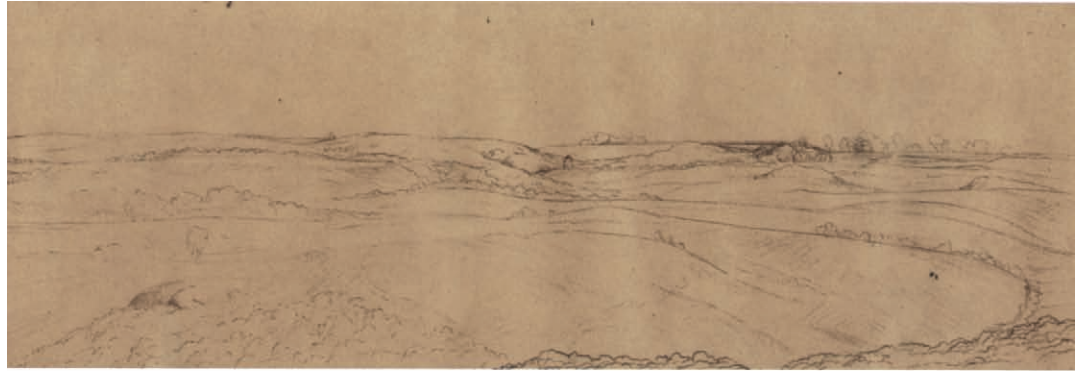


27. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below): *No. 3. From Point C* (Elm Avenue and Terrace from Vista Rock), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives

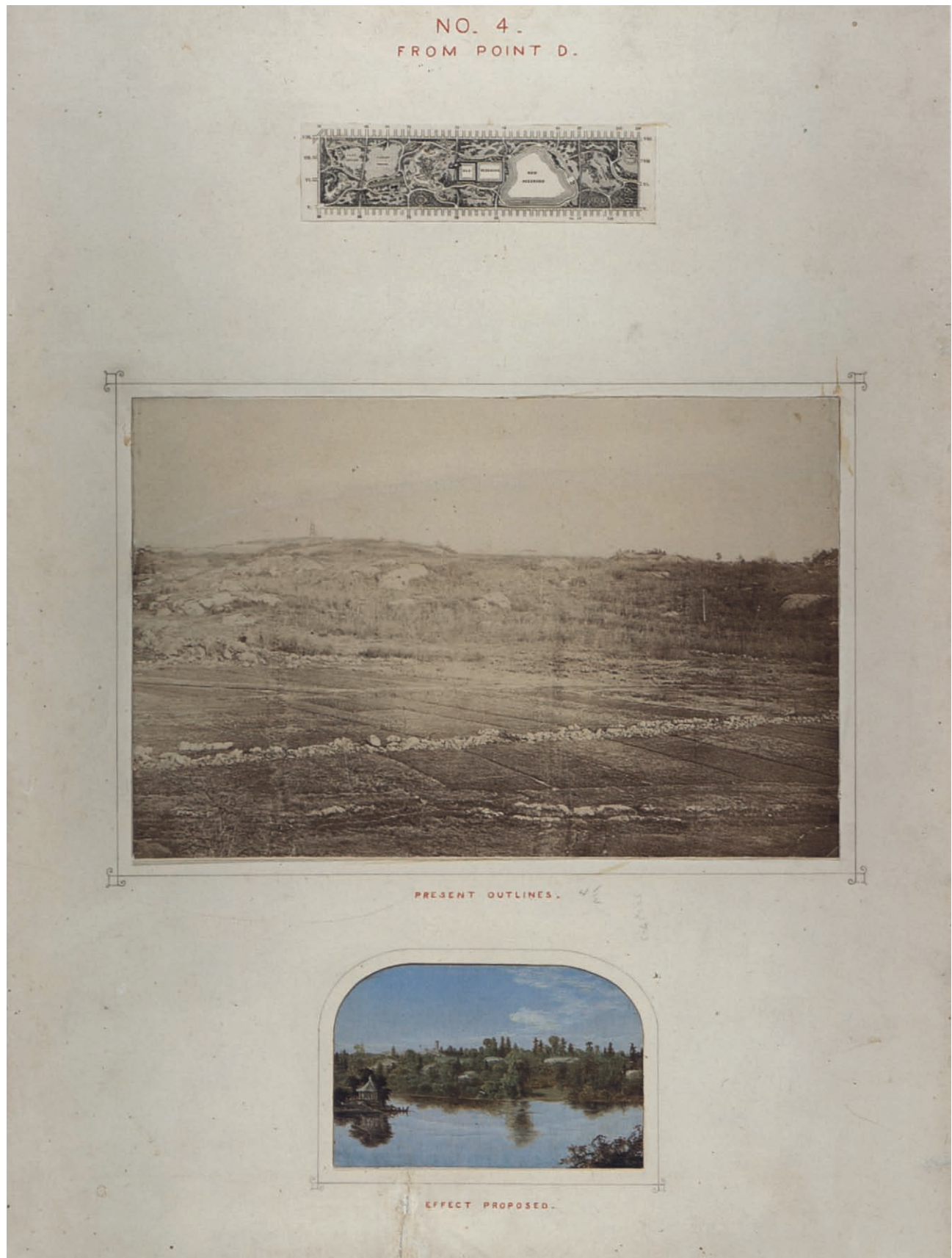


30. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below): *No. 6. From Point F* (across the Lake from below Vista Rock), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives

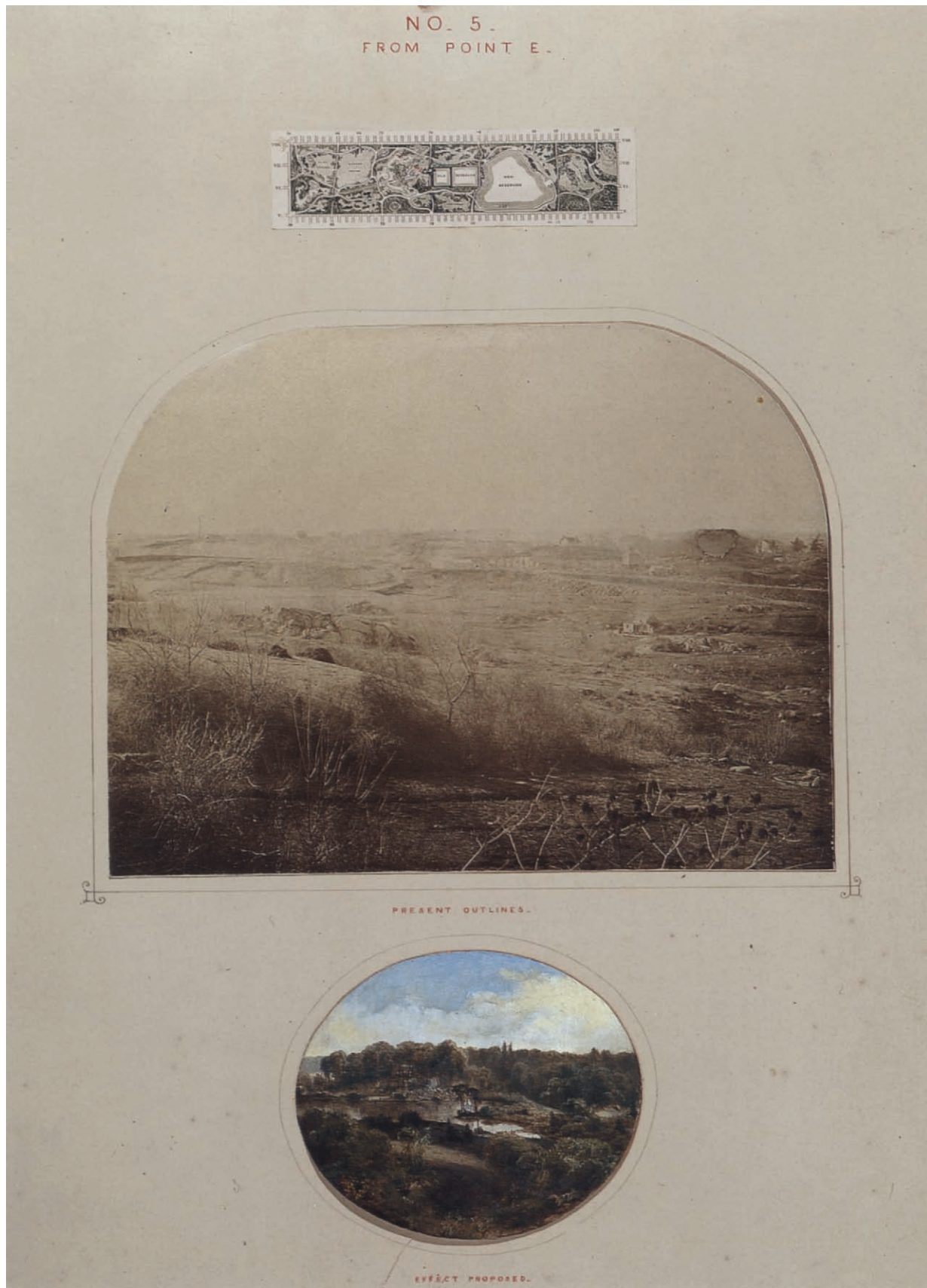
31. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below); No. 7. From Point G (looking south from Bogardus Hill), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives



32. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below); No. 8. From Point H (looking east from Bogardus Hill), 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives



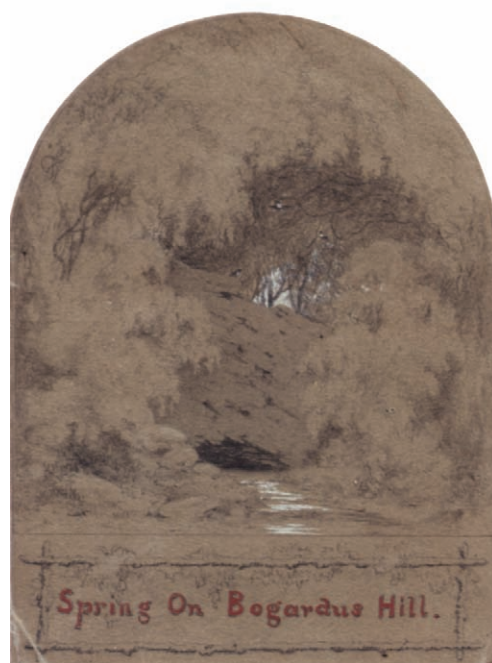
28. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; attributed to Mathew B. Brady, photographer; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below): *No. 4: From Point D* (across the Lake toward Vista Rock), 1858. Albumen silver print from glass negative and oil on paper. New York Municipal Archives



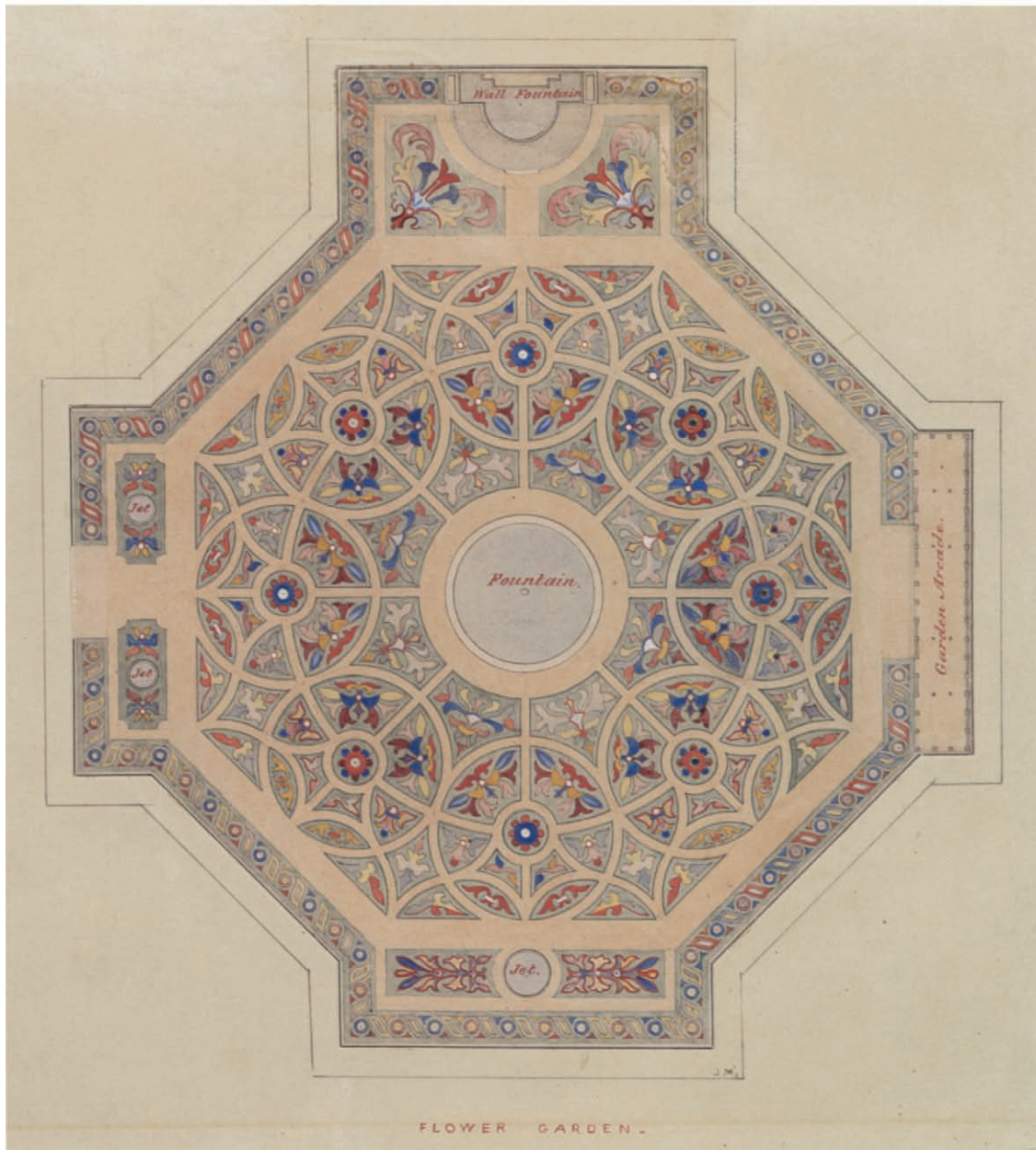
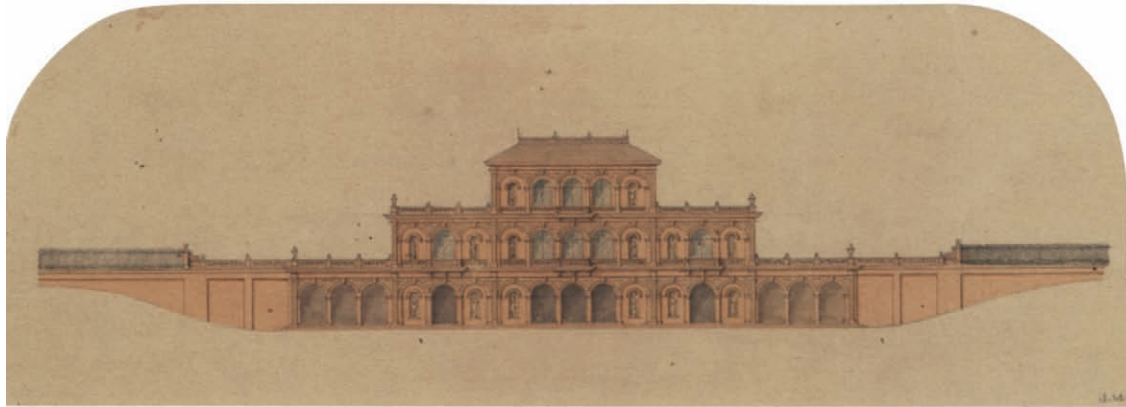
29. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; attributed to Mathew B. Brady, photographer; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below): *No. 5: From Point E* (across the Lake from Vista Rock), 1858. Albumen silver print from glass negative and oil on paper. New York Municipal Archives



33. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board with "Present Outlines" (above) and "Effect Proposed" (below): *No. 9: From Point I (Bogardus Hill and Monumental Tower)*, 1858. Graphite and oil on paper. New York Municipal Archives



34. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board: *No. 10: Spring on Bogardus Hill*, 1858. Graphite, wash, and white lead on paper. New York Municipal Archives



35. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, designers; Calvert Vaux, artist. Greensward Plan presentation board: No. 11: Garden Arcade Building (above), Flower Garden (below), 1858. Ink and wash on paper. New York Municipal Archives

or pavements to which they are ordinarily confined by their business.” DeWitt C. Hitchcock captured that exhilarating contrast in his 1859 rendering of the future park (see cover ill.).

