

**FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted.** Laura Wood Roper. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. 555 pp. \$15.

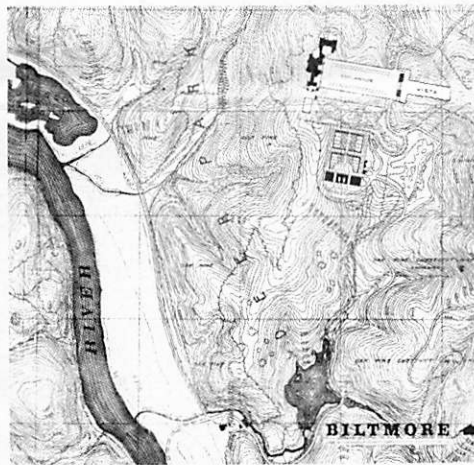
Laura Roper has done for Frederick Law Olmsted what nobody could do for Humpty Dumpty: She has put him back together again. The man who journeyed through the antebellum South and documented the economically wasteful and socially dehumanizing slave system was also the man who later designed and supervised New York City's Central Park. The man who set up a fleet of hospital ships for Union troops was the same man who managed a frontier mining estate in California and first advocated the preservation of Yosemite as a public reservation. At last, with this superb biography, Olmsted emerges as a complete person and, moreover, as a key figure in American history.

Olmsted's life reads like adventure fiction. At a time when travel was slow and difficult, he went just about everywhere, from his native New England, all over the United States and Europe, as far away as China. At a time when disease was everywhere, he and his family had just about everything, or at least enough to make most men stay put.

Considering all that he did, it is no wonder that Olmsted has been studied in parts. Historians, focusing on his travels and writings before and during the Civil War, have recognized him as a voice of conscience and social change. However, they have barely noted his later work, which came to be known as landscape architecture.

On the other hand, design professionals have long admired his landscape achievements, but know him only as the creator of this or that park—perhaps Prospect Park or Belle Isle, Mount Royal or Boston's "Emerald Necklace." Mrs. Roper provides the opportunity to meet all of Olmsted, and to see his works as the realization of social and moral aims which to him far outweighed the artistic.

In today's jargon, Olmsted believed that environment shapes behavior. Pleasant, healthful settings, he felt, could lift the spirits, enhance human dignity and counteract the oppression of hard living,



particularly crowded, tense, urban living. He saw the need for all varieties of recreation. He sought to create civilized communities, distinguished by what he termed "communicativeness." These were his aims when he supervised the gold mines of the Mariposa Estate in 1863 and also, in a very different context, in 1868 when Olmsted, Vaux & Co. planned Riverside, a complete residential suburb outside of Chicago.

It was around these aims that Olmsted oriented his entire career rather than to a specific job or profession. He farmed, he wrote, he published, he constantly sought opportunities for public service, he made money, and more often lost it, and luckily had a generous father bank-rolling him nearly all the while. His landscape architecture practice finally brought him a steady income. Not only did all the career experiences influence his design work, they were a part of it and made it possible. Today's academic/professional training, leading to degrees in architecture, landscape architecture, city and regional planning and numerous specialties, obviously provides a different background. It produces a different professional, whose career is more likely oriented to projects than purposes.

Olmsted's enthusiasm is contagious, and Mrs. Roper could not have captured it if she did not share it herself. She is able to convey it through the text by her scholarly research of Olmsted's own voluminous notebooks and letters, which she has scrupulously footnoted. In fact, her success in exploring him and his work

points up the enormous importance of correspondence. It is worth wondering what kind of personal histories will be derived from people who now communicate so exclusively by telephone.

In addition to his written correspondence, most of which has been acquired by the Library of Congress, Olmsted left thousands of drawings and plans, which remain in his Brookline office. It is unfortunate that the publishers included so little visual material in the book, especially when so much exists, and it would be so valuable. From Montreal to Palo Alto, his plans were rarely executed as he wished, despite his efforts at educating both public and private clients. Preliminary plans, working drawings, old photographs and new—all would have further enriched this volume.

At the peak of his career, Olmsted was a very famous man. Even as a writer, he had gained a sizeable following; as a landscape architect he was a national figure. Why, when we celebrated his sesquicentennial in 1972, had so few people ever heard of him? Why did his fame fade so quickly? In answer to this question, Mrs. Roper suggests that within a short time his achievements simply were taken for granted. Growing up in Boston, I never thought of the ponds and parks as man-made; I was just happy we had them. I think that Mrs. Roper is right. Thanking her for this fine biography, we can now properly thank Olmsted for his remarkable legacy. *Jane Canter Loeffler, AIP Associate, executive secretary for the Olmsted Sesquicentennial, Washington, D.C.*

**The Victorian City: Images and Realities.** Edited by H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. 2 vols. \$80.

