

**REPORT UPON A
PROJECTED IMPROVEMENT
OF THE ESTATE OF THE
COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA**

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Report upon a projected improvement of the estate of the College of California by Fred. Law Olmsted

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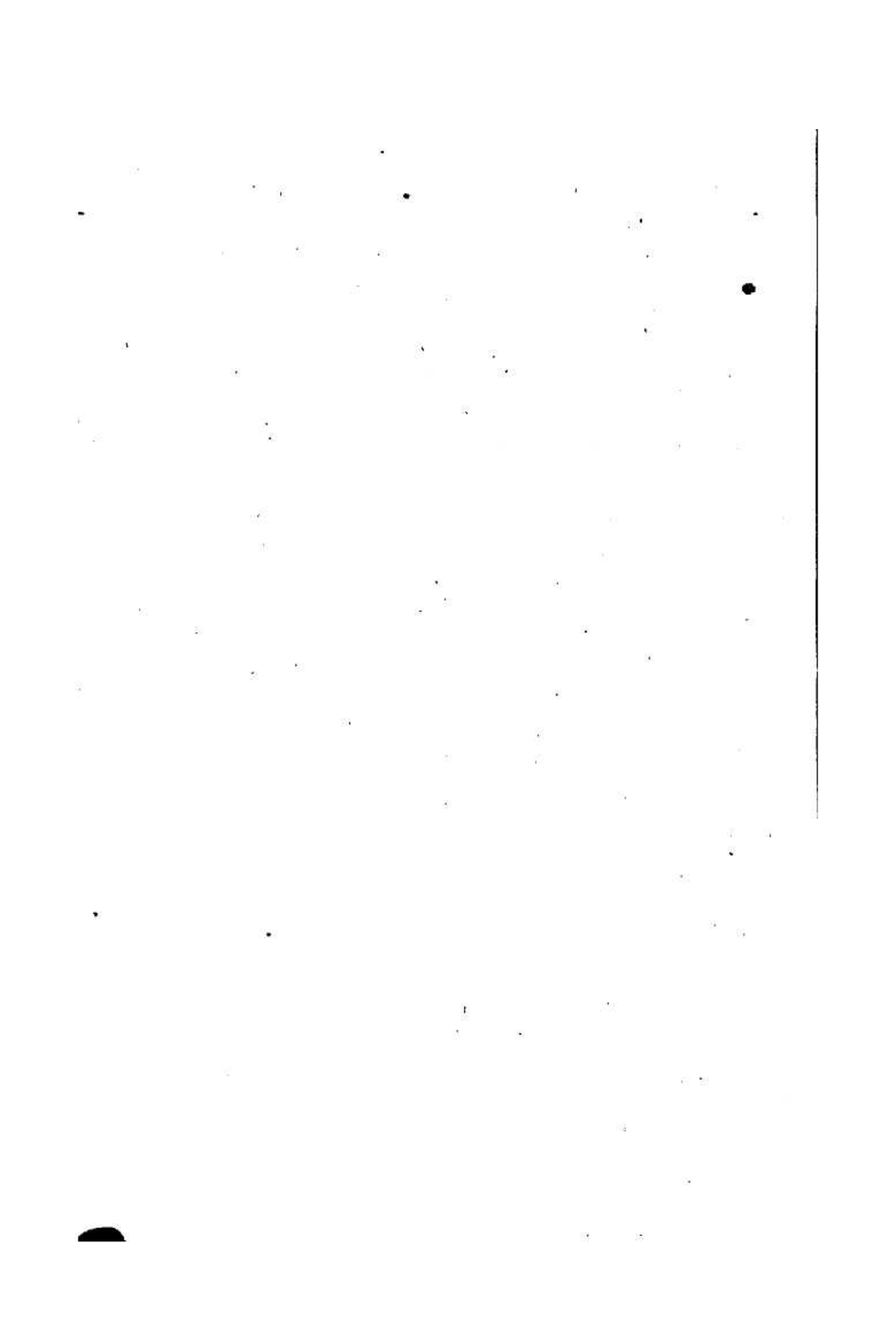
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FRED. LAW OLMSTED

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NEIGHBORHOOD.



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REPORT

UPON A

PROJECTED IMPROVEMENT

OF THE ESTATE OF

THE COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA,

AT

BERKELEY, NEAR OAKLAND.

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NOV. 7, 1923

REPORT.

TO THE REVEREND S. H. WILLEY;
Chairman of Committee:

Sir;

The portion of the estate of the College of California, for the improvement of which a plan is required, lies immediately below the steep declivities of the coast range, north and east of that which has already been laid out in rectangular blocks and streets, and sold in village house lots by the Trustees. No change is proposed to be made in the existing public roads and streets, with which, therefore, any improvements to be made are required to be conveniently associated.

