

Crafting A Natural Aesthetic: Riverside Cemetery in Moline, IL

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Perched atop a bluff that overlooks the Mississippi River, Riverside Cemetery in Moline, Illinois offers a serene final resting place. Exemplifying the pastoral style of cemetery design prevalent in the 19th century, Riverside provides respite from the surrounding urban environs. Winding, curvilinear lanes with grand names such as Belavista and Montevideo juxtapose more blatantly descriptive names such as Hillside and Summit, and connect the various family plots. Designed by renowned architect William Le Baron Jenney, Riverside offers not only a sweeping view of the present-day city, but also a view into the nation's past.

Below the elegant terraces of the graveyard, an area once simply referred to as "The Green"¹ is now known as Riverside Park. Enjoyed by more than 30,000 visitors² annually, who flock to the several baseball diamonds and tennis courts on the park grounds, Riverside Park is very different from the vision Jenney might have had for the space. Though there is no record of that Jenney completed a design for the open tract of land, Riverside Park has been segmented in such a way as to be aesthetically at odds with Jenney's design repertoire. Furthermore, this physical segmentation contradicts the prevailing aesthetic philosophy of the time.

In this paper, I will detail not only how Riverside Park has deviated from the aesthetic of Jenney's original vision over the past century, but also contextualize cultural

¹ Original Jenney Cemetery Design, 1874

² Estimate of Laura Duran, head of Moline Parks and Recreation, as of 2012

and economic shifts that brought about changes in the design and use of public green space.

Better known for his architectural work in Chicago, Jenney was a man thoroughly of his time, influenced by the needs of a turbulent and transformative society. 19th Century America was a place of rapid and intense change, of war and reconciliation, and of navigating new social, political, and geographic boundaries. The beginning of the century was characterized by the continued struggle to establish a national identity in the wake of colonialism. The young nation grasped for unique and definitive qualities that would set the United States apart from European powers while simultaneously reinforcing economic and political validity on a world scale. Because so many cultural traditions (such as religion and language) were imported from Europe, national identity was sought in the form of something Europe as a continent couldn't claim: unexplored land. Thomas Jefferson, whose presidency ushered in the new century, had a vested interest in exploration of the immense territories to the West. The possibility of scientific discovery was enticing to intellectuals like Jefferson, who was widely acknowledged as a zealous natural historian³. However, love of science was not the only draw to the West. Economic incentives were also alluring. Who knew what riches were waiting to be revealed beyond the Mississippi? Natural resources of excitingly unknown proportions awaited discovery. Jefferson commissioned an ambitious expedition of the Louisiana Purchase around the same time that older, more established cities in the east of the country were also becoming concerned with land, but in a much more immediate sense.

³ P.D. Thomas, *Thomas Jefferson, Meriwether Lewis, The Corps of Discovery and The Investigation of Western Fauna*, Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science, (Wichita: 1996) 69-70.

As industrialization became more prevalent in America, more and more people were drawn from rural areas to centers of industry. Population distribution of the American people began to shift as entire communities sprang up around hubs of industry⁴. In the year 1800, the population of New York City (then and still the largest city in the United States) was 60,515. By mid century, in 1850, New York's population had ballooned to 515,547, only to increase exponentially over the next five decades to nearly 3,437,202 inhabitants by 1900⁵.

The average American's relationship with landscape changed from nearly constant interaction with the natural world (such as was the case with agriculture) to nearly constant interaction with the built environment. The visual arts and literature of 19th-century America reflected this urbanization. American painters became enamored with the majesty of North American mountains and rivers. Just 50 miles from the most populous city in the country was a landscape that inspired an entire artistic movement, known as the Hudson River School.

Perhaps the most well known painter of the group, and often cited as the founder, British-born Thomas Cole spent much of his career capturing the nuances of the Catskill Mountains and the New England countryside, and his work did much to establish a distinctly American identity that was bound fast to the land.⁶ In contrast to European

⁴ For example, the Lowell factories, which employed "girls" (usually teenaged or in their twenties) from rural areas and provided housing, Thomas Dublin, *Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: "The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us,"* Labor History 16 (Oxfordshire: 1875) 99-101.