The first of the paired illustrations (fig. 25) depicts the landscape seen from the entrance to the park at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue—what Vaux and Olmsted called the “handsomest” approach—looking due west over a foreground lake. The second (fig. 26) is a view south from near the Sixty-sixth Street Transverse at Seventh Avenue over a proposed playground and including, perched on a rock, the visitors’ viewing stand. Both these views are of the southern center of the park, which was accessible from east or west and from whence the eye of the visitor was intended to be drawn northwest, toward the Old Reservoir, by a broad, straight, tree-lined avenue. The next four views (figs. 27–30) are to or from Vista Rock, at the southwest corner of the Old Reservoir (at about Seventy-ninth Street and Seventh Avenue), the highest point of land in the lower park. (Olmsted and Vaux judged the existing reservoirs too high to be the landscape attraction from the ordinary drives that Downing had envisaged; instead, they proposed a bridle path around the new one.) The stepped Terrace visible in the third view (fig. 27) marks the termination of the Mall, a quarter-mile-long avenue the authors proposed to build on a northwest diagonal from about Sixty-sixth to Seventy-first Street, leading directly to Vista Rock. “Although averse on general principles to a symmetrical arrangement of trees,” Olmsted and Vaux considered it “an essential feature of a metropolitan park, that it should contain a grand promenade, level, spacious, and thoroughly shaded.” Though the allée was “the central feature in [their] plan for laying out the lower park,” it had not been a requirement of the original program, and they were concerned that it remain “subservient to the general design.”

The remaining before and after comparisons (figs. 31–33) focus on Bogardus Hill, the highest point in the upper park. The Greensward Plan treated the upper park altogether more simply, in harmony with its broad slopes and sweeping horizon lines. To the east would be an arboretum for the display of American trees; to the west, atop the hill (see fig. 33), a massive monument (commemorative, perhaps, of a successful transatlantic telegraph). The tenth presentation board depicted two seasonal views in the upper park, one the freshwater spring (fig. 34), the other (now lost) “The Winter Drive.” The eleventh (fig. 35) illustrates a plan for the requisite flower garden, an octagonal parterre with geometric beds and fountains and jets that was absolute anathema to Vaux and Olmsted but a competition requirement that they cheerfully described as being unnecessary to the design and the sort of thing that could be added later. Located on low ground at Seventy-fourth Street, the flower garden would have been visible chiefly from a “Garden Arcade Building” (shown at the top of fig. 35) opening off Fifth Avenue. The twelfth presentation board, now missing, was entitled “Monumental Tower” and must have been a detailed study of the structure on Bogardus Hill that is visible in the illustration on the ninth board (fig. 33), again included only because it was required by the commissioners.

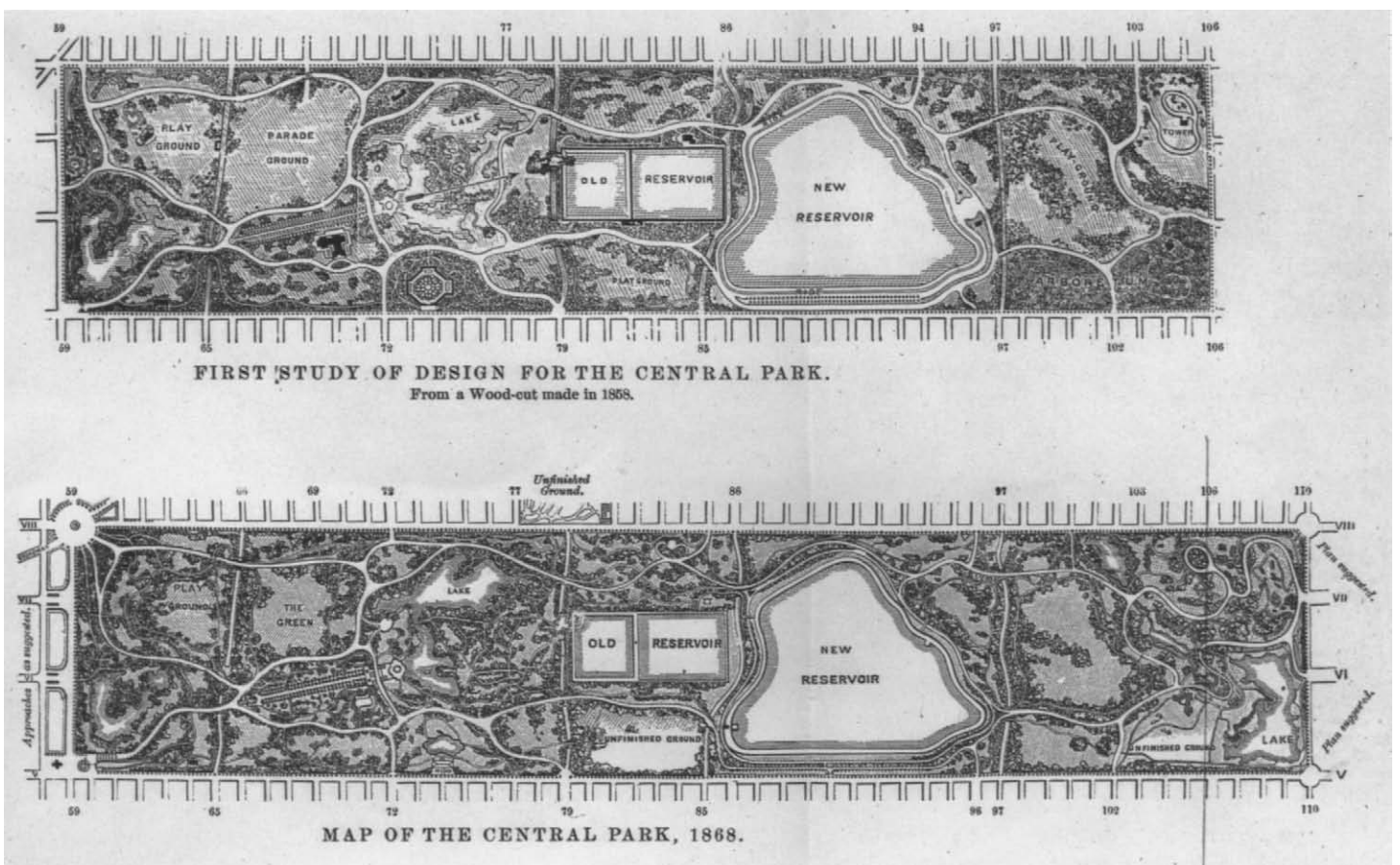
Andrew Jackson Downing’s work and writings were, of course, the immediate inspiration for “Greensward.” Yet both Vaux and Olmsted were well versed in European, especially English, precedent, Vaux having grown up in England and Olmsted having paid particular attention to public parks during his extensive travels there. After he visited it in 1850 Olmsted called Joseph Paxton’s Birkenhead Park in suburban Liverpool, with its mix of housing and natural landscape, “the most agreeable park in Europe.” And in 1861 he claimed that Phoenix Park in Dublin, more than twice the size of Central Park, was “the best public park in the world.” In November 1859, at Olmsted’s specific request, the British photographer Roger Fenton took pictures of the barrel-vaulted Tunnel in the Zoological Gardens in Regent’s Park in London, which was certainly among the inspirations for Central Park’s many bridges.

Building the Park

Vaux and Olmsted were careful to describe “Greensward” as a “study or sketch for a plan,” fully aware that changes would be required during construction. The significant modifications that were actually made are graphically presented in an illustration from an 1868 reprint of Olmsted and Vaux’s original 1858 competition proposal that compares the original and “as built” plans (fig. 36). Most obvious is the extension northward to 110th Street to encompass the whole of Bogardus Hill. The commissioners realized the need for this before the competition had even been concluded: in August 1858 they directed Olmsted to plan the extension, and in April 1859 they received legislative authorization, but because of disputed valuations it was not until 1863 that the land was finally acquired. In April 1864 Manhattan Square, between Seventy-seventh and Eighty-first Streets across Eighth Avenue from the park proper, was also annexed, but that was for purposes more of management than of design.

The other major variation from the original plan was the result of public pressure exerted by Democratic commissioners who remained opposed to the Greensward Plan. Robert Dillon, the City’s former corporation counsel involved in acquiring the park lands, believed that only a more formal design incorporating the reservoirs as the central focus was appropriate, and financier August Belmont, who had just been elected a commissioner, agreed. At the May 1858 meetings of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park Dillon offered seventeen amendments to “Greensward” that he estimated would save \$300,000. The debate played out in the public press during May and June. Although he was unable to contravene Vaux and Olmsted’s naturalistic design, Dillon lobbied successfully for adding three miles of bridle paths parallel to the main drives. Little did he know that this embellishment would

36. Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted. *First Study of Design for the Central Park: From a Wood-cut made in 1858 and Map of the Central Park, 1868*. Wood engravings. From *Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park: Greensward* (reprinted New York: Aldine Press, 1868). New-York Historical Society





require the building of some nineteen additional bridges to effect the complete separation of the different types of roadways—today one of the most admired aspects of the park plan. Other changes were of less import: the flower garden at Seventy-fourth Street, the arboretum at 100th Street, and the tower at 105th, all requirements of the competition, were not built; the Parade Ground was reduced in size, playgrounds were moved around, and three areas were reserved as “unfinished ground.” (Two of those “unfinished” areas were to become the sites of major museums.)

The opponents of “Greensward” were to make one last serious attack on the plan. Construction costs had far exceeded estimates, and James Hogg, a former commissioner, filed charges of mismanagement (though not of corruption), leading to the appointment, on April 14, 1860, of a special Senate Committee of Investigation which engaged Swiss engineer Julius Kellersberger to investigate. On January 25, 1861, Kellersberger reported that in terms of orderly, efficient management there was “no other public work in the United States to be compared with the Central Park.” And he concluded that the park plan and its implementation did “as much honor to the taste, refinement, and wealth of the metropolis, as credit to its designer and executor.”

The prewar years, 1858–61, were a time of remarkable activity and achievement, when the lower park was brought nearly to completion. The labor force in the park rose from 500 in the summer of 1857 to 2,000 in the summer of 1858 to more than 3,800 at one time in 1859, then dropped to 2,500 in 1860 and 650 in 1861. (The financial panic of 1857 created a large pool of the unemployed that began to dry up when the Civil War began.) Olmsted, appointed “Architect-in-Chief” (a title he objected to as incorrectly describing his professional role) for Central Park on May 12, 1858, was in charge in the field, responsible for the duties formerly carried out by both the chief engineer and the superintendent; Vaux, named “Consulting Architect” (a title he accepted but felt belittled his contribution), was in charge of design in the office. Engineering was split between two men: George E. Waring Jr., “Draining Engineer” from 1858 to 1861, and William H. Grant, “Civil Engineer” in 1859 and “Supervising Engineer” in 1860–61. Ignaz A. Pilat was the “Plantsman.” Andrew Haswell Green, who served as treasurer and comptroller from 1859 to 1870, effectively controlled the Board of Commissioners. The team, except for Grant, was captured in a group portrait in 1861 (see page 6).

Green and Olmsted were both exceptionally talented, hardworking, and honorable public servants, but they were temperamental opposites. Inevitably the bookkeeper’s compulsion to



37. Frederick Law Olmsted, architect in chief; Calvert Vaux, consulting architect; and W. H. Grant, superintending engineer. *Map Showing the Original Topography of the Site of the Central Park with a Diagram of the Roads and Walks now under construction*, 1859. Lithograph in black and red ink. From *Second Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1859. Dotted lines indicate as yet unbuilt roads. Contour lines, at ten-foot intervals, are in red, as are the numbers that express the elevation above tide-water. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

account for every penny and the artist's dictatorial pursuit of perfection put them at loggerheads. In January 1861 Olmsted wrote a lengthy epistle to the commissioners explaining that, having been relentlessly nicked and dined by Green about every expenditure, he was resigning. He was dissuaded, but in June he took a leave of absence to join the United States Sanitary Commission, which had been established to look after the health of the Union troops, where for two exhausting years he was chief staff officer. (Like his famous English contemporary Florence Nightingale, Olmsted was a passionate, embattled, and brilliant manager in the cause of modern hygiene.) Grant, as superintending engineer of Central Park, filled Olmsted's shoes there. Vaux finally left the park's service in 1863. In 1865, after the war, the new firm of Olmsted, Vaux and Company was appointed consulting landscape architects to the Central Park Commission.

