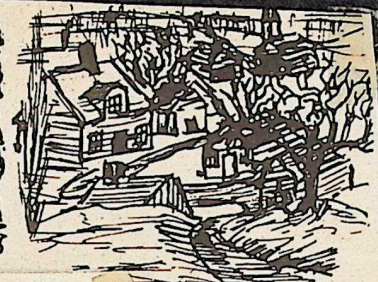


Village
View
by Andrea
Leonard



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One nice thing about people is their generosity. Hardly a week passes someone doesn't send along a newsclipping or magazine they think might bring "inspiration". These are invaluable as source material.

Anyone who's ever tried writing -- a letter to your mother-in-law, a business report, or a story -- knows there's more to it than "inspiration".

Information people share with me is always appreciated, and often becomes a basis for a column. So it is today.

Recently a bundle of magazines arrived. Many were publications unknown to me: in one was an article about a man born over 150 years ago named Frederick Law Olmsted.

Another time I might have been only casually interested, but today, I'm overjoyed to learn more of him for only a month or two ago I first heard his name and promised myself to research and share him with you.

And here it is, a gift! I don't even need to look him up at the library.

Frederick Law Olmsted, a merchant's son, was born in Hartford, Connecticut. At fifteen he was apprenticed to a civil engineer. Six years later he shipped as crew aboard a vessel bound for China.

Upon his return, he lived with his brother, John, in New Haven where John was a premedical student at Yale. Although Frederick didn't attend the college as a student, he joined in campus life, attending lectures and social functions.

His interests centered on scientific agriculture. Three years later he apprenticed himself as a farmer, in Onondaga County, N.Y., and later established himself as a farmer, first in Guilford, Connecticut, and later on Staten Island, where he operated a fruit tree nursery and began writing for agricultural journals.

Before he was 30 he toured Great Britain, parts of Western Europe and the troubled south prior to the Civil War. Some of his published accounts of these tours and impressions are still in print.

In 1857, at the age of 35, he was appointed superintendent of the site that later became New York City's Central Park. Fighting infamous Tammany Hall, maligned in the press, and threatened in letters, his plans for the park were delayed by politicians and others. During the twenty-one years he worked on Central Park, Olmsted resigned several times and was always reappointed.

Together with his partner, Calvert Vaux, he worked on other projects, creating Brooklyn's Prospect Park, park systems in Buffalo, Chicago and Boston, and designing several college

campuses and suburban areas around the country.

Olmsted planned the grounds for the national Capitol at Washington, D.C. and was instrumental in securing the Yosemite as a national reservation.

In 1872 he and Vaux dissolved their partnership, and Olmsted moved his home and office to Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1883. Although still designing urban parks, his work was now diversified to include many private estates. He often collaborated with other architects of national reputation, but more and more, he relied upon his stepson, J.C. Olmsted and his own son, Frederick, Jr.

In 1903 Frederick Law Olmsted died. During his later years he designed and laid out the Marston Estate in Centerville.

That's right. Centerville.

The Marson Estate is now called Fernbrook, and many have been the pros and cons regarding the proposed use of these seventeen (give or take) acres as a residential home for the elderly. This plan has received much publicity in recent months.

Whether the estate, which was sold by the Marston family to the Kalmuses of technicolor fame, and later deeded by them to the Catholic Church, becomes a residential haven for older citizens, or is ultimately broken up into house lots as has also been proposed, is not my decision.

That's a matter for the Board of Appeals, lawyers, perhaps Town Meeting, a referendum, or even -- ultimately -- the courts to decide.

Whatever becomes of the Old Marston Estate, it would be a tragic loss where the quality of the scenery beyond those great gates destroyed.

Hidden in our very midst is this small spot of serene peace and tranquility. As the Cape becomes more and more suburban and day-by-day loses its "rural seaside charm", a treasure such as this is not to be cast lightly aside.

To recreate it would involve millions in money and a century in time -- time for trees and shrubs to grow and final shapes to sprout from plan to perfection.

Whatever the future brings for this remarkable piece of property, I hope it will remain as nearly as possible the way Mr. Olmsted planned it. Further, I hope people who appreciate it may be allowed to visit and know its quality.

Olmsted recommended the Yosemite be kept as nearly as possible in its natural state, allowing only a minimum of access roads and other public accommodations.

His philosophical rationale for the preservation of national and state parks could well be extended to the preservation of the acreage lying behind the houses, fronting the east side of Centerville's Main Street.

Frederick Law Olmsted, in writing of the Yosemite, expressed what many might say of this property; that prime consideration be given 'to the danger that such scenes might become private property and through the false taste, the caprice, or the requirements of some industrial speculation of their holders, their value to posterity be injured'.