⁵ "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, last modified June 1998, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>

⁶ "These artists created a style of which the natural scene was the inspiration and which had no counterpart in Europe, where, at the time, art was largely the expression of the romantic aspects of life and nature."

Romanticism, 19th Century American landscape artists focused on the raw beauty of the natural world and sought to replicate that beauty faithfully.⁷ Additionally, the landscapes of the Hudson River School served as hallmarks of the pastoralist mentality, depicting American society and industry in harmony with the natural bounty of the wild and untamed land. Thomas Cole's 1839 work *New England Scenery* (figure 1) exemplifies the Hudson River School balance of natural splendor and human habitation.

Cole's subtle mastery is typified by the placement of the artifices of man within the existing physical environs. In *New England Scenery*, the tree to on the left facing side of the image dominates the composition, creating a scale that firmly places humanity within nature. Structures that are comparatively large on a human scale are dwarfed in the juxtaposition Cole establishes. The neatly defined bridge in the middle ground of the image, alive with the comings and goings of locals (one can see a miniature horse and buggy and an even tinier pedestrian) is nestled in the atmospheric river haze and the stoic face of river bluffs. Though the steeped church in the distance provides a visual continuity from the verdant hills to the pleasantly pastel sky, the structure does not supersede in size the surrounding hills. Man is fitted perfectly within the picturesque environment, not overwhelming the existing contours of the land.

The work of the Hudson River School was paralleled in writing by such environmental wordsmiths as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson's 1836 essay *Nature* catapulted a new philosophy of Transcendentalism to the forefront of 19th-century intelligentsia. Emerson wrote of how "the foregoing generations

Henry S. Francis, *Thomas Cole: Painter of the Catskill Mountains*, *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 24, No. 7 (July 1937) 113.

⁷ "...the artist's sheer love of woods and country, his interest in the aspects of pure natural phenomena seem to permeate the scheme and to outrun his concern for the romantic element as such or for the conscious representation of realism as exemplified in the work of contemporary Frenchmen." Francis, 114.

beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes.” and asked of his contemporaries “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?”⁸ Emerson contended that Western philosophy had long dichotomized humanity and nature, separating nature, art, and people from the concept of self. To Emerson, Nature was an encompassing term that enveloped all of existence, and thus integrated all aspects of human life, physically and spiritually connecting people to each other and their environment. Industrialization and the subsequent urbanization of society was distancing people from their innate connection with the earth and each other. In a lecture delivered in 1842, Emerson expressed his skepticism of technological innovation, stating

“Soon these improvements and mechanical inventions will be superseded; these modes of living lost out of memory; these cities rotted, ruined by war, by new inventions, by new seats of trade, or the geologic changes: -- all gone, like the shells which sprinkle the seabeach with a white colony to-day, forever renewed to be forever destroyed.”⁹

Instead of succumbing to the allure of transient industrialism, Emerson urged his audience to seek “fuller union with the surrounding system,” much like the relationship between man and nature that Cole’s paintings espoused.

Critics, who suggested that the new philosophy “transcended” beyond rationality and sanity, had originally used the term “Transcendental” pejoratively.¹⁰ A Transcendental manifesto of sorts was published six years after Emerson’s *Nature*.

⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in Norton Book of Nature Writing, edited by Finch, Robert and Elder, John, 140. New York: W.W.Norton & Co. Ltd., 2002.

⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Transcendentalist*, A Lecture read at the Masonic Temple, Boston, January 1842, accessed from <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/transcendentalist.html>.

¹⁰ Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (University of California Press: 1999) 185.

Generally attributed to Charles Mayo Ellis, this thin pamphlet professed a holistic approach to living. According to the essay, nature was “the only foundation of practical religion, of government, laws, and the rule of right between man and man.”¹¹

Transcendentalism ultimately fizzled as a movement in the late 1840s as the philosophy stressed a hyper-individualized approach to finding one’s place within nature, which in turn made for a somewhat inconsistent ideology. Emerson was famously quoted as saying “Damn consistency,”¹² as he realized that anything done on an individual level is bound to be inconsistent. Instead, Emerson advocated for individual action on the grounds that as a part of Nature and of existence, one’s actions would meld seamlessly into the actions of his kindred, and this melding would be visible from a distance.¹³ Despite the dissolution of the philosophical movement, the affects of the holistic approach espoused by Transcendentalists remained culturally prominent, especially in terms of human interaction with the natural world.