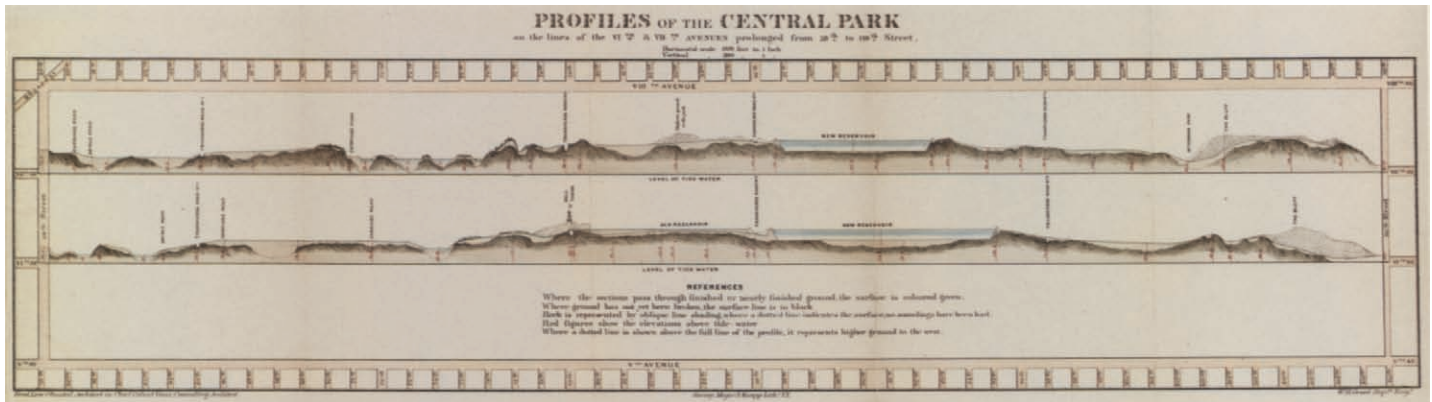
Olmsted has always received the lion's share of credit for designing Central Park, even though it was Vaux who was Downing's pupil and acolyte and Vaux who invited Olmsted to join him in the design competition. The explanation has much to do with the two men's personalities: Vaux's innate modesty; Olmsted's passion, charisma, and literary flair. The problem was compounded by the misleading titles bestowed on them by the commissioners. When in 1863 Vaux finally wrote to Olmsted to complain about the lack of public recognition of his role, Olmsted responded with a lucid and convincing recapitulation of their contributions in which he unequivocally gave his partner equal billing for the design and full credit for the architecture, reserving full credit for himself only for the administration and management:

There are several properties in the park held or properly belonging to us. 1st the general design, in which our property is mutual, equal and indivisible. 2^d Detail of General design from which can not be separated something of "superintendence" and in which also there is equality of property between us. 3^d Architectural design & superintendence in which I have no appreciable property—which is wholly yours. 4th Organization and management of construction force in which you have very little property, though more than I have in the last. 5th Administration & management of the public introduction to and use of the park, in which you have very little property and which I hold to be my most valuable property in it.

Samuel Parsons Jr., who was park superintendent in the 1880s and 1890s, put it another way: "Mr. Olmsted was a leader of men, a man of magnetism and charm, a literary genius, but hardly the creative artist that Mr. Vaux was."

The annual reports issued by the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park between 1857 and 1870 chronicle the construction of the park. And the newly popular art of photography made possible the preservation of actual images of the work as it proceeded. Indeed, the park was a favorite subject for photographers. Victor Prevost, by special permission of the commissioners, took approximately thirty views that were printed in 1862. W. H. Guild Jr. provided fifty-one photographs that were pasted in each copy of Fred P. Perkins's book *The Central Park* of 1864. And beginning in 1863 commercial firms like E. and H. T. Anthony and Co. produced endless stereoscopic images, or stereographs, that they offered for sale. By 1865 photographs had even begun to replace lithographs as illustrations in the commissioners' annual reports.

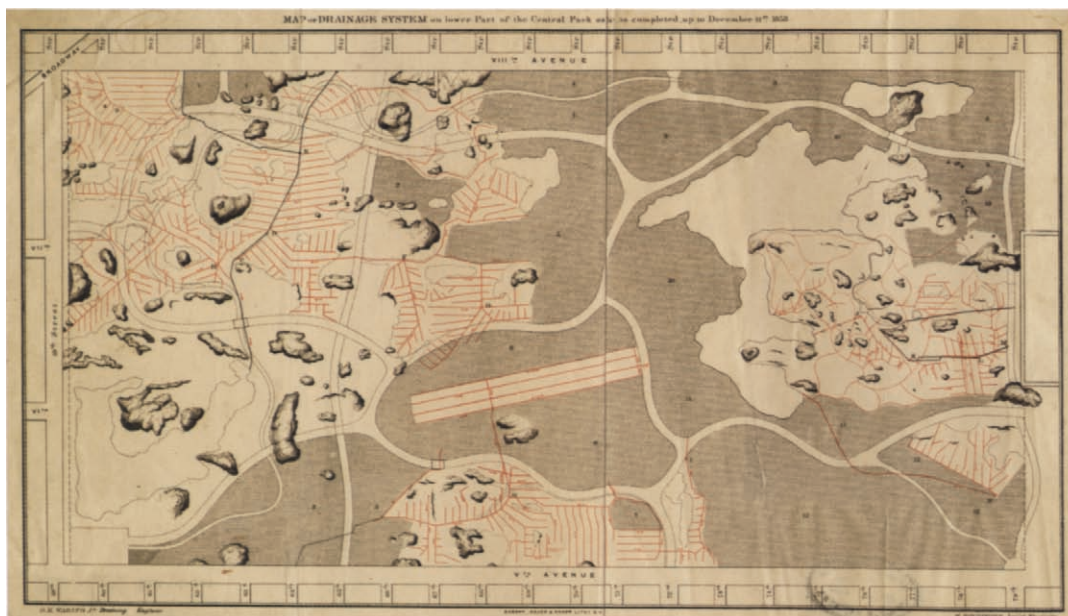
A park plan dated January 1, 1859 (fig. 37), was the first of the precisely rendered maps recording the progress of construction that were to illuminate the commissioners' annual



reports through the 1860s. It depicts the original topography with “a diagram of the roads and walks [then] under construction.” Two longitudinal sections taken along Sixth and Seventh Avenues (fig. 38) included in the commissioners’ third annual report show the park’s dramatically varied terrain and the ambitious changes being wrought to it.

The first task, the essential foundation work of the park, was ground drainage. In August 1857 Viele, who saw drainage as a health (rather than herbal) issue, had hired the young George E. Waring Jr. (1833–1898) to work on a system of drains. But this was not enough to stop the commissioners, their confidence in Viele waning, from requesting from Olmsted, in September, a comprehensive drainage plan. His reply was a model of circumspection. Until the complete park plan was established, he said, he judged it unwise to address anything other than four fundamental questions: To what extent shall the park be drained? (Answer: Totally.) By what form of drains? (Earthenware, of varying calibers.) At what depth? (Three feet in open glades, four feet in forested areas.) For best economy, by contract or days’ work? (By days’ work because of the endlessly varied conditions requiring uncommon on-site supervision.) Meanwhile, Waring had rented Olmsted’s Staten Island farm and what was to be a close personal and professional relationship had begun. The two men worked together on the park until 1861. Olmsted was later to say that “Waring planned and superintended the work

38. Frederick Law Olmsted, architect in chief; Calvert Vaux, consulting architect; and W. H. Grant, superintending engineer. *Profiles of the Central Park on the lines of the VIth & VIIth Avenues prolonged from 59th to 110th Street*, 1859. Lithograph. From *Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1860. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



39. George E. Waring Jr., draining engineer, and H. Bieringer, assistant engineer. *Map of Drainage System on Lower Part of the Central Park as far as completed up to December 31st, 1858*. Lithograph. From *Second Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1859. Red lines represent the tile drains, red circles the silt basins, and heavy black lines the sewers. New-York Historical Society

40. George Hayward. *View in Central Park, Southward from the Arsenal 5th Avenue & 64th St. June, 1858.* Lithograph. From *Valentine's Manual for 1859.* New-York Historical Society



41. Victor Prevost. *St. Luc's Hospital, 1862.* From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 3. New York Public Library



of agricultural drainage, superficial & thorough, upon the Central Park from the outset. I believe it to be the best work of the kind in the world.”

During the summer of 1858 Waring had some 400 laborers at work on the drains. Less than a year later, on March 15, 1859, he reported to Olmsted that 105,000 feet of drain tile had been laid. His drainage plan (fig. 39) consisted of simple trunk lines with parallel rows of feeders at right angles. Three park views drawn in June 1858 for *Valentine's Manual*, a semiofficial gazette published in New York between 1842 and 1866, memorialize the beginnings of this long-anticipated work. Two of the drawings are of the future promenade and depict teams of workers with the one-horse, two-wheeled carts they used to move earth and rock. The third (fig. 40) is a view south from the Arsenal at Sixty-fourth Street showing piles of dynamited rock in the foreground, with the raised roadbeds of Fifty-ninth and Fifty-eighth Streets in the middle ground and, farther to the south, on Fifty-seventh Street, Saint



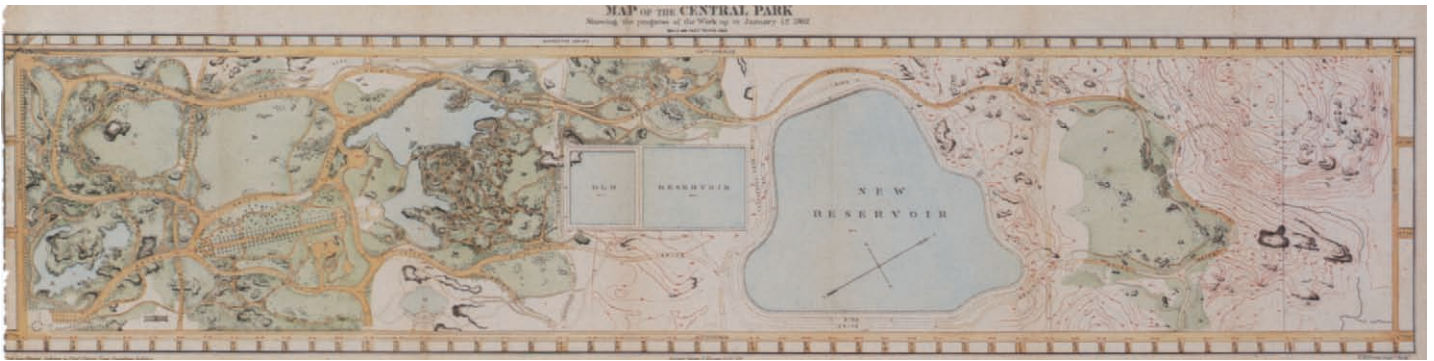
42. Victor Prevost. *Arsenal from 6th Avenue Station*, 1862. From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 2. New York Public Library

Luke's Hospital. Prevost photographed the same view in 1862 when the work was virtually complete (fig. 41). Two of his other photographs from the same time show exposed rocks and built-up roadways at Fifty-ninth Street (fig. 42) and completed roads, paths, and plantings leading toward the Arsenal and Denesmouth Arch (fig. 43). On the Commissioners' Plan dated January 1, 1862 (fig. 44), the completed areas, which included almost all of the lower park, are colored green. An aerial view of the park published as *Martel's New York Central Park* in 1864 (fig. 45) offers the clearest and most comprehensive contemporary depiction of the Greensward Plan.

The series of four transverse roads (called thoroughfares until 1862), the key to the circulatory system of Central Park, were another clear construction priority, requiring extensive excavation and bridge building. For this work Vaux did the designs, Grant the engineering. Roads 1 and 2, in the lower park, were completed and open for public use in December 1859 (see fig. 46) and December 1860, respectively. Roads 3 and 4, in the upper park, were finished in the fall of 1862. Each was 40 feet wide (a 27-foot roadbed with two 6½-foot sidewalks) and crossed by several bridges. The retaining walls and the bridges, not intended to be visible from the park, were made of undressed or "rock-faced" park stone (schist), the arches of high-quality hard-burnt brick. Longitudinal and cross



43. Victor Prevost. *The Arsenal from 5 Avenue Road Sept 29th*, 1862. From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 4. New York Public Library



44. Frederick Law Olmsted, architect in chief; Calvert Vaux, consulting architect; and W. H. Grant, superintending engineer. *Map of the Central Park Showing the progress of the Work up to January 1st 1862*, 1861. Colored lithograph. From *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1862. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

45. Martel, artist, and J. C. Geissler, lithographer. *Martel's New York Central Park, Respectfully Dedicated to the Park Commissioners*, 1864. Lithograph. New-York Historical Society

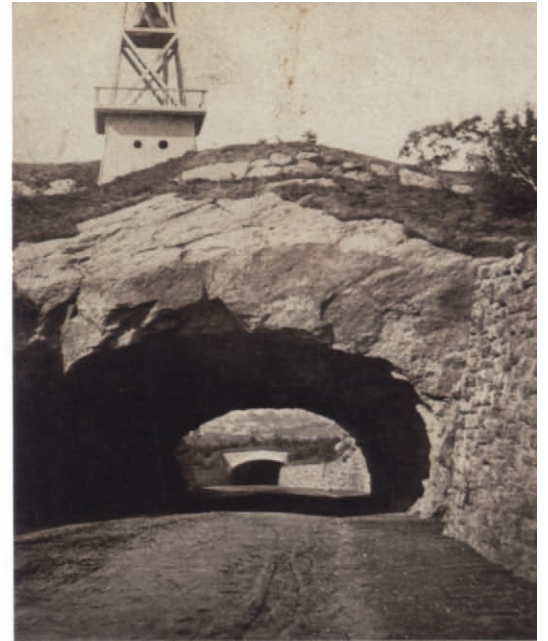
sections of Bridge "E," the westernmost bridge over Transverse Road No. 2 at Seventy-ninth Street (fig. 47), depict typical stonework and drainage treatments. Across this bridge pass the bridle path, the carriage road, and two footpaths, all bundled together. The next bridge to the east, just south of the old reservoir, was tunneled through the living Vista Rock (fig. 48), upon which was mounted the bell tower that synchronized the work of the men who built the park. Grant determined the precise angle of batter necessary for the retaining walls of different heights that lined the transverse roads (fig. 49).

