

Annotated Resource List About Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted Legacy

Books by Frederick Law Olmsted:

Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England

The Cotton Kingdom (many editions are available. I recommend one with the intro by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.)

Frederick Law Olmsted: Writings on Landscape, Culture and Society (Library of America, 2015)

Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts, edited by Robert Twombly

Biographies:

FLO.: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted by Laura Wood Roper (older volume, and maybe a little hard to come by, but still excellent)

A Clearing in the Distance, by Witold Rybczynski

Genius of Place, by Justin Martin

On Olmsted, Senior and his landscapes:

Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape by Charles Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau. (Beveridge is the dean of Olmsted scholars. Seek out a library copy or pre-owned copy of this marvelous volume, available in both large format hardback and in paperback. A new edition was just published by Rizzoli. It is a coffee table book. But it doesn't just feature beautiful pictures. It is loaded with wonderful interpretive content by Charles Beveridge.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.:

The first ever full-length biography of Junior/Rick Olmsted, published fall 2021:

Beauty, Efficiency, and Economy: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Landscape Architect, Planner, and Conservationist by Elizabeth Hope Cushing

John Charles Olmsted:

Greenscapes: Olmsted's Pacific Northwest, by Joan Hockaday. (Out of print, but used copies are out there.)

Olmsted in Seattle: Creating a Park System for a Modern City, by Jennifer Ott.

Newly published (2021-2022):

The Power of Scenery: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Origin of National Parks, by Dennis Drabelle

Architects of an American Landscape: Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Reimagining of America's Public and Private Spaces, by Hugh Howard

Olmsted and Yosemite: Civil War, Abolition, and the National Park Idea by Rolf Diamant & Ethan Carr

Before Central Park, by Sara Cedar Miller (publication date May 2022) Sara's thoroughly researched history will reveal much previously unpublished material covering two and a half centuries of the land that became Central Park. Its residents and events include Indigenous peoples, the early Dutch and English families, the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the African American settlement of Seneca Village, Irish and German immigrant farmers, and the Motherhouse of Catholic sisters and students. The book also narrates the two-decades-long struggle to realize Central Park from concept to creation and includes the beginnings of Frederick Law Olmsted's long and celebrated career.

This Land Was Saved for You and Me: How Gifford Pinchot, Frederick Law Olmsted and a Band of Foresters Rescued America's Public Lands, by Jeffrey H. Ryan.

A wonderful and masterful new guidebook to key Olmsted landscapes across America, just published (Sept. 2022), by the Cultural Landscape Foundation:

Experiencing Olmsted: The Enduring Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted's North American Landscapes. With contributions from Charles A. Birnbaum, Arleyn A. Levee and Dena Tasse-Winter.

Calvert Vaux:

Country, Park & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux, by Francis R. Kowsky.

Additional books that might be of interest:

Spying on the South: A Journey Across the American Divide, by Tony Horwitz. A northern writer's accounting of his retracing Olmsted's travels in the South, and his sardonic commentary on the North-South divide, (and related cultural divisions in America), then and now.

The Devil and the White City, by Erik Larson. Historical fiction. (Soon to become a limited dramatic series, in production for Hulu? Though its forward progress is once again in doubt.)

Landscape of a Marriage: Central Park Was Only the Beginning, by Gail Ward Olmsted. Historical fiction. (Yes, Gail is descendent.)

Additional notes:

There are many fine additional books out there that touch on landscape architecture and the Olmsted legacy. There are additional biographical treatments. Plus, there are many additional regional books, that touch on individual states, such as New Jersey or other sub-regions, such as New York City. It should come at no surprise—there are many books focused on Central Park alone. Seek out volumes by Sara Cedar Miler, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, Charles Beveridge, and Ethan Carr, among the many fine scholars who have contributed to scholarship on Olmsted and landscape history in N. America. The broader history of garden and landscape design, and the history of landscape architecture deserves an entire separate bibliography.

Films:

Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing America—Produced and Directed by Lawrence Hott. Laurence Cotton originated this project, served as content provider and Consulting Producer. A

production of Florentine Films/Hott Productions and WNED Buffalo/Toronto. On this special website (not the main PBS website), you can stream the original 60-minute PBS film, watch additional video material and select reading material from a list of essays about the Olmsted legacy.

<https://www.wned.org/television/wned-productions/wned-history-productions/frederick-law-olmsted-designing-america/>

Another fine film about the Olmsted parks:

Olmsted and America's Urban Parks:

<https://www.olmstedfilm.org>

There are additional documentaries out there that focus in on the Olmsted park legacies in such places as Upstate New York (Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester) and Louisville.

A (very) short list of recommended resources:

National Association for Olmsted Parks/NAOP: <https://www.olmsted.org/>

Olmsted Online: <https://www.olmstedonline.org/>

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site/NPS: <https://www.nps.gov/frla/index.htm>

Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted/National Archives:
<https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/projects/catalog/frederick-olmsted>

The Cultural Landscape Foundation: <https://www.tclf.org>

Library of American Landscape History (LALH): <https://lalh.org/>

For information about FLO on Staten Island, Tosomock Farm and the Olmsted-Beil House:

Friends of Olmsted-Beil House: <https://olmstedbeilhouse.org/>

Plus, please keep in mind that many Olmsted park systems (Buffalo, Boston, Louisville) and individual parks (Central Park, Prospect Park) have well-resourced conservancies with beautiful, content-rich websites that often include information that is far broader than any one park or collection of parks. Plus, many smaller parks and clusters of parks have active "friends" groups (Lake Park, Milwaukee, Seattle, the Memorial Park Association (Jacksonville), Olmsted-Beil House, just by way of a few examples. There are many such groups across the U.S. and in Montreal.) All the friends groups have websites loaded with wonderful content. Always remember to check out those websites...and if you are local, make contact. The personnel often include a mixture of professionals and active volunteers who love their park/portfolio of parks, and work to raise funds to maintain and restore those landscapes. Many are trained horticulturalists, landscape design practitioners and historians, and many actively volunteer time to maintain and restore these parks, and to give tours for these special places. You cannot go wrong by reaching out to these extraordinary park advocates across the nation.