As urban populations increased, so too did the need to accommodate the increasing number of deceased in urban areas. In the early part of the 19th Century, Boston in particular was grappling with this particular challenge. The problem was both physical and cultural. With many more people rising to the middle class as a result of industrialization, an increase in income led to a mounting concern for respectful and proper treatment of the dead. Additionally, there was a growing sensitivity amongst the burgeoning middle class to all things filthy, including the garbage and dirt that had

¹¹ Charles Mayo Ellis, *An Essay on Transcendentalism (1842)*, (Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints: Gainesville, 1954) 19.

¹² Walter Harding, *Introduction to An Essay on Transcendentalism*, (Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints: Gainesville, 1954) 7.

¹³ Emerson continued “Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now...For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem. These varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of thought. One tendency unites them all.” Walter Harding, *Introduction to An Essay on Transcendentalism*, (Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints: Gainesville, 1954) 7.

heretofore been an assumed element of the urban landscape. Dead and decaying bodies were understandably placed within this category, and there was ever-increasing concern about the healthfulness of burial within bustling metropolises.¹⁴

Like New York, Boston's population had expanded rapidly, tripling in the five decades after the United States became a free nation. Established in 1799, the Boston Board of Health was formed to create a more livable city. Attempts were made by the Board to regulate refuse sewers, privies, harbor dumping, the handling of fish and untanned hides, and the depth of graves. Grave depth had been an issue for the city since the 1730s – Boston's three original burial grounds were full to bursting, and new graves were routinely four occupants deep.¹⁵ Even the opening of a fourth graveyard in 1756 did little to alleviate the pressures of post-mortem overcrowding. Physicians began to warn against cattle grazing on the burial grounds by the 1790s, fearful of disease. The implementation of South Burying Ground in 1810 still did not relieve the pressure of burial overload.¹⁶ By 1816, burial in individual graves was banned altogether. Indeed, the fear of grave-spawned diseases was alive and well along the Atlantic coast during this time. A study conducted by the New York Board of Health in 1806 attributed "malignant epidemic fever" as occurring the most frequently in the neighborhoods surrounding the congested Trinity churchyard gravesite¹⁷. Overcrowding and the subsequent threat of contagion aside, Bostonians had long regarded gravesites as dwellings for vagrants or as

¹⁴ "Many urbanites became sensitive to an unprecedented degree to the variety of foul smells that filled their environment; they began to consider repulsive the garbage and dirt that filled their streets." Blanche Linden-Ward, *Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989) 149.

¹⁵ Linden-Ward, 150.

¹⁶ Linden-Ward, 151.

¹⁷ Linden-Ward, 153

plunder for vandals¹⁸. Though crypt burials were proposed by Saint Paul's Episcopal Church as a possibility to alleviate strains on in-use burial sites, the proposal became religiously factious and was ultimately abandoned as a long-term solution for Boston due to continued concerns about the medical viability of such burial.¹⁹

In short, burial sites at this time were considered a medical and aesthetic detriment to the urban environment. Aesthetic detriment translated into economic detriment as property values slumped in areas surrounding burial grounds, and it was this impetus that ultimately spurred the creation of a new and different kind of graveyard.

Consequently, 1826 featured several calls for pastoral cemeteries in Boston newspapers. In a letter to the editor of the *Columbian Centinel*, one writer poetically envisioned a peaceful and noble final resting place situated on the hills to the south of the city that would compel Bostonians to visit frequently in hopes of learning "the lesson of our own mortality; and that, from those we love, even death itself cannot separate us."²⁰

This writer, who called himself only "A Traveler," proposed a graveyard that was at once aesthetically appealing and philosophically appeasing as well as situated at a healthful distance from the urban center. This idea was in perfect accordance with the ideas of Dr. Jacob Bigelow, a Boston physician and professor at Harvard College's new medical school. Bigelow advocated vociferously for a burial system in which "nature is permitted to take its course, when the dead are committed to the earth under the open sky, to become early and peacefully blended with its original dust."²¹ Meditations on the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Though churches gained permission to erect crypts and bury members of their congregation on the church grounds within the city limits, medical concerns as well as concerns about whether or not the wealthy would hold a monopoly on crypt burial were publicized to a great degree in contemporary newspapers. Linden-Ward, 156 – 58.