Its creators designated three types of roadways within Central Park: the "drive" (called the carriage road until 1862) for carriages, the "ride" for horses, and the "walk" for people. Work on the roads went rapidly; 3.5 miles of drives were completed in 1859, and almost all the roadways below 102nd Street were in place by the end of 1861. The park plan in the commissioners' fifth annual report (see fig. 44) vividly depicts this progress. Finished roads and walks have solid outlines and dark color, those not fully finished but in use have solid



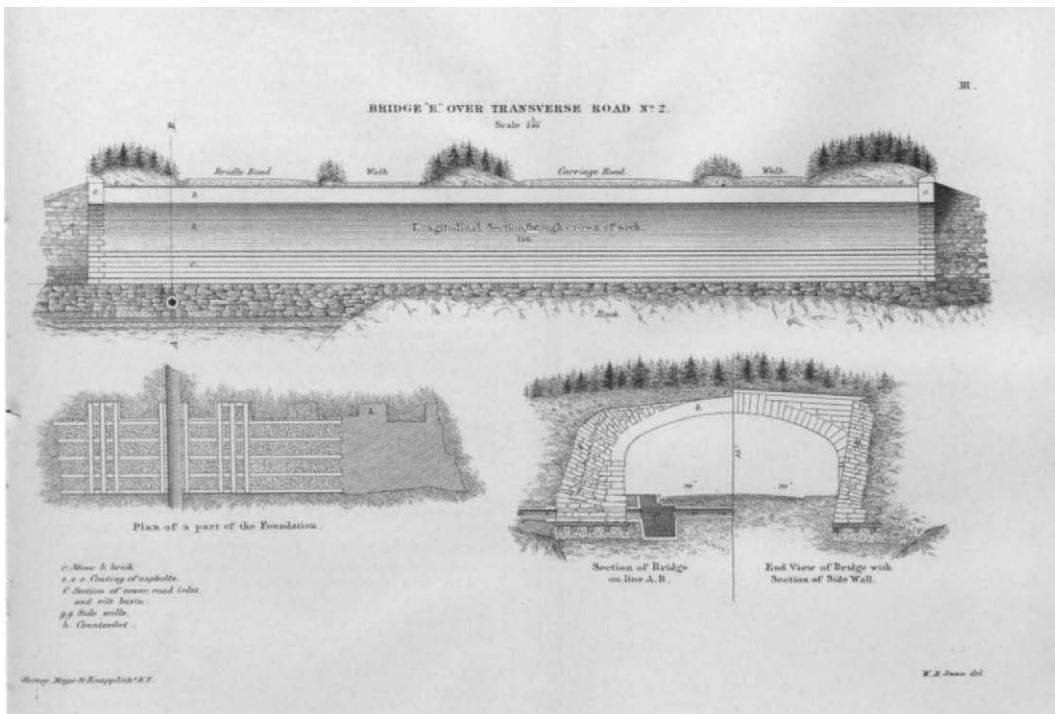


46. Calvert Vaux, architect; W. H. Grant, engineer; Sarony, Major and Knapp, lithographers. *Archway under Carriage Drive for Traffic Road Across the Park*, 1859. Lithograph. From *Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1860. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

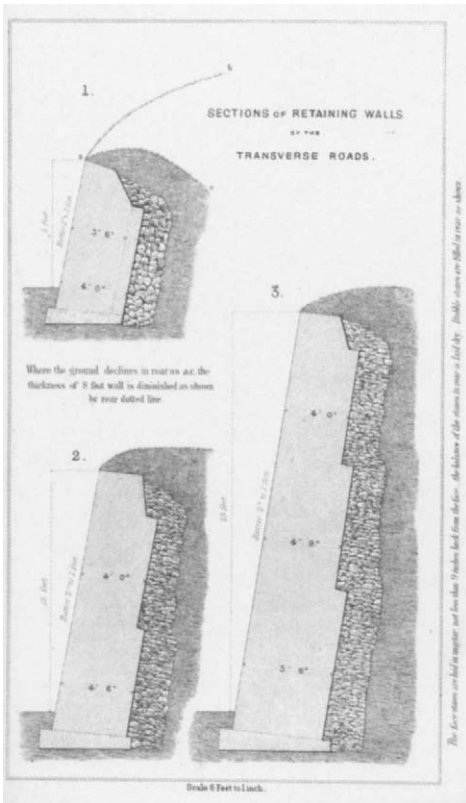


48. *Tunnel in Traffic Road [No. 2, Seventy-ninth Street] across the Park with Temporary Bell Tower*, ca. 1863. One-half of a stereograph. From *Stacy's Central Park Views*, no. 17. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1-3866)

outlines and light color, those under construction have dotted outlines and light color, and those not yet begun have dotted lines and no color. Planted or grassy areas are colored green; water is blue. Black numbers give the width of roads; red ones the elevation above tidewater. Red lines show the contours of the original surface where ground was not yet broken. The

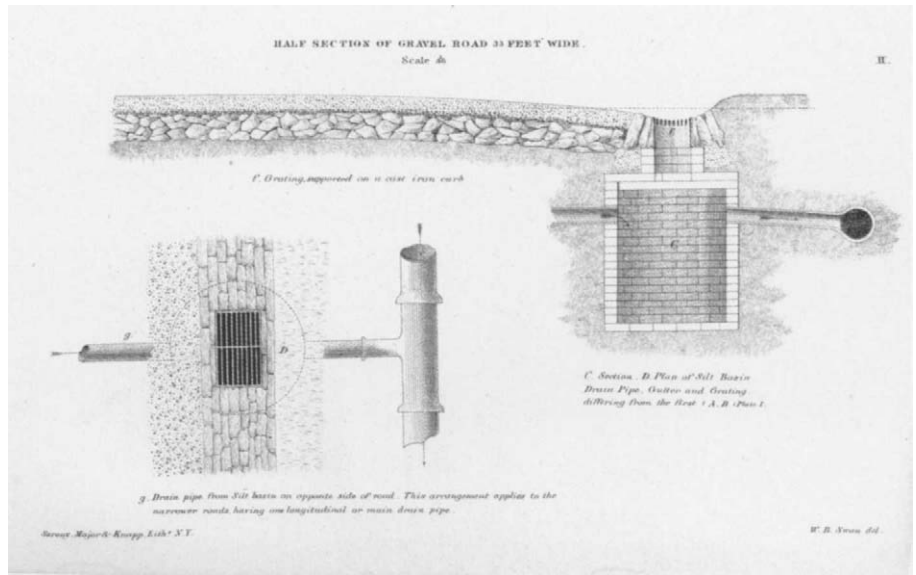


47. Calvert Vaux, architect; W. B. Swan, delineator; and Sarony, Major and Knapp, lithographers. *Bridge "E" over Transverse Road N° 2*, 1861. Lithograph. From *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1862. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



49. Calvert Vaux, architect; W. H. Grant, engineer. *Sections of Retaining Walls of the Transverse Roads*, 1865. Lithograph. From *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1866. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

50. W. B. Swan, delineator, and Sarony, Major and Knapp, lithographers. *Half Section of Gravel Road 33 Feet Wide*, 1861. Lithograph. From *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1862. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



report also includes engraved designs showing how the elaborate drainage systems for the various types of roads were constructed. Like the transverses (see figs. 46–48), the drives, rides, and even some walks were flanked on one or both sides by curb gutters carefully fitted out with iron grates, brick silt basins, and clay pipes (fig. 50).

In addition to the utilitarian transverse road bridges, the park had two other classes of bridges: “Ornamental Bridges or Archways, in view and forming a part of the general landscape, with selected stone and brick or iron,” and “Rustic Bridges, the smaller class for walks and over streams.” Originally the bridges were given numbers, which conformed generally

51. Calvert Vaux. *The Central Park: Bridge No. VII (Denesmouth Arch)*, ca. 1859. Ink and colored wash. New York Municipal Archives





52. G. W. Fasel. *View of the Lake, Iron Bridge and Island, Looking North*, 1862. Lithograph. From *Central Park Album*, 1862. New-York Historical Society

to the order of construction. Twenty-three bridges were completed between 1859 and 1861, eleven more by the end of 1865.

Vaux's seductive presentation rendering of Denesmouth Arch, or Bridge No. 7, designed in 1859 and nearly finished by the next year's end (fig. 51, and also visible just beyond the Arsenal in fig. 43) and one of the thirteen original masonry bridges, shows the extraordinary lengths that were taken to separate the foot and carriage traffic and yet keep the structure of the bridges at ground level and basically visible only to pedestrians. The broad, arched underpass also provided protected seating. The arch was constructed entirely of New Brunswick stone, with lamp standards on the balustrade to provide illumination for nighttime traffic on the Sixty-sixth Street Transverse.

Seven of Vaux's bridges were made of cast iron, a popular building material after James Bogardus introduced it in the late 1840s for the fronts of commercial buildings. All the cast iron bridges were for pedestrian traffic, and all but one were to cross over bridle paths. The exception, long and low, is Bow Bridge (fig. 52), which was designed in 1858 and fabricated by Janes, Kirtland and Co. in 1859–62 to cross the Lake northwest of the Terrace. Spur Rock Arch (fig. 53), designed in 1859 and constructed at Sixty-first Street and Seventh Avenue (and since, sadly, demolished), was notable for its powerful circular cusped openings in the Gothic style. In 1863 Vaux designed three iron bridges to traverse the ride around the recently completed new reservoir: the Southeast Reservoir Bridge near the South Gate House (see fig. 56), the Southwest Reservoir Bridge, and what is now known as the Gothic Bridge near the North Gate House.

Vaux's half-dozen rustic bridges were either of log or rough stone construction. The most whimsical is Ramble

53. Victor Prevost. *Part of Iron Bridge near 8th Avenue*, 1862. From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 5. New York Public Library





Arch (fig. 54), a narrow, five-foot-wide passage that pierces a massive stone infill between two rock outcrops on the west side of the Ramble, Olmsted's "wild garden" in the center of the park between Seventy-third and Seventy-ninth Streets.

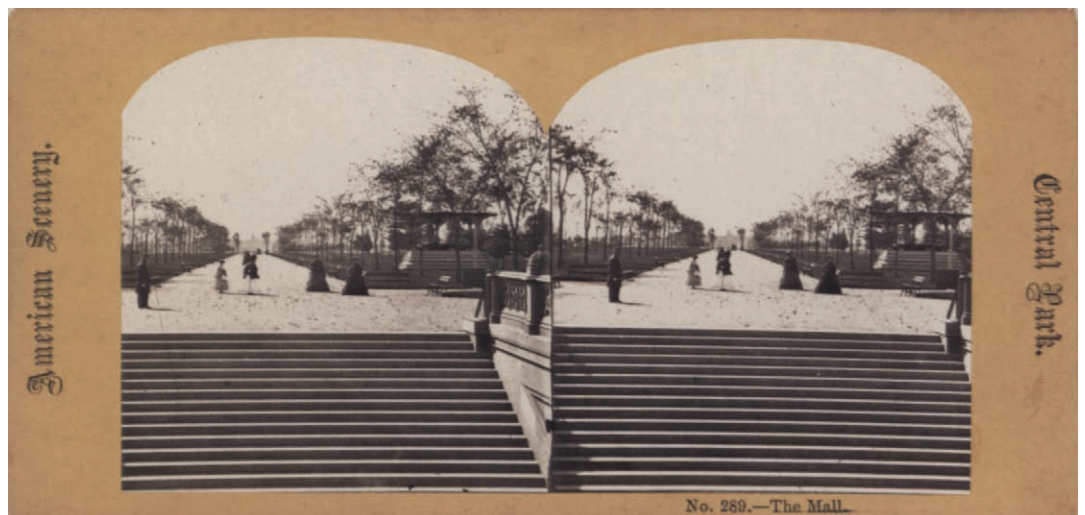
With his background in the nursery business Olmsted had a broad enough familiarity with trees and shrubs that, in October 1857, he could confidently advise the commissioners on what needed to be purchased immediately. But planting the whole park required the in-depth knowledge of an expert, and for that he depended on Ignaz Anton Pilat (1820–1870), an Austrian-born landscape architect who had earned a degree at the University of Vienna and eventually headed the Imperial Botanical Gardens at Schönbrunn. Pilat was hired as chief landscape gardener for Central Park in 1857, and that same year he coauthored a catalogue of plants found in the park. Rows of twenty-year-old elms were planted along the Mall in 1858 (see fig. 55), and between 1859 and 1863 Pilat supervised the planting of

54. *Central Park, the Ramble*. One-half of a stereograph published by E. Anthony, New York, ca. 1865. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

240,000 trees and shrubs in Central Park, 79,904 of them in 1863 alone. To document the total transformation he had wrought, the commissioners published in their seventh annual report his *Catalogue of Trees, Shrubs, and Herbaceous Plants on the Central Park, Dec. 31, 1863*.

The one part of the park that was not under the direct supervision of the commissioners was the new North Reservoir, or Manhattan Lake, between Eighty-sixth and Ninety-sixth Streets, the construction and management of which was the domain of the Croton Aqueduct Board. The site had been selected in 1850, the land purchased in 1853, the "egg shape . . . appearance of a lake" (conforming to the topographical declivity) determined by Viele in 1855, and ground broken on April 17, 1858. The basin required massive earth and stone

55. *The Mall* (looking south from the Terrace stairway). Stereograph, ca. 1863. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

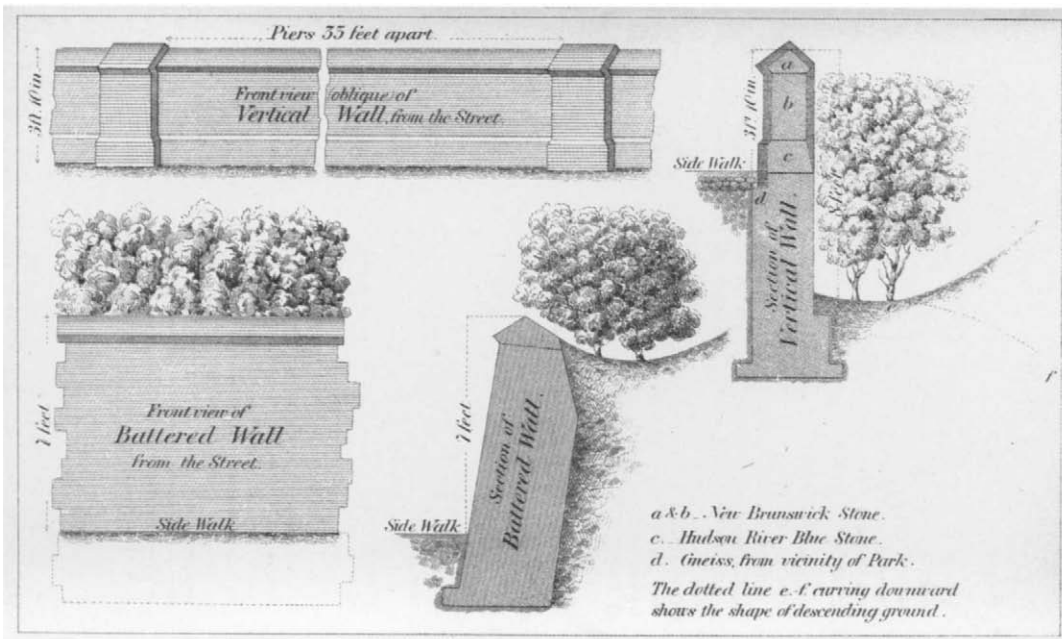




56. A. Brown and Co., lithographers. *South Gate House, New Reservoir, during Construction: Viewed from the South—Looking into the Reservoir, 1862.* Lithograph. From *Valentine's Manual for 1862*. New-York Historical Society

berms, the gatehouses formidable brick foundations and pipes (fig. 56). The mains to the Distributing Reservoir at Forty-second Street were laid in 1860, and water was introduced into the pipes in 1862.