The cities with which we struggle today are Victorian cities. The better we understand them, the more success we are likely to have in dealing with their social and economic problems, their transportation and planning, their preservation and their architecture and urban design. No better key to such an understanding in humanistic terms will be found than in this handsome, well illustrated, imaginative and

authoritative pair of volumes. Forty scholars in Great Britain and the United States have been marshalled by England's leading urban historian and his distinguished American colleague to explore the most productive themes.

Architects will find the most of direct interest in the two essays by Sir John Summerson and Nicholas Taylor, but it is the panorama of popular life, health, transportation, housing, suburban development, human migration, education and culture and the rich fabric of urban culture that really makes the volumes the masterpieces of synthesis that they are. Taylor's handling of "the sublime" and Summerson's discussion of the architecture of the Victorian city are masterly and fascinating treatments of urban form.

Eric Lampard's introductory essay establishes the chief value of this topic to those who are not professional historians: what it means to the developing world—facing the prospect of 300 cities of a million or more by the end of this century—that must decide whether to accept this inheritance of the Western model of the city or to strive—perhaps at the United Nations meeting in Vancouver in 1976—for some alternative. At most, they could skip over the anguish and turmoil of the Victorian city that is so well described here, and perhaps develop some new alternative urban model. But for that, one needs to know what is so wisely selected and offered in these pages. *Frederick Gutheim, Hon. AIA, planning consultant, Washington, D.C.*

**Chicago 1910-29.** Carl W. Condit. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973. 354 pp. \$12.50.

Chicago has stood out in my mind ever since I was a child in London. My first impression or curiosity derived from the raised printing on the bottom of nearly every American manufactured product reaching Britain: "Pat Pend, Chicago, Ill." I didn't know who Pat Pend was or why she wasn't well. I still don't; but I do know, with this fine volume, how the great city of Chicago was born, what makes it tick and why, in a sense, it typifies America to the outside world. The book is interesting and stimulating, throwing light on problems in our own communities and solutions which we might use to capitalize on the experience of Chicago.

Inexplicably, the title does not adequately describe the contents. The inside is better than the outside. Very little has to do with 1910-29. In fact, it is not until page 89 that the author starts talking seriously about the period beginning in 1910. Before that, Condit reviews the great building eras of Chicago; the urban community founded in 1830 and its incorporation in 1837, to the fire of 1871; the reconstruction of the city to World War I; the boom of the 1920s, and from

Odessa City Hall, Odessa, Texas.  
Architects: Peter and Fields

## DOORWAY NOTES . . .

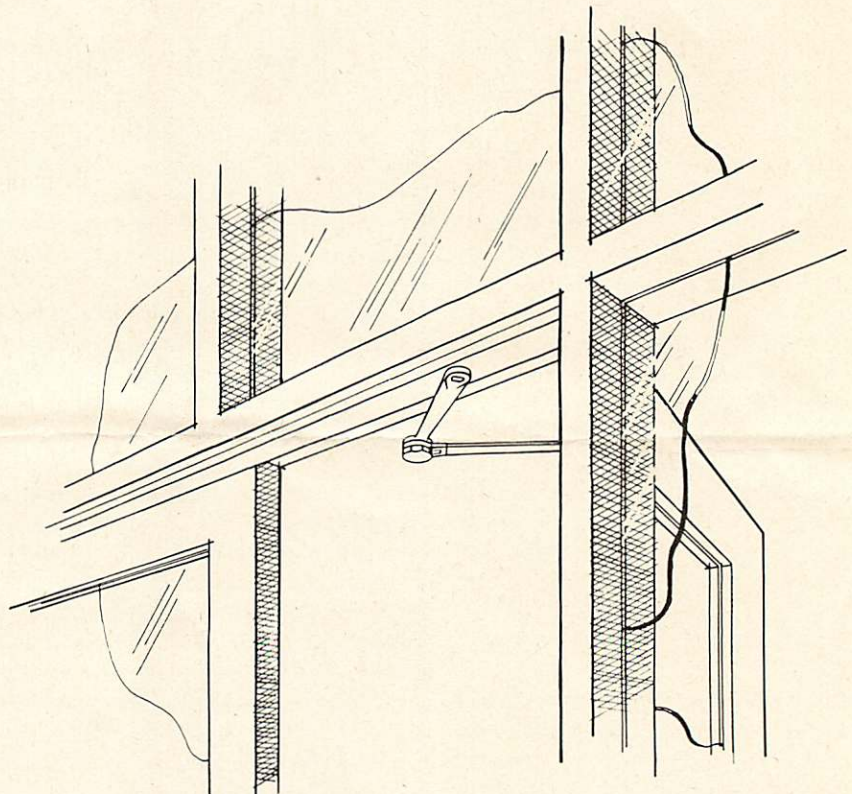
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