²⁰ Abel Bowen, "Burial in Cities," *Boston News-Letter and City Record* (March 4, 1826), 126-29.

²¹ Linden-Ward, 171.

cyclic nature of existence were completely in keeping with the tenets of Transcendentalism, as was the final cemetery design.

After several years of unsuccessful lobbying for a new rural cemetery, Bigelow's interest in the project cooled. Though busy with publications and other professional concerns, Bigelow managed to keep up with friends²². One friend, George Watson Brimmer, happened to purchase seventy-two acres of hilly forest situated between Cambridge and Watertown in 1825. Watson and Bigelow were both interested in the natural history of New England, particularly in the botanical viability of the region. As towns and cities expanded, more and more New England countryside was becoming relegated to farmland to feed the burgeoning urban populations. Watson had fond memories of the forest that became his property. As a student at Harvard, Watson had frequented the woods affectionately referred to as "Sweet Auburn," an allusion to the rather melancholy Oliver Goldsmith poem "The Deserted Village" (1770) which opens with the line "SWEET AUBURN! Loveliest village of the plain." Brimmer was keen on preserving the trees in particular, and purchased the land for primarily sentimental reasons, though the location was prime for commercial use. Oaks, beeches, cedars, and pines graced the hills of Sweet Auburn. Also present on the property was a pear orchard and a walnut grove²³. Intent on maintaining the beauty of the land, Brimmer originally planned on making his residence in Sweet Auburn. The landscape was in perfect harmony with the English manor garden. Historian Blanche Linden-Ward describes Sweet Auburn as follows:

"Several acres of 'wildwood,' with large and varied forest trees, were separated from each other by lawns, ponds, old orchards, and rugged slopes and valleys. A

²² Linden-Ward, 174.

²³Linden-Ward, 177- 180.

glacial moraine crossed the property, creating a varied terrain of hills, grassy knolls, dells, bogs, rambling ponds, bosks, copses, and clearings.”²⁴

The terrain was the result of four successive periods of the Ice Age, with soil varying between sand plains and clay beds above a slate ledge fifteen to two hundred feet deep.²⁵

For Brimmer’s part, he added ornamental trees (as any good New England hobbyist horticulturist would have²⁶) and carved several sinuous roads through the property, even staking out potential sites for a house and stables. However, due either to the depressed economy of the 1830s or to Brimmer’s failing health, no further changes were made to the estate. Either through friendly coercion from Bigelow or through his own meditations on mortality coupled with experiencing Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, Brimmer came around to the opinion that Sweet Auburn would make a perfect new cemetery for Boston, and sold the land to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for \$6,000 to further the cause²⁷.

Henry A.S. Dearborn, then head of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, became the chief designer of Mount Auburn cemetery. Aided by the prodding of Zebedee Cook, Jr., an insurance executive and horticultural hobbyist, the final design was a triumph of moralized aesthetics, Romantic ideals, and municipal needs.²⁸ Incorporating existing features, such as the various wetlands and bodies of water already contained by the site, the landscape lent itself well to popular folklore that purported the sequestration of spirits to ponds and lakes. Even Henry David Thoreau described his experiences at

²⁴ Linden-Ward, 178.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Among other connections, both Brimmer and Bigelow were involved with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which at the time was deeply concerned with the connection between fantastic landscapes and historically successful civilizations. Linden-Ward, 174-78.

²⁷ Linden-Ward, 180 – 181.

²⁸ Linden-Ward, 182.