It was not until 1863, when the gradients had been permanently established for Fifth and Eighth Avenues, along the east and west edges of the park, that the commissioners finally resolved the issue of the treatment of the perimeter. The Greensward Plan had specified only an outer line of trees, but in 1862 the commissioners had still not decided whether the physi-



57. Calvert Vaux, architect. *Inclosing Walls of the Park, 1863.* Lithograph. From *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, January 1864*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

cal border of the park would be of iron, stone, or wood, or even a living hedge. The following year they selected a simple stone wall (fig. 57). The vertical, or freestanding, parts of the wall were just 3 feet 10 inches high, low enough for pedestrians on the sidewalk outside to look over, and they were made of New Brunswick (Canada) freestone, with a base course of Hudson River bluestone and a foundation of local gneiss. Battered, or retaining, walls were 7 feet high and constructed of gneiss. During 1863 alone some 2,100 feet of “vertical wall” were under construction on Fifty-ninth Street, lower Fifth Avenue, and Eighth Avenue, and 2,900 feet of “battered wall” were being built on Fifth Avenue between Eighty-sixth and Ninety-seventh Streets. The total length of the wall would ultimately be 29,025 feet.

Eighteen entrances breached the park walls, four at each end and five on either side. In April 1862, in a grand democratic gesture, the Commissioners’ Committee on Statuary, Fountains and Architecture proposed that the entrances should bear a “systematic nomenclature representative of the pursuits of the whole people, and of the vocations to which the city especially owes its metropolitan character.” And so the entrances were named Scholars’ Gate, Artists’ Gate, Merchants’ Gate, Hunters’ Gate, Miners’ Gate, and so on (see fig. 59).

Calvert Vaux, Jacob Wrey Mould, and the Park Buildings

Buildings were not part of Vaux and Olmsted’s original vision for the park, and with one magnificent exception, the ones they included in the Greensward Plan were there solely because they were called for in the competition guidelines. The music hall, the conservatory, the flower garden, and the fountains were but accessories, according to the authors’ text, to be built later if at all. Over time, however, Vaux, alone or together with his assistant Jacob Wrey Mould (1825–1886), did erect numerous park structures. Mould (fig. 58), a London-trained architect said to have been a pupil of the ornamentalist Owen Jones, moved to New York in 1852. He is credited with introducing polychrome architecture to the City. In December 1858 he was hired as assistant architect in the office of Olmsted, Vaux and Company, where he remained until 1870. During 1870 and 1871, when the City was under the thumb of Boss

Tweed, Mould served as architect in chief of the Central Park. From 1871 to 1874 he served as Vaux’s associate architect. The plan dated January 1, 1870 (fig. 59), the last published by the commissioners before Mould took over, shows the park complete and includes a “Reference to the Central Park Guide,” a listing of the various park highlights keyed to the numbers on the plan. With this guide one can locate the structures erected during the twelve years since work had begun in the park.

The largest and most important of the original park buildings was the Terrace, at the north end of the Promenade, or Mall, between Sixty-sixth and Seventy-second Streets in the center of the park (fig. 60, and no. 21 on fig. 59), the one



58. Victor Prevost. *Bird’s Nest* (at foot of Terrace staircase), 1862. The man has been identified as Jacob Wrey Mould. From Victor Prevost, *Central Park in 1862* (photograph album, 1862), pl. 17. New York Public Library

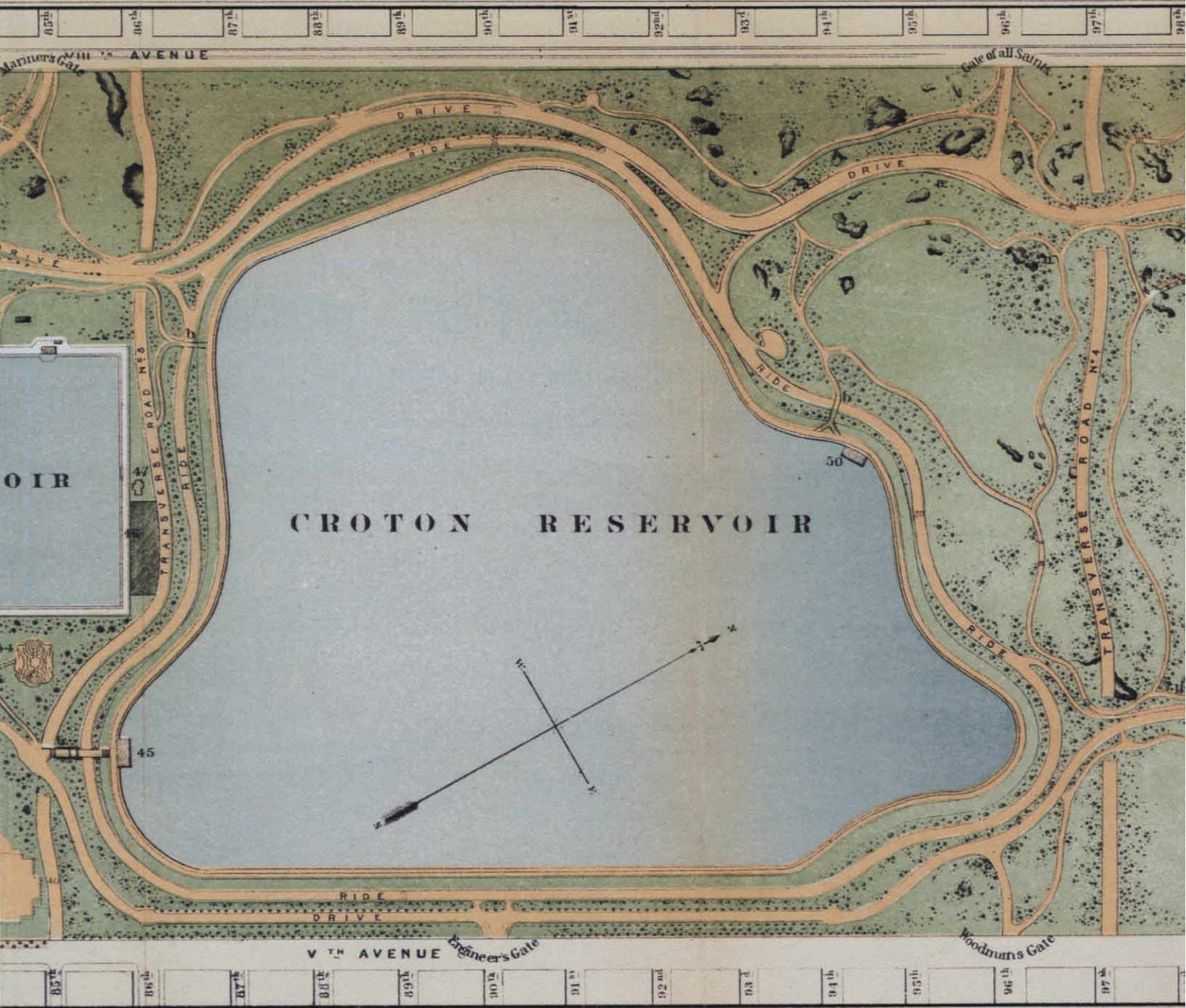


MAP OF THE CENTRAL PARK
JANUARY 1st 1870



Scale 400 feet to the inch

CENTRAL PARK



REFERENCE TO THE CENTRAL PARK GUIDE.

GATES.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5th Avenue and 59th Street— | The Scholars' Gate. |
| 5th " 59th " | The Artists' Gate. |
| 7th " 59th " | The Artizans' Gate. |
| 8th " 59th " | The Merchants' Gate. |
| 8th " 72d " | The Womens' Gate. |
| 8th " 79th " | The Hunters' Gate. |
| 8th " 85th " | The Mariners' Gate. |
| 8th " 96th " | The Gate of All Saints. |
| 8th " 100th " | The Boys' Gate. |
| 5th " 72d " | The Childrens' Gate. |
| 5th " 79th " | The Miners' Gate. |
| 5th " 90th " | The Engineers' Gate. |
| 5th " 96th " | The Woodman's Gate. |
| 5th " 102d " | The Girls' Gate. |
| 5th " 110th " | The Pioneers' Gate. |
| 6th " 110th " | The Farmers' Gate. |
| 7th " 110th " | The Warriors' Gate. |
| 8th " 110th " | The Strangers' Gate. |

1. Humboldt Monument.
2. The Pond.
3. Museum and Park Office.
4. Dairy.
5. Childrens' Cottage.
6. Childrens' Summer House and Play Ground.
7. Ball Players' House.
8. Play Ground.
9. The Green.
10. Statue of Commerce.
11. Palæontological Museum.
12. The Marble Arch.
13. Site of Shakespeare Monument.
14. The Mall.
15. Oak and Elm, planted by Prince of Wales.
16. Music Pavilion.
17. Vine—Covered Walk.
18. Carriage Concourse.
19. Casino, or Refreshment House.
20. Croquet Players' House.
21. The Terrace.
22. Fountain.
23. Bronze Statue of Tigress.

24. The Circle.
25. Mineral Spring.
26. Site for Refectory.
27. The Lake.
28. The Bow Bridge.
29. Ladies' Cottages.
30. Balcony Bridge.
31. West Carriage Step—entrance to Ramble
32. Schiller's Monument.
33. Gentlemens' Cottage.
34. The Ramble.
35. The Tunnel.
36. Proposed Belvedere.
37. The Cedars.
38. East Carriage Step—entrance to Ramble.
39. Evergreen Walk.
40. Dove Cot.
41. Conservatory Lake.
42. Site for Flower House.
43. Proposed Art Museum and Hall.
44. Site for the Maze.
45. South Gate House.
46. Stable.
47. Croton Board House.
48. Spring.
49. The Knoll.
50. North Gate House.
51. The West Meadow.
52. The East Meadow.
53. The Pool.
54. The Loch.
55. Mount St. Vincent House of Refreshment.
56. The Nursery.
57. Old Fortification.
58. Harlem Lake.
59. The Cliffs.
60. Block House, War of 1812.
61. The Briars.
62. 7th Regiment Monument.
63. The Great Hill.

59. Reference to the *Central Park Guide* and (overleaf) Olmsted and Vaux, landscape architects, *Map of the Central Park, January 1st 1870* (colored lithograph). From *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, January 1870*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



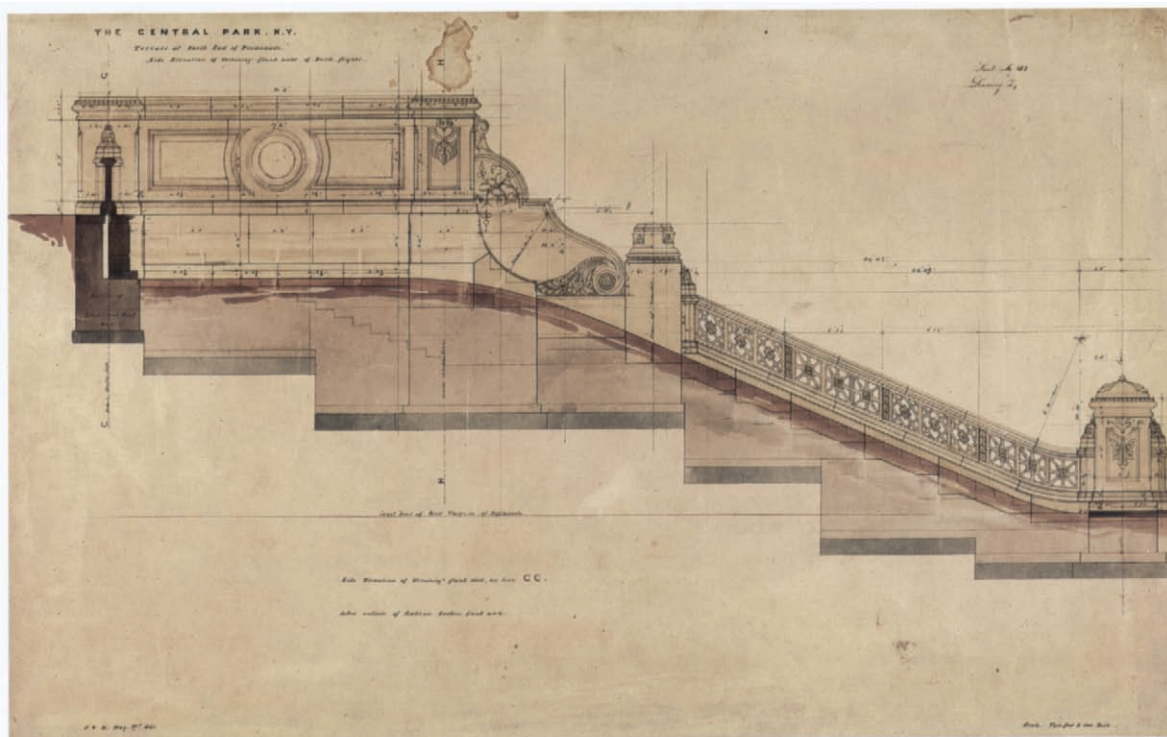




60. W. H. Guild Jr. *The Terrace: The Grand Stairways*. Photograph. From Fred B. Perkins, *The Central Park* (New York: Carleton, 1864), no. 16



61. Barnum. The Terrace from the Ramble (northeast), ca. 1866. One-half of a stereograph published by E. and H. T. Anthony and Co., New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1-3866)



62. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould, architects. *The Central Park, N.Y. Terrace at North End of Promenade. Side elevation of Retaining flank walls of North flights*, 1861. Ink with colored washes. New York Municipal Archives

