

**FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED,
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, 1822-
1903. EARLY YEARS AND
EXPERIENCES TOGETHER WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903. Early Years and Experiences Together with Biographical Notes by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. & Theodora Kimball Hubbard

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FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED JR. & THEODORA KIMBALL HUBBARD

**FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED,
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, 1822-
1903. EARLY YEARS AND
EXPERIENCES TOGETHER WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

**FORTY YEARS OF
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

**BEING THE PROFESSIONAL PAPERS OF
FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED, SENIOR**



Frederick Law Olmsted in 1850

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

1822-1903

EDITED BY

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED, JR.

AND

THEODORA KIMBALL



EARLY YEARS AND EXPERIENCES

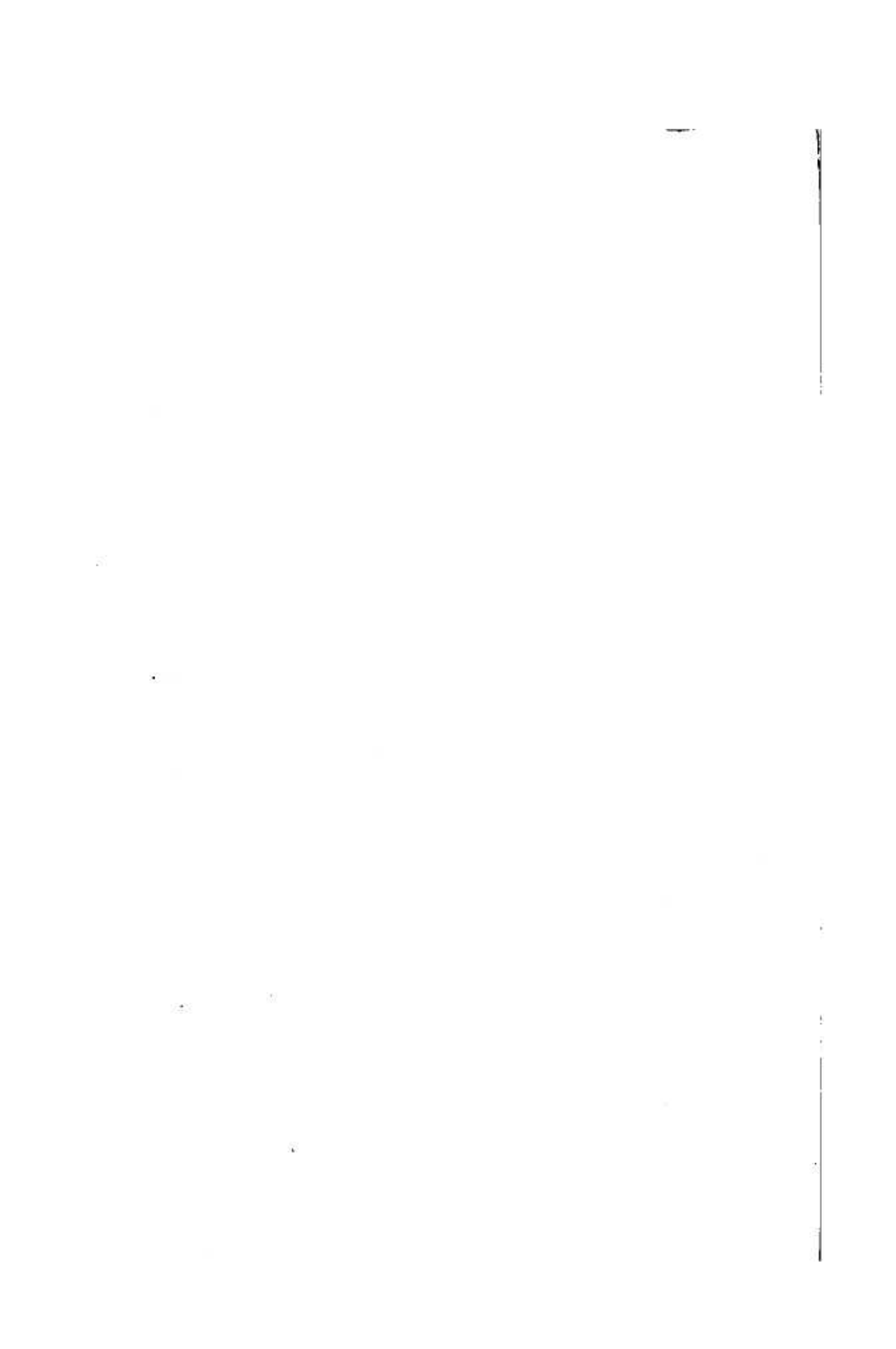
TOGETHER WITH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ILLUSTRATED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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1922