Walden Pond with spiritually infused language, detailing his interactions with the pond with reference to religious ritual.²⁹ Following Thoreau's precedent, allegorical meaning was ascribed to the water features of Mount Auburn. Trees, too, held certain superstitious reputations for housing the spiritual remains of the dead³⁰ Cook urged that the site be multi-functional, and presented on this topic at the 1830 Second Annual Festival of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. In his address, Cook counseled that the "improvement and embellishment of grounds devoted to public use, is deserving of especial consideration," and went on to propose that the "place of graves affords to the serious and contemplative, instruction and admonition." To Cook, Mount Auburn was poised to become a place where "the heart is chastened, and the should is subdued, and the affections purified and exalted," and thus making the point that a "suitable regard for the dead is not inconsistent with the precepts of religion or our duty to the living." There moralistic aims would be accomplished through design by incorporating "rural embellishments." Cook furthermore offered the would-be designers and architects of the cemetery instruction on the types of embellishments that would best convey the transience of human experience as compared to the infinity of God. In regards to flora, Cook asserted that

"the weeping willow, waving its graceful drapery over the monumental marble, and the sombre foliage of the Cyprus should shade it, and the undying daisy should mingle its bright and glowing tints with the native laurels of our forests."³¹

²⁹ When expounding on his daily routine at Walden, Thoreau described his mornings in this way: "I got up early and bathed in the pond: that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things I did." Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, (New York: Peebles Press International Inc., first published in 1854), 76.

³⁰ Linden-Ward, 181.

³¹ Zebedee Cook Jr., "An Address Pronounced before the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in Commemoration of its Second Annual Festival, the 10th of Sept. 1830" (Boston: Isaac R. Baits, 1830) 27 - 28.

While Cook's sentiments were not "environmental" in the sense that the trees Cook mentions are exotics (weeping willows, for example, are Asiatic³²), his statement reflects the more Romantic and thus symbolic approach to the natural world in the 19th Century. This symbolism is more blatantly discussed in Cook's instructions for florists, of whom he implored that their contributions to the cemetery design be

"manifested in the collection and arrangement of beautiful and fragrant flowers, that in their budding and bloom and decay they should be the silent but expressive teachers of morality, and remind us that, although, like the flowers of autumn, the race of man is fading from off the earth, yet like them his root will not perish in the ground, but will rise again in a renewed existence, to shed the sweet influence of a useful life, in gardens of unfading beauty!"

The idea of adding and arranging elements to direct the existent beauty in untouched Nature is much more in keeping with the contemporary European Romantic constructs of super-imposed symbolism on the natural world. However, the Romantic *placement* of man within Nature, common to both European Romantics and American Romantics, is expressed in Cook's meditations on plant symbolism as in Thomas Cole's miniscule depiction of travelers in *New England Scenery*.

The end result was an exceedingly pleasant park-like environment that made Mount Auburn the archetype for "rural cemeteries" all across the country, so named because of the suburban location, irregular terrain sculpted into thoroughfares for the dead as well as the living, and because of the emphasis on trees as a major element of landscape³³. Even the use of "cemetery" is significant in that word is derived from the Greek for "the sleeping place," now ascribed to places previously called "burial grounds"

³² Arthur Plotnik, *The Urban Tree Book: An Uncommon Field Guide for City and Town*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 145.

³³ Linden-Ward, 213.

or “graveyards” that had long been considered unsavory and only suitable for the dead, the homeless, and the deranged.³⁴ The site lived up to Cook’s ideas multipurpose space, attracting locals who wished to tarry amongst the melancholy monuments or to simply escape the stresses of urban life and courting couples seeking an afternoon’s diversion. Students were urged by their teachers to visit and learn from the virtuous lives of those buried. Ministers and others of high ethical merit echoed Cook’s attitude and named Mount Auburn a place of extreme moral fortitude, impressing in all who visited the importance of family values and the resultant social solidity when faced with inevitable death³⁵.

Mount Auburn inspired international acclaim as well, prompting one impressed visitor (who called himself “A Son of Britain”) to write in the November 30th, 1853 edition of the British Banner:

“Mount Auburn Cemetery is five miles from Boston, and a mile and a half from Harvard College, Cambridge. It contains about one hundred and fifty acres, and is well laid out. I was much pleased with the absence of long and high-wrought epitaphs on the monuments here. Many of them have nothing on them but the name of the individual whose dust lies beneath. The avenues are called by the names of trees: as Elm, Pine, and Cypress, and the paths by the names of flowers, as Geranium and Lupine, so that the situation of any grave may be given, and readily found.”