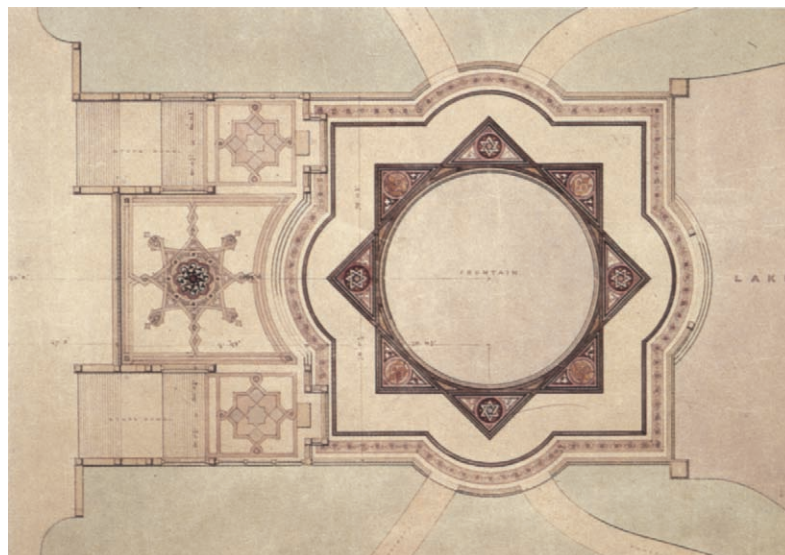


63. *Bethesda Terrace: View of Staircase*, ca. 1868. One-half of a stereograph published by E. and H. T. Anthony and Co., New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

64. Calvert Vaux, architect (general design), and Jacob Wrey Mould, architect (details). *Photograph of Design for Ramp*, ca. 1866. From *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, January 1867. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

instance where Olmsted and Vaux saw the need for a structure not called for in the original park program. Vaux told Clarence Cook: “The landscape is everything, the architecture nothing—til you get to the Terrace. Here I would let the New Yorker feel that the richest man in New York or elsewhere cannot spend as freely . . . just for his lounge.” The Terrace was to serve as a focal point in the park, just as a mansion house anchors a private park. But with a difference. True to Vaux’s insistence that buildings be subservient to nature, the Terrace is, from most vantage points, invisible. From the Promenade one descends the central stairs to an underpass beneath the drive and thence out onto a broad, low terrace opening on the Lake and the view of Vista Rock. It is only when one turns around (or crosses the Lake and looks back from Vista Rock or the Ramble) that one sees an arcade flanked by monumental staircases (fig. 61). In essence, the Terrace is the most elaborate of the Central Park bridges.

On September 16, 1858, the commissioners approved the final design for “the bridge, corridor and water-terrace at the northern end of the Promenade.” Work began the next year,



65. Attributed to Jacob Wrey Mould. *The Central Park: Paving Plan of the Proposed Terrace*, ca. 1863. Ink with colored washes. New York Municipal Archives

and the basic structure was well advanced by 1862, though execution of the richly elaborate ornamental program for which Mould is deservedly famous (see figs. 62–64) carried on into 1871. Most resplendent are the “foliated ramps,” the carved, scrolled panels flanking the middle landing of each stair. Six of the eight sides, seen in the rough in fig. 60, were carved in situ in 1867 and 1868 (see fig. 63) based on Mould’s lifesize models (fig. 64). Birds and other beasts dwell in the great newel posts, against one of which Prevost caught Mould proudly lounging (see fig. 58). Again according to Cook, “on no public building in America has there yet been placed any sculpture so rich in design as this, or so exquisitely delicate in execution.” Within the corridor were fresco-painted wall panels and, most extraordinarily, a ceiling of colorful encaustic tiles specially ordered from the Minton factory in Stoke-on-Trent, England. The floor tiles on the Terrace—an octagonal border on the fountain’s circular basin and three smaller variations on an octagonal theme at the base of the stairs—survive today only in Mould’s original drawing (fig. 65). Vaux’s proposal for a series of twenty bronze figural sculptures to ornament the steps depended upon private donations and was never realized.

Only two other park buildings of any note were constructed during the war years, both adjacent to the Mall



66. *The Music Stand*, 1862. One-half of a stereograph published by E. and H. T. Anthony and Co., New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)



67. *Casino—West Front*, ca. 1862. One-half of a stereograph published by E. and H. T. Anthony and Co., New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)



68. *The Rustic Arbor* (Children’s Summer House), 1866. One-half of a stereograph published by E. and H. T. Anthony and Co., New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)



69. *The Dairy, Central Park, 1869.* One-half of a stereograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

and both now demolished: the Music Pavilion, or Music Stand (fig. 66, no. 16 on fig. 59, and see also fig. 55), with cast iron filigree designs by Mould, was completed in 1862 to the west of the Mall; and the Casino, or Ladies Refreshment Saloon (fig. 67, no. 19 on fig. 59), a rambling one-story stone pavilion designed by Vaux that was one of three intended park restaurants, stood to the east. Much more ambitious was Vaux's unrealized design of January 1862 for a massive glass "flower house" or Conservatory (no. 42 on fig. 59) for the site originally intended for the formal flower garden at Seventy-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. The 200-by-75-foot rectangle, with a two-tiered rounded iron and glass roof, was clearly inspired by Joseph Paxton's famous Great Conservatory of 1836 at Chatsworth.

After July 1865, when he and Olmsted were reappointed as the park's landscape architects, Vaux designed and built several additional structures to cater to the needs of park visitors. The central area of the park just south of the Sixty-sixth Street Transverse was called the Children's District, or the Kinderberg, and there in 1866 Vaux erected the Children's Summer House and Play Ground (fig. 68, no. 6 on fig. 59). An octagonal platform 110 feet in diameter supporting a veritable forest of trees constructed from unsawn cedar logs and branches, the Summer House (since demolished and replaced by the Chess and Checkers House) was the largest and most



70. *The Spa (Mineral Spring), 1869.* One-half of a stereograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

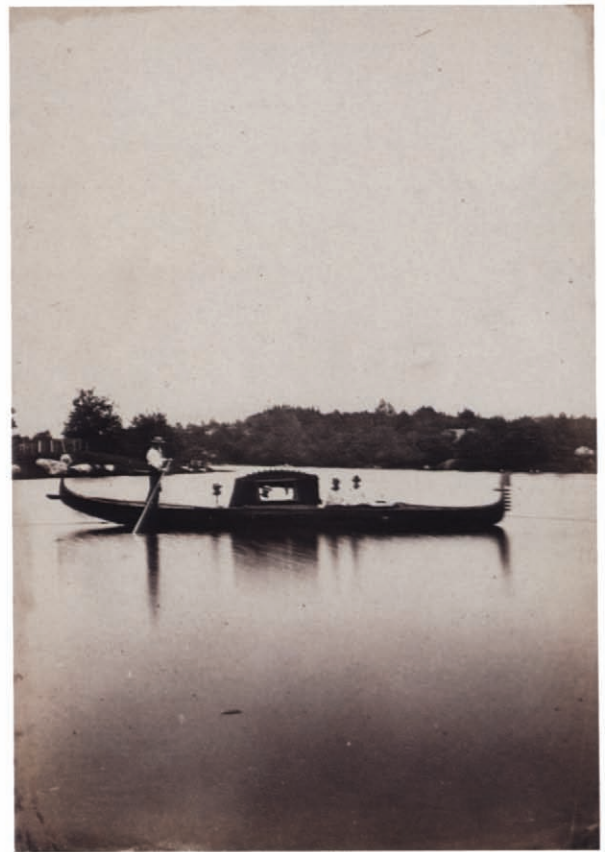


71. *The Spa, Central Park, 1869.* One-half of a stereograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)

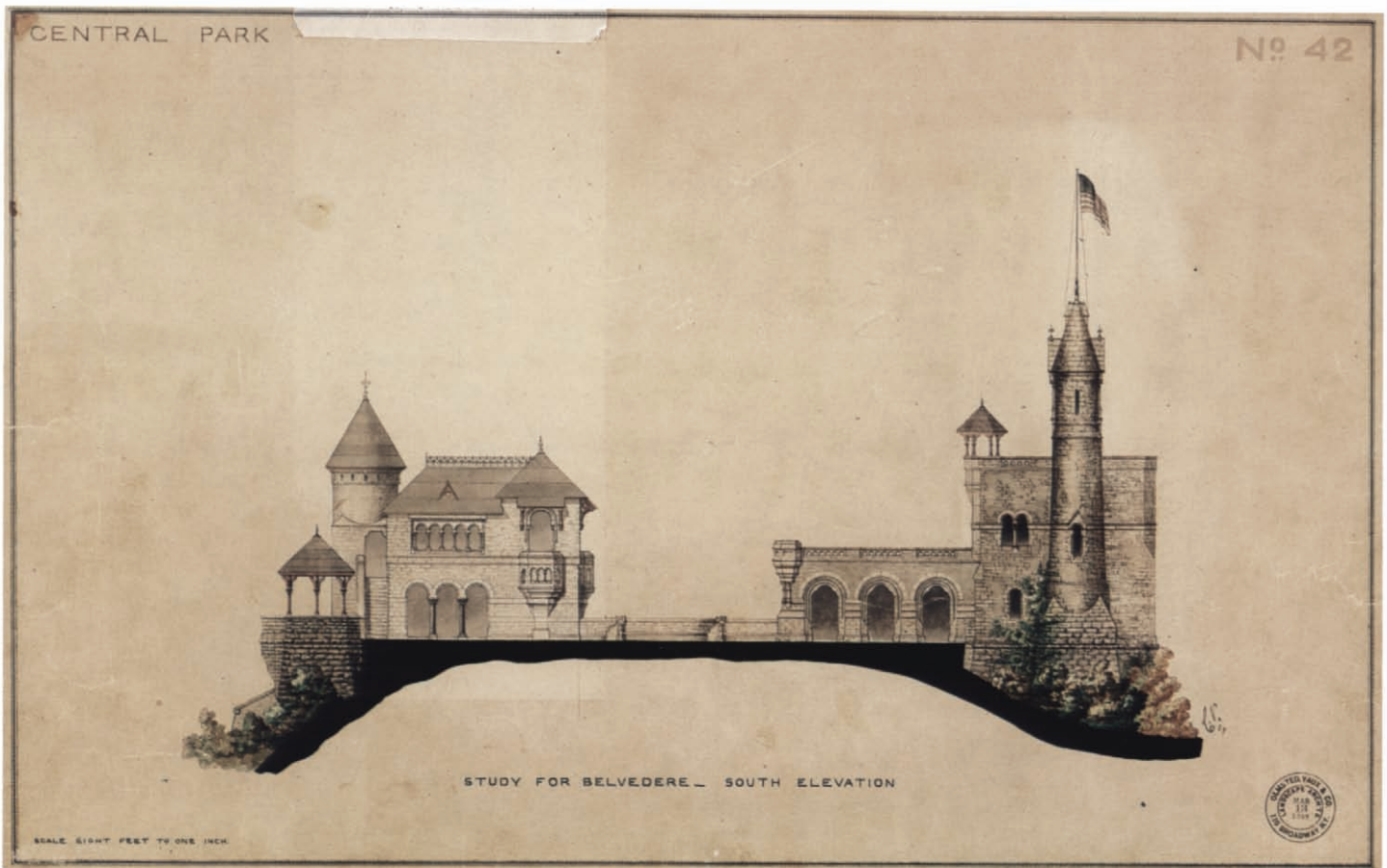
elaborate of Vaux's rustic works. The nearby Dairy (fig. 69, no. 4 on fig. 59), which offered fresh milk for young children, was begun in 1869. It consists of a pair of narrow, steep-roofed pavilions, the front a sheltered open-air pavilion of post-and-beam construction and the rear a structure of stone. In 1869 Vaux completed the Mineral Spring, or Spa, just northwest of the Sheep Meadow (fig. 70, no. 25 on fig. 59) to house a private concession for the selling of mineral waters. Greek cross in plan, with Moorish-arched openings and a central octagonal "bar" (fig. 71), it was a popular destination for adults. Later, in 1873, in response to the great popularity of boating, Vaux designed a commodious Boathouse (figs. 72, 73) surmounted by viewing platforms and pavilions, for the eastern shore of the Lake. But the most visible of all these structures was the Belvedere, erected on a broad terrace on Vista Rock (no. 36 on fig. 59) on the site of the workers' bell tower (see fig. 48). In the original 1867 design (fig. 74), Vaux called for two turreted stone structures. The larger one, on the east side and facing south, was constructed between 1869 and 1871 (fig. 75). The smaller one, on the west side and facing north, was never built; in its stead, during his tenure as architect in chief in 1870–71 Mould erected a small, colorful canopied wood pavilion. At the same time he designed the polychrome masonry Sheepfold (now Tavern on the Green) and Ladies Pavilion; and in 1872, when he and Vaux had become associate architects, he designed the administrative offices and stables for the Eighty-sixth Street Transverse. Add these various structures to all the bridges, and Vaux's and Mould's contributions to the park were significant indeed.