When I first visited the ground at your request, it was proposed that the buildings to be erected for the Institution should be placed upon a site which looked down upon the surrounding country on every side except that which would be to their rear, and that the remainder of the property should be formed into a *Park*, for which it was desired that I should furnish a plan.

After some preliminary study, I advised you that whatever advantages such an arrangement might have in a different climate and soil, it would in my judgment be inappropriate to your site and inconvenient to your purposes, while it would permanently entail burdensome expenses upon your institution.

My objections to the original project having been deemed conclusive, I was requested to review the whole question of the placing of the College buildings and the disposition to be made of the tract within which it had been determined that a situation for them should be selected. The general conclusions to which I was brought by this review having been verbally presented to your Committee, I was instructed to draft a plan in accordance with them. This I have done, and in the present report I have to show how this plan is adapted to serve the main purposes of your corporation, as well as some others of public interest.

The question as to the local circumstances that would be most favorable to the attainment of the objects of a College, is mainly a question of adjustment between a suitable degree of seclusion and a suitable degree of association with the active life of that part of the world not given to the pursuits of scholars. The organic error in this respect of the institutions of the middle ages and the barrenness of monastic study in the present day, is too apparent to be disregarded. Scholars should be prepared to lead, not to follow reluctantly after, the advancing line of civilization. To be qualified as leaders they must have an intelligent appreciation of and sympathy with the real life of civilization, and this can only be acquired through a familiarity with the higher and more characteristic forms in which it is developed. For this reason it is desirable that scholars, at least during the period of life in which character is most easily moulded, should be surrounded by manifestations of refined domestic life, these being unquestionably the ripest and best fruits of civilization. It is also desirable that they should be free to use at frequent intervals those opportunities of enjoying treasures of art which are generally found in large towns and seldom elsewhere.

Such is the argument against a completely rural situation for a College.

On the other hand, the heated, noisy life of a large town is obviously not favorable to the formation of habits of methodical scholarship.

The locality which you have selected is presumed to be judiciously chosen in respect to its proximity to San Francisco. Although it has the advantage of being close by a large town, however, the vicinity is nevertheless as yet not merely in a rural but a completely rustic and almost uninhabited condition, two small families of farmers only having an established home within half a mile of it. This is its chief defect, and the first requirement of a plan for its improvement is that it should present sufficient inducements to the formation of a neighborhood of refined and elegant homes in the immediate vicinity of the principal College buildings.

The second requirement of a plan, is that, while presenting advantages for scholarly and domestic life, it shall not be calculated to draw noisy and disturbing commerce to the neighborhood, or any thing else which would destroy its general tranquility.

The third requirement of a plan is, that it shall admit of the erection of all the buildings, the need of which for college duties can be distinctly foreseen, in convenient and dignified positions,

and leave free a sufficient space of ground for such additional buildings as experience may hereafter suggest, as well as for exercise grounds, gardens, &c.

I proceed to a consideration of the means of meeting the first of these requirements.

San Francisco is so situated with regard to the commercial demands of various bodies of the human race, that it may be adopted as one of the elements of the problem to be solved, that many men will gain wealth there, that the number of such men will be constantly increasing for a long time to come, and that a large number of residences will be needed for these suited to a family life in accordance with a high scale of civilized requirements. If these requirements can be more completely satisfied in the neighborhood of the college than elsewhere, it may be reasonably anticipated that it will eventually be occupied by such a class as is desired.

We have to consider then, what these requirements are, and whether, by any arrangements you can make or initiate, they may be provided for in an especially complete way, on the property which you have to dispose of.

We shall gain but little light in this matter, by studying the practice of those who have had it in their power to choose the circumstances of their residence, the difference in this respect being very great, and leading to no clear, general conclusions. Some, for instance, as soon as they are able to withdraw from the active and regular pursuit of their business in towns, seem to have cared for nothing but to go far away from their friends, and to rid themselves of the refinements of life and the various civilized comforts to which they have been previously accustomed. Others can only make a choice among lofty structures, the windows of which look out on busy streets, so that the roar of toiling, pushing crowds, is never escaped from, while for any enjoyment of natural beauty, the occupants might as well be confined in a prison.

In England, the prevailing fashion of wealthy men for several centuries, has been to build great stacks of buildings, more nearly represented by some of our hotels, than anything else we have, and to place these in the most isolated positions possible, in the midst of large domains, with every sign of human surroundings not in a condition of servility or of friendly obligation to themselves, carefully obliterated or planted out.

This fashion, growing as it doubtless has, out of a conservative dis-