It was this design that also likely inspired Frederick Law Olmsted, the mastermind behind New York City’s Central Park. Born on April 22nd 1822, Olmsted came of age during the height of the Mount Auburn rage. A native to Hartford, Connecticut, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that Olmsted’s family, like many other

³⁴ James Mitchell, *Significant Etymology: or, Roots, Stems and Branches of the English Language*, (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1908), 152.

³⁵ Linden-Ward, 295.

families of the time, may have made the one hundred or so mile journey to visit Mount Auburn³⁶. If not in childhood, certainly in adulthood Olmsted would have visited the famed rural cemetery.

The agricultural enthusiast, journalist, ardent traveler, and intellectual³⁷ was brought to the Boston area by a landscaping design commission in the late 1870s, some twenty years after the creation of Central Park.

Commissioned to help plan and execute what became known as Boston's "Emerald Necklace," a series of parks that created a 7-mile-long network around the city, Olmsted spent much time and deliberation on the design for a university arboretum. The Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University was established in 1872. Transferred from the estate of James Arnold, a whaling merchant from New Bedford, Massachusetts, the income from the land that became the arboretum was designated in the deed between the Arnold trustees and the College to be utilized in the "establishment and support of an arboretum, to be known as the Arnold Arboretum, which shall contain, as far as practicable, all the trees [and] shrubs...either indigenous or exotic, which can be raised in the open air."³⁸

Due to the creativity and leadership of the Arboretum's first director, Charles Sprague Sargent, funds for Olmsted's design were raised through a unique 1882 agreement that allowed the City of Boston to lease the Arnold Arboretum for 1,000 years while still maintaining the control and direction of the Arboretum staff. On the condition

³⁶ A description of Olmsted's childhood home concludes that "there was in John Olmsted's household not luxury but a sort of humane worldliness, or urbanism not quite consistent with the idea of Puritanism, and symbolized by the piano, the light reading, the wine and spirits and good table, and frequent travel for pleasure..." Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted*, (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1973) 12.

³⁷ Roper, 35-86.

³⁸"Our History," last modified March 22, 2012, <http://arboretum.harvard.edu/about/our-history/>.

that the Arboretum was open and free to the general public everyday of the year, the city maintained the perimeter walls, gates, and roadways system.

Olmsted designated specified areas within the Arboretum for groups of plants and established the path and roadway systems. For Sargent, imparting scientific knowledge was paramount, and it was decided that plant collections would be arranged by family and genus as per the then-accepted Bentham and Hooker system within the more curving and aesthetically pleasing design of Olmsted. The Arnold Arboretum is situated less than ten miles from Mount Auburn Cemetery, and thus the cemetery could have certainly been a place that Olmsted visited while engaged with the Boston Parks Department.

Though surviving documents can support little evidence of a visit to Mount Auburn, there is proof that Olmsted visited and was impressed enough to write home about a similarly “rural” cemetery, Spring Grove, in Cincinnati, Ohio.³⁹ Olmsted’s designs speak volumes about his inspirations. In 1863, Olmsted received his first Californian commission for a rural cemetery, to be implemented in Oakland. The steep and treeless site captured Olmsted’s interest⁴⁰. The cemetery now features a tree-lined avenue leading from the entrance into the grounds as well as many curved pathways that softened the slope of the steep hills, creating gradual terraces. The stylistic similarities of Mountain View to both Mount Auburn and Spring Grove are striking.

³⁹ Note from Chapter XXIII, Roper: “O to J.H. Brayton, 26, 29 March 1864, private letter book, pp. 79, 92; O to JO, 16 October 1864.”

⁴⁰ Roper, 277.

Each cemetery features curvilinear pathways, the inclusion of naturally occurring water features, and a blending of indigenous plantings and plantings that served a purely symbolic (as well as aesthetic) purpose. At Mountain View, Olmsted maintained the native California oaks but incorporated Italian cypress, Lebanese cedar, and Italian stone pine.⁴¹ In Victorian symbolism, cypress was indicative of grief and death,⁴² whereas pines symbolized longevity, prosperity, and friendship in adversity,⁴³ all suitable messages for a cemetery. Like Cook, Olmsted saw park and cemetery design as a way to advocate for moral and social reform. True to Transcendentalist individualism, Olmsted was religious but did not subscribe to any organized religion, and had a particular disdain for religions that encouraged divisions between people and hindered democracy.⁴⁴ Olmsted described his relationship to organized religion as a “war with all sectarianism- and party trammels. The tyranny of priests and churches is as great a curse to the country and the world as Negro slavery.”⁴⁵

Olmsted believed democracy and societal reform could be achieved through the careful manipulation of the landscape, for Nature had a healing effect on

⁴¹“History at Mountain View,” accessed March 31, 2012, <http://www.mountainviewcemetery.org/history.html>.