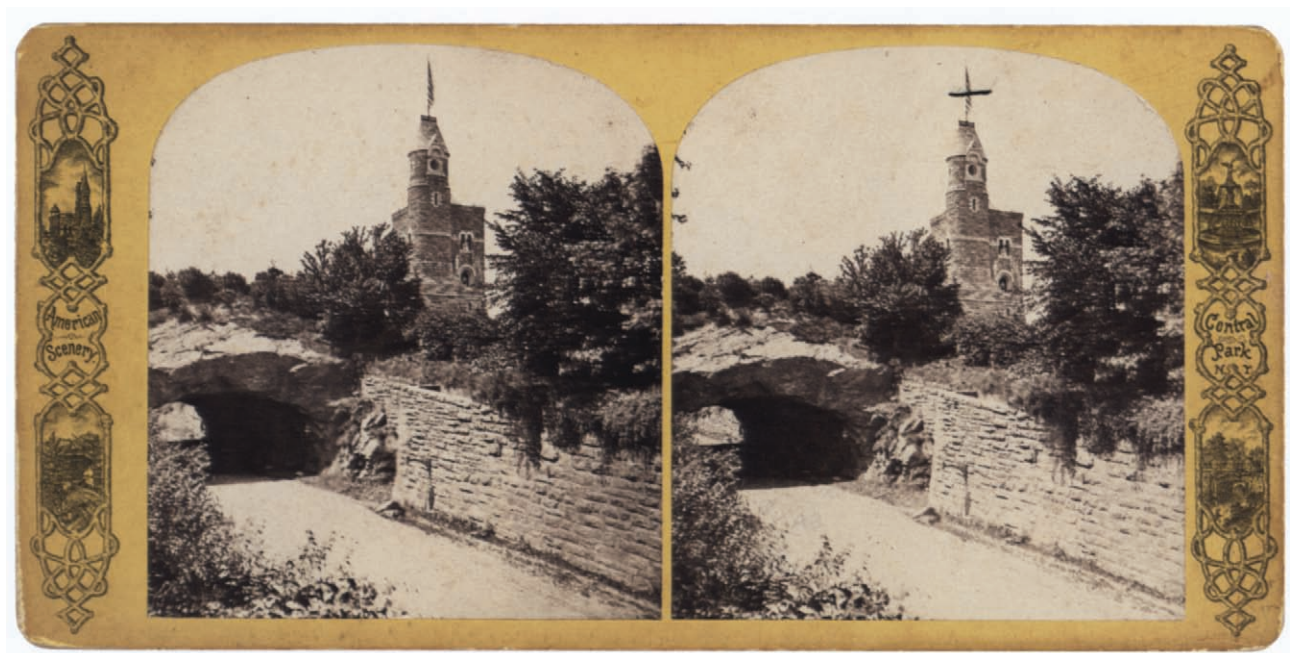
72. *The Boathouse*, 1873. One-half of a stereograph published by A. J. Fisher, New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)



73. W. H. Guild Jr. *The Gondola*. Photograph. From Fred B. Perkins, *The Central Park* (New York: Carleton, 1864), no. 17



74. Olmsted, Vaux and Company, landscape architects. *Central Park, No. 42: Study for Belvedere—South Elevation*, March 13, 1867. Ink and colored washes. New York Municipal Archives



75. *Belvedere and Tunnel*, ca. 1871. Stereograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1-3866)

Richard Morris Hunt and Central Park

Another architect who had had an interest in the park from the beginning was Richard Morris Hunt (fig. 76). Although just three years Vaux's junior, in matters architectural Hunt (1827–1895) represented the next generation and an altogether different approach to art and design: French rather than American, urban rather than rural. From 1845 to 1854 he studied architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris (the first American to do so), where he imbibed the French tradition of grand urban planning. Returning to the United States in 1855, he settled in New York City. During a distinguished forty-year career, he became the acknowledged “dean of American architecture.” Among the many public buildings he designed his crowning achievement was the entrance wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, designed in the year of his death (1895). Central Park, which had been the talk of the town ever since his arrival, was too grand an undertaking for such a talented, ambitious, and highly trained man to ignore. In 1861, with Olmsted's departure, Hunt saw a chance to break Vaux's architectural monopoly with a design for the entry gates on Fifty-ninth Street and the renovation of the State Arsenal Building as a museum.



76. Karl Bitter (American, 1867–1915). *Richard Morris Hunt*, 1891 (this cast, 1892). Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Erving Wolf Foundation, 1978 (1978.206)



78. Richard Morris Hunt, architect. *Proposed Central Park Gates: Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue entrance: View east to monument on axis with 60th Street*, ca. 1863–65. Ink with colored washes. Octagon Museum



Hunt first considered the question of the Central Park gates in February 1861, but his marriage in April, followed immediately by eighteen months abroad, put his involvement on hold. The importance of public access from the south was acknowledged on the 1859 park plan (see fig. 37), where a grand opening from each of the four avenues replaced the three modest entrances on the original Greensward design (see fig. 23). Hunt was first consulted about the gates in 1861 through the good offices of his brother-in-law, Commissioner Charles H. Russell. After Vaux's resignation in May 1863 the commissioners authorized a public design competition. At first none of the twenty-one entries was chosen, but in the end Hunt's design was selected.

Hunt had prepared a number of sets of presentation drawings of his designs for the gates in different formats, including bird's-eye views in sepia and boldly colored plans and elevations. For the main entrance, at Fifth Avenue, which Hunt called the Gate of Peace, his aerial view (fig. 77) depicts a circular fountain within a square parterre, not unlike what already existed on the park plans (see fig. 44). But the new focal point, entirely Hunt's inspiration, is an exedralike semicircular terrace, on axis with Sixtieth Street, with a fifty-foot column bearing the City's arms and, at its base, a monument to Henry Hudson, with figures personifying the Hudson and East Rivers flanking Hudson on the prow of a boat. On the park side stepped cascades were to flank a memorial to Christopher Columbus (fig. 78). The actual park gates, with statues of lion tamers on high pedestals, were to be on the north side of the rectangular plaza. On the other drawings, the Sixth Avenue gate (Hunt's Gate of Commerce) displays bronze columns and a flagpole, the Seventh Avenue gate (Artists' Gate) stone herms and a column supporting the genius of the arts, and the Eighth Avenue gate (Warriors' Gate) a circular central fountain and equestrian statues atop high plinths overlooking the entrances to the park drives.

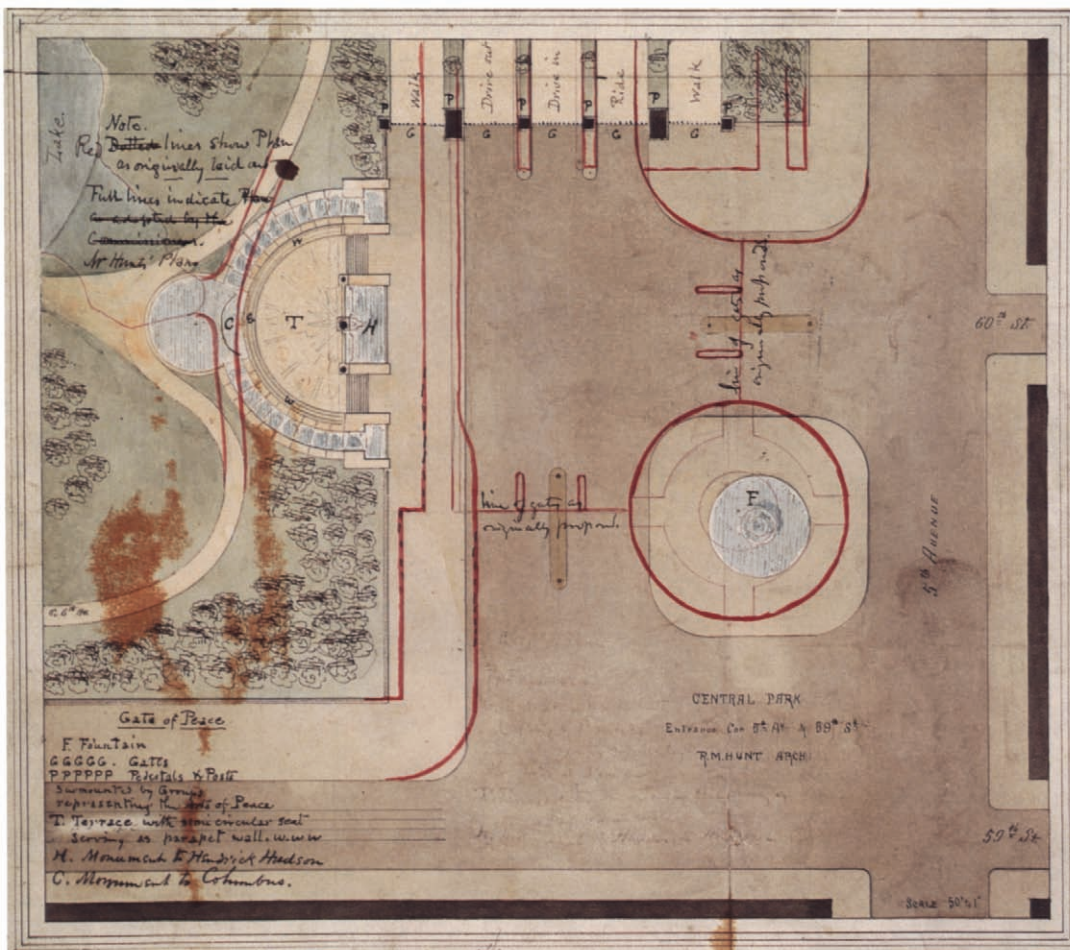
When the board temporized, Hunt chose to promote his designs himself, arranging for them to be displayed in 1865 at the annual summer exhibition of the National Academy of

77. Richard Morris Hunt, architect. *Proposed Central Park Gates: Aerial view of Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue entrance*, ca. 1863–65. Ink and sepia wash. Octagon Museum, Washington, D.C.

Design. In May the controversy went public when the *New York Evening Post* published a letter from Vaux objecting to the damage Hunt's grandiloquent gates would do to the picturesque scenery and quiet, rural settings of the park. This was followed, in August, by a scathingly critical article by Clarence Cook. And while the board paid Hunt for his designs, they deferred the work itself. In 1866 Hunt went so far as to publish his bird's-eye sepia series (see fig. 77) in a book illustrated with lavish lithographs. This was, after all, the public commission by which he intended to establish his name in New York.

But Hunt underestimated Vaux's power and passion. Vaux took up this challenge every bit as energetically as he had the campaign to discredit Viele's plan for the park years before. Privately, Vaux admitted to Olmsted that Hunt's designs were "splendidly got up and very striking," but he told Clarence Cook that "the park typifies what we have been fighting for and the gates typify what we have been fighting against. . . . Napoleon III in disguise all over." In sum, he continued, Hunt's designs "are not American and the Park is." The popular press, most notably the *Nation*, agreed, and in 1867 Hunt's scheme for the gates was finally canceled. Echoes of the controversy reverberate through one set of plans, on each of which (see fig. 79) Vaux and Olmsted's preexisting design is shown with dotted lines (later highlighted in red) and the handwritten legend "Full lines indicate Plan as adopted by the Commissioners" was later crossed out and replaced with the notice "Full lines indicate Mr Hunt's Plan," acknowledging that Hunt's scheme had ultimately failed to be adopted.

Meanwhile, in 1860, in response to what the commissioners described in April 1859 as "the eagerness that exists in the public mind" for establishing in Central Park institutions



79. Richard Morris Hunt, architect. *Proposed Central Park Gates: Plan of Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue entrance*, ca. 1865, with later emendations. Pencil, brown and red inks, and colored washes. Octagon Museum

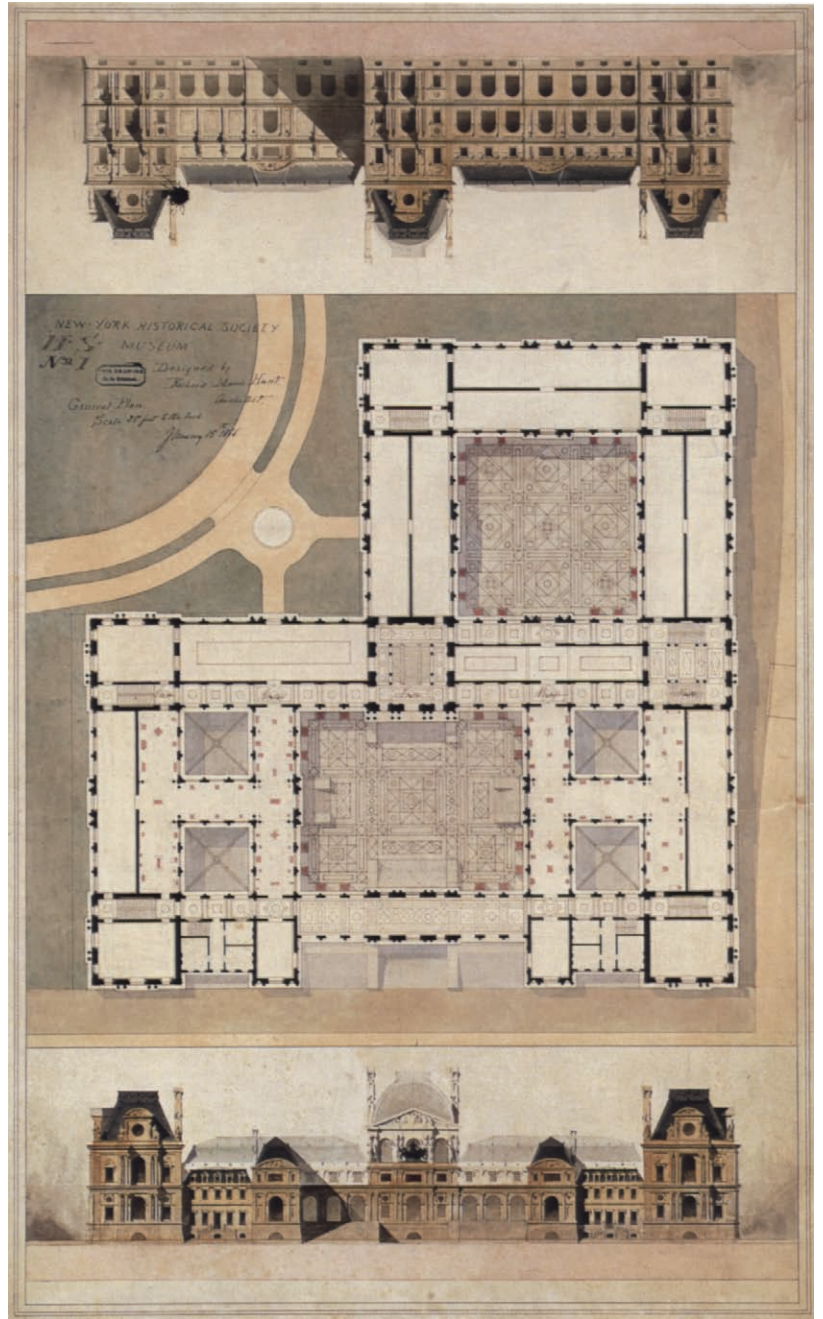
80. Richard Morris Hunt, architect. *Proposed Remodeling of the State Arsenal for the New-York Historical Society, 1865*. Ink with colored washes. Octagon Museum



like museums of natural history and galleries of art, Hunt had prepared designs to transform the old Arsenal on Fifth Avenue at Sixty-fourth Street into a museum. In that same year the New-York Historical Society (which housed the only public art museum in the city and which no longer had room for its collections) expressed interest in finding accommodations within the park for a museum of antiquities and science and a gallery of art. Accordingly, in 1862 the legislature passed an act authorizing their use of the Arsenal. A resolution dated April 19, 1864, set aside a plot of land between Sixty-third and Sixty-fifth Streets and extending from Fifth Avenue westward 225 feet (and including the existing Arsenal Building) to give the society ample room to construct the necessary buildings, and in 1865 the society engaged Hunt to do the work. His presentation perspective (fig. 80), looking northwest from Fifth Avenue at about Sixty-third Street, shows the old castellated building now clad in brick with round-arched windows, a machicolated cornice, and steeply pointed slate roofs—a splendidly medievalizing French confection. The New-York Historical Society's trustees were pleased, but the park commissioners were not, referring it back to Hunt "to prepare plans for buildings of more extensive scope and with ample room for the anticipated requirements of the proposed great and noble undertaking in the cause of literature, Science, and Art." Hunt's response—a grand public building with multiple courtyards and wings—was just what one would expect from a graduate of the *École* whose first job had been working on an addition to the Louvre. Two of his presentation sheets, both dated January 15, 1866, survive, one with two elevations and a floor plan (fig. 81), the other with a single cross section. The only accommodation the plan makes to the park is in opening up the southwest corner to allow for the park drive and a park entrance. Once again the society was pleased, the commissioners not. Belatedly the board recognized that a building of this scale could not be placed just anywhere in the park. But if not at Sixty-fourth Street, then where?