ON THE CENTENNIAL YEAR OF HIS BIRTH IS PUBLISHED THIS
FIRST VOLUME OF THE PROFESSIONAL PAPERS OF
FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED



PREFACE

THE richness and variety of the professional papers left by Frederick Law Olmsted, Senior, is astonishing, especially in view of the enormous amount of work on the ground which he accomplished in the almost forty years of his active career as a Landscape Architect. Orderly and thorough by habit of thought, he wrote down with minute care the various steps of his professional dealings, in many cases retaining unused drafts which show valuable processes of mind. From the beginning he realized fully the importance of presenting the new profession to the public in a favorable light, and was constantly "coming before the public,"—as the phrase went,—in the daily press and in occasional pamphlets. Several of his professional reports also were printed at his own expense, but a far greater number have lain buried in the files of Park Department Documents or have never been printed in any form. His personal life after 1857 was so closely bound up with his professional activities that his family and friendly letters reveal many sidelights on his work. The record of his professional correspondence is fortunately full. When the political harassments to which he was subjected prevented him from sleeping, he used to while away the hours of the night by writing, sometimes in regard to his current problems and sometimes bits of general wisdom gained in his professional experience. About 1890 when he was obliged in some degree to lessen his travelling about, he wrote several long retrospective letters, reviewing his career, and he left also two or three short fragments of autobiography, which are included in this present volume.

Among the many people outside the Olmsted family who had preserved and were able to return letters for editorial purposes, there should be especially mentioned: the late Frederick J. Kingsbury of Waterbury, Conn., who added to the letters a valuable group of reminiscences; Miss Emma Brace (letters to her father Charles Loring Brace) who assisted also in the preliminary sorting of Olmsted letters; Miss

Sarah Norton (letters to her father Charles Eliot Norton); and the Vaux family, who have aided the editors of Mr. Olmsted's papers in every possible way, Mr. Bowyer Vaux especially, and given permission for the publication in Vol. Two of several very illuminating letters from Calvert Vaux to Mr. Olmsted, in 1864-65, which formed a turning point in the latter's career.

The present volume of Mr. Olmsted's papers is intended as an introduction to a series covering his main activities as a Landscape Architect. The writings are to be arranged by large groups, according to the nature of the works in connection with which they were written,—public parks and park systems, town plans, land subdivisions, grounds for public and semi-public buildings, private estates, and so on. This somewhat arbitrary rather than sequential arrangement is adopted perforce because Mr. Olmsted's writings—illuminating as they are in regard to principles of wide application—relate, with few exceptions, directly to some specific problem or set of conditions, dealing with the case now from the point of view of aesthetics, now from that of utility and convenience or economy, sometimes from that of the sociologist, sometimes from that of the administrator or that of the artisan.

Mr. Olmsted wrote not primarily to set forth general theories but to show how to get satisfactory results under actual specific circumstances and requirements as he found them, or to carry conviction of the wisdom of certain courses of action which he advised.

In this connection it is interesting to compare his professional writings with those of A. J. Downing,—whose friendship unquestionably did much to stimulate and develop Mr. Olmsted's interest in landscape matters, and whose activities in the Central Park campaign and in bringing Calvert Vaux into relations with Mr. Olmsted led the latter so unexpectedly into the profession. It is very striking to note the contrast between Downing's somewhat doctrinaire and *a priori* method of discussing landscape problems, and Mr. Olmsted's habitual method, which was frankly to envisage the peculiar facts of each situation as an individual problem to be solved on its own merits in its own individual way, and then to test and perhaps correct his conclusions by reasoning back to find principles consistent alike with the facts and artistic intuitions present in this particular case and with other principles