⁴² Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers, a history*, (Virginia: Virginia University Press, 1995), p 174.

⁴³ Seaton, p. 41

⁴⁴ Carol J. Nicholson, *Elegance and Grass Roots: The Neglected Philosophy of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society, Spring, 2004, Vol. XL, No.2, p. 341.

⁴⁵ Charles E. Beveridge, and Paul Rocheleau, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1998) p. 9.

mankind. Central Park was the epitome of this healing, effecting a “harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city.”⁴⁶ Having reasoned that this was true of parks and cemeteries, Olmsted turned his attention to an even grander goal: planning an entire community that would serve as a shining example of how humanity could not only occasionally visit a park, but truly live in harmony with nature without sacrificing modern convenience. The relationship between interior and exterior environment, especially in terms of design, is purely spatial. By incorporating more space into a plan for suburban dwelling, Olmsted successfully highlighted a uniquely American sensibility, harkening back to the need to differentiate from Europe. Because American cities were relatively new (especially in the Midwest) the spatial configurations of built structures and landscape were comparatively endless. Alternately, European cities were limited to long-established habitation patterns. Therefore, community planning and design in the 19th Century offered the opportunity for a uniquely American approach to providing shelter.

In 1868, Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux were approached to design a suburban development to the south of Chicago. This development became the Village of Riverside, the one of the first planned communities in the United States. A National Historic Landmark since 1970, Riverside features many of the same elements of Olmsted’s parks and cemeteries. Utilizing expansive green park ways

⁴⁶ Nicholson, p 340.

and curvilinear streets that wind through forested land, Riverside earned the moniker “Village in the Forest.”⁴⁷

It was through Riverside that Olmsted began a professional relationship with William Le Baron Jenney, a contemporary architect best known as the “Father of the American Skyscraper.”⁴⁸ Born in 1832 in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, Jenney was the son of an affluent whale ship owner. As a child, Jenney was surrounded by maritime culture and the roar of the Industrial Revolution⁴⁹. As Jenney biographer Theodore Turak stated, the Industrial Revolution fundamentally changed the relationship between the exterior and interior of built spaces in such a way as to highlight functionality over aesthetic⁵⁰. Practicality over frivolous design elements became a trademark of Jenney’s architectural style, though it is not as immediately evident in his landscape architecture portfolio. This proclivity to favor functionality over form can be attributed in part to Jenney’s education.

Like Olmsted, Jenney had a hard time pinning down a single career trajectory. He finally settled on engineering, and began his training in this field at Harvard . However, Jenney was disappointed with Harvard and decided instead to pursue schooling in Paris at the Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures, where he studied for three years under Louis Charles Mary. Mary espoused a rationalism in

⁴⁷ “About Riverside,” last modified 2010.

http://riverside.il.us/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={DC4955B9-2DBD-4383-A011-14F34A625889}

⁴⁸ “William Le Baron Jenney,” last modified 2006.

<http://www.lib.colum.edu/archives/college/buildings/lejenney.htm>

⁴⁹ Theodore Turak, *William Le Baron Jenney: A Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 11.

⁵⁰ Turak mentions the mill wheel by way of example, stating, “ The most efficient transfer of motion dictated a mill of narrow width and about five stories high. In a sense the structure became part of the machinery it enclosed.” 11.

design that necessitated function precede form⁵¹. Under Mary's tutelage, Jenney took courses on drainage and grading, and was able to witness the majority of the construction of Alphand's⁵² Parisian parks. After Jenney's formal education ended, he was able to hone his training in the field, designing earthwork fortifications and bridges first under Grant, and then under Sherman, during the American Civil War.

It