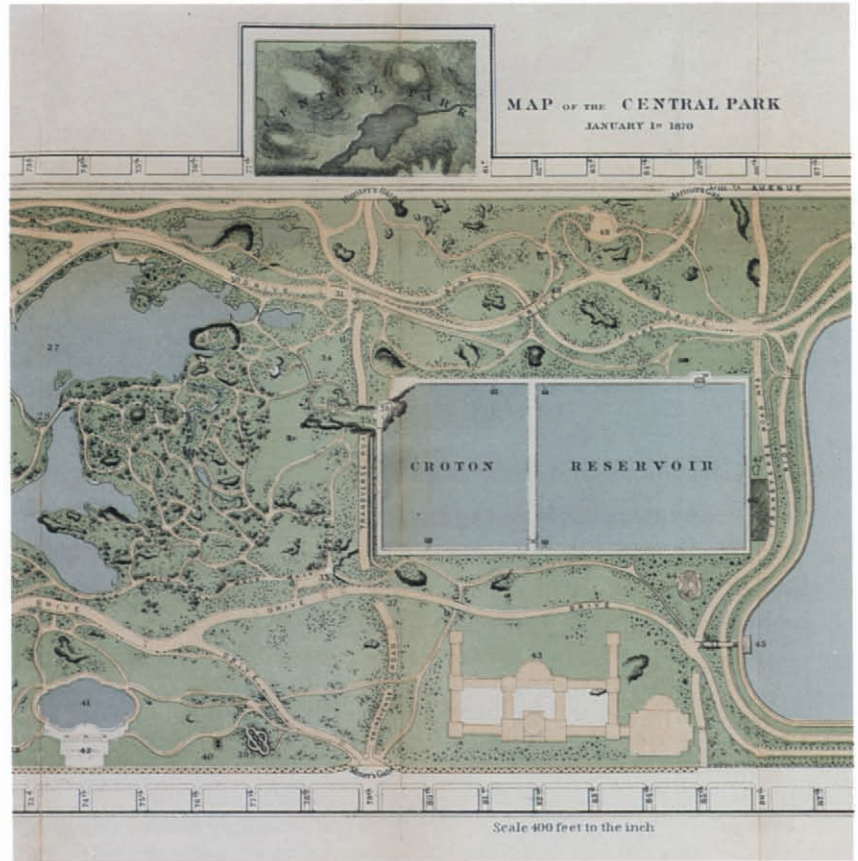
What Olmsted, Vaux, and the commissioners finally agreed upon was four blocks on Fifth Avenue between Eighty-first and Eighty-fourth Streets, a plot isolated from the rest of the park by transverse roads north and south and by reservoirs north and west. The area had never been integral to the park design: in Viele's 1856 design it was designated the Parade Ground, in the 1858 Greensward Plan it was a playground, and in the 1859 revision it was labeled simply "Unfinished Ground." "There are," Olmsted and Vaux were to note in 1872, "along the [park's] boundary, several small spaces of ground, buildings within which, if properly designed, will not affect the park landscapes, and which, regarding the Park as a work of art . . . may be considered extraneous." This site was one of them. On April 29, 1868, the legislature set it aside for the Historical Society, at the same time repealing the Arsenal Act of 1862.

The Historical Society now had the land it needed, but not the money to build on it. And so, one year later, on May 5, 1869, the legislature switched horses and authorized the commissioners to erect in the park an observatory, natural history museum, and art gallery. On the park plan dated January 1, 1870 (fig. 82, and no. 43 on fig. 59), the site on the east side between Eighty-first and Eighty-fourth Streets is filled with a large building complex comprising a central structure with narrow wings flanking three large inner courts and, off to the right, a separate solid rectangle. The caption reads: "Proposed Art Museum and Hall." This was three months before the incorporation of The Metropolitan Museum of Art on April 13, 1870, and four months before Boss Tweed replaced the independent Board of Commissioners of the Central Park with a New York City Department of Public Parks. During the Tweed ascendance, May 1870 to November 1871, the new commissioners removed the art museum to Manhattan Square, which it was to share with the American Museum of Natural History, founded in 1869. Such an arrangement suited neither party, and once Tweed was toppled, the museums were given their own permanent sites. On the plan of Central Park for the year ending May 1, 1872 (fig. 83), the American Museum of Natural History fills Manhattan Square, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art occupies the site in Central Park at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-second Street. The plans of both buildings, simple grids forming multiple courtyards, were the work of Vaux and Mould. Only the first wing of each (see gray shaded portions of fig. 83) was built to their designs.



81. Richard Morris Hunt, architect. *New-York Historical Society Museum, January 15, 1866*. Pencil and ink with colored washes. Octagon Museum

82. Olmsted and Vaux, landscape architects. *Map of the Central Park, January 1st 1870* (detail of fig. 59, showing proposed museum at Eighty-second Street and Fifth Avenue)



83. Olmsted and Vaux, landscape architects. *Map of the Central Park 1871-72* (detail showing proposed museums on Manhattan Square and at 82nd Street and Fifth Avenue). Lithograph with colored washes. From *Second Annual Report of the Department of Public Parks* (year ending May 1, 1872). The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Sculpture in the Park

Sculpture's only role in the original Greensward Plan was as part of the design of the Terrace at the end of the Mall. There Mould displayed his mastery of naturalistic ornament (see fig. 64), and there Vaux proposed a sculptural program consisting of twenty large bronze figures, to be paid for by private subscription. The only figural work ever installed as part of the program (and that only in 1873) was Bethesda, the Angel of the Waters fountain in the center of the Terrace. The sculptor Emma Stebbins (whose brother Henry, a commissioner, paid for it) modeled it in Rome in 1865.

Before long, however, interested parties began to see Central Park as a perfect place to commemorate their heroes with freestanding statues. In 1859 a bust of Schiller by the sculptor C. L. Richter (no. 32 on fig. 59) was placed in the Ramble (and has since been moved to the Mall). And during the 1860s a number of pieces by American sculptors, notably the young John Quincy Adams Ward in collaboration with Richard Morris Hunt or Jacob Wrey Mould, were installed in the vicinity of the Mall. Sometimes Olmsted and Vaux consulted on the design and placement of the statues. The first such commitment to the display of American sculpture in Central Park was made on April 23, 1864, the tercentenary of William Shakespeare's birth, when at the urging of actor Edwin Booth the foundation stone for a monument to the bard was planted at the entrance to the Mall (no. 13 on fig. 59). In 1866, after the Civil War, the City held a public competition to select a sculptor for the monument, and Ward won based on his sketches for a standing figure, head bowed in thought and

one arm akimbo. The bronze was finally cast in 1870, when Hunt proposed various pedestal designs, including one with terminal figures at each of its canted corners (fig. 84). Ultimately it was placed upon a molded granite base designed by Mould. The memory of Hunt's park gates may have been too recent and too painful for Vaux to countenance his involvement.

The piece that had established Ward's reputation was *The Indian Hunter*, a naturalistic rendition of an indigenous American. The original statuette was cast in bronze in 1860. A larger than lifesize replica cast in 1866 was displayed at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867 and at the National Academy of Design in New York in 1868. On December 28 the Committee of the Indian Hunter Fund, consisting of twenty-three prominent artists and patrons, presented the bronze to the City for installation in Central Park, proclaiming that "both in Europe and America it justly ranks among the best examples of the plastic arts . . . , a work so truly American in subject, and so admirably executed by one of our native and most celebrated sculptors." The piece,



84. Richard Morris Hunt, architect and delineator, with John Quincy Adams Ward, sculptor. *William Shakespeare Monument, New York, NY, 1870*. Sepia watercolor. Octagon Museum

85. John Quincy Adams Ward.
The Indian Hunter, 1869.
Chromolithograph. From
Valentine's Manual for 1869.
New-York Historical Society



86. Richard Morris Hunt, architect and delineator, with John Quincy Adams Ward. *Proposal for Seventh Regiment Monument, New York, NY*, 1869. Ink and wash. Octagon Museum



placed just west of the Mall at Sixty-sixth Street, was unveiled on February 4, 1869. Such was the popular interest that a colored illustration (fig. 85) was included in *Valentine's Manual*. The granite pedestal was the work of Mould, who prepared preliminary designs in 1869; the final scheme, endorsed by Vaux and Olmsted, was completed only in 1872.

In 1869 Ward, once again in collaboration with Hunt, began making studies for a monument to honor the fifty-eight men of New York's Seventh Regiment who had died in the Civil War. Olmsted and Vaux wrote to Ward to suggest a location near the Warriors' Gate at Seventh Avenue and 110th Street and backed by high ground (see no. 62 on fig. 59). They suggested a single standing soldier in the center, flanked by semirecumbent figures. Hunt played with various grand settings for Ward's central figure, including one with a raised round terrace and three separate staircases (fig. 86). The parallels to his Central Park gates proposals are striking, and it is not surprising that in the end the Regiment had to make do with a single figure on a handsome, tapered square shaft. In 1872 Olmsted and Andrew Haswell Green chose a new location for the monument, by the West Drive at Sixty-seventh Street, which is where it was finally installed in 1874.

Central Park Completed

From the beginning Central Park was madly popular. Just the idea of the park had captured the public's imagination, and people were impatient, after years of political gridlock, for the reality.



87. Winslow Homer (1836–1910). *A Drive in Central Park*, 1860. Wood engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, September 15, 1860. New-York Historical Society

Olmsted and Green realized the importance of opening the finished parts to the public as rapidly as possible: The Lake was already filled and in use for ice skating in the winter of 1858–59. Three miles of the drive were opened for carriage traffic in 1859. The commissioners' fifth annual report (published January 1862) tabulated the number of skating days (27), musical events (9), and boat passengers (14,886, plus 4,999 private boat hires) and recorded an astounding number of visitors: 1,863,263 pedestrians, 73,547 equestrians, and 467,849 vehicles. "There are occasions," the report noted, "when, in the course of an afternoon, more than three thousand carriages enter the gates of the Park, sufficient to form a continuous procession of more than seven miles." There was little talk of tranquil walks in peaceful glens; it was all about active sport and being seen.

American artists and publishers, most notably Winslow Homer and Currier and Ives, were quick to capture, for a national mass market, the sense of cheerful anarchy that prevailed among the new park's users. Homer's *A Drive in Central Park*, of September 1860 (fig. 87), a view looking west from Fifth Avenue at about Seventy-second Street, includes as landmarks (at left) the bell tower above the Seventy-ninth Street Transverse and (at right) a construction crane for the new reservoir. Careening carriages, galloping horsemen, sedate pedestrians—the seeming chaos was carefully monitored, on orders from Olmsted himself, by the park keepers visible in the foreground. Homer had sketched another park view the previous winter (it was published in *Harper's Weekly* on January 28, 1860) depicting ice skating on the Lake (see no. 27 on fig. 59). That scene, looking northwest from the Terrace and also with



88. Charles Parsons (1821–1910), designer. *Central Park, Winter: The Skating Pond*, ca. 1861. Lithograph with hand coloring. Printed and published by Currier and Ives, New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Adele S. Colgate, 1962 (63.550.266)



89. *Bicycle Parade, Central Park, New York, U.S.A.*, 1895. Stereograph published by Strohmeyer and Wyman, New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Herbert Mitchell Collection, 2007 (2007.457.1–3866)



90. William I. Taylor.
The City of New York
(detail), 1879. Uncolored
lithograph. Published by
Galt and Hoy, New York.
Library of Congress

the bell tower and construction cranes in the background, was the inspiration for Charles Parsons's more idealized image of skating in the park, with iconic Bow Bridge in the background, which was reproduced in full color by Currier and Ives (fig. 88). Though the park was designed specifically for driving, riding, and walking, it was not long before it also proved to be a congenial fit for other forms of locomotion, such as the bicycle (fig. 89). On August 31, 1862, New York lawyer George Templeton Strong had written in his diary:

We went after dinner to the upper end of Central park and walked down. Great progress since my last visit. The long lines of carriages and the crowds of gents and giggling girls suggested peace and prosperity. There was nothing from which one could have guessed that we are in a most critical period of a great Civil War, in the very focus and vortex of a momentous crisis and in imminent peril of grave national disaster.

From the beginning, then, Olmsted and Vaux's idealized landscape had to accommodate not just city dwellers' need for quiet and the contemplation of scenic vistas but also New Yorkers' demands for a wide variety of other uses. It is perhaps more in this regard than in its naturalistic design that the park remains today a living emblem of democracy. As the first urban landscape park in America, Central Park had an immense influence. Beginning with Prospect Park in Brooklyn in 1865, Olmsted and Vaux went on to build numerous other examples in Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, and elsewhere, forever altering the face of urban America.

Located as it is right in the middle of the all-encompassing City (see fig. 90), Central Park is now indispensable. But as its history bears out, its existence was hardly inevitable. Built a little sooner, it might have consisted of a series of city squares; a little later, and it might have been a formal garden in the French manner. Either way, it would hardly have engendered the same enduring affection as the park it became, the embodiment of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's Greensward Plan, whose 150th anniversary we celebrate this year.

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For this essay I have drawn heavily upon contemporary sources, especially the Park Commissioners' annual reports. Of the many modern publications about Central Park and Frederick Law Olmsted, I have listed a number of the most useful and readily available titles. In addition, the visual record of drawings, prints, and photographs—a goodly sampling of which are reproduced within the text—constitutes an often neglected but richly instructive historical resource.

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AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks for their many courtesies go to Jean Ashton, Vice-President and Director of the Library, the New-York Historical Society, and her staff; Leonora A. Gidlund, Director, Municipal Archives, the City of New York, and her staff; Sherry C. Birk, Director, the Octagon Museum and Collections, Washington, D.C.; Annette Blaugrund, Director, the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts; and Thomas Mellins, Curator of Special Exhibitions, the Museum of the City of New York. Special thanks are due to Catherine Scandalis, Department of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Metropolitan. Sara Cedar Miller, photographer and historian of the Central Park Conservancy, has been my guide to all things Central Park ever since I first dared, with Lori Zabar, to mount a Central Park exhibition at the Metropolitan in 2003.

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978-0-300-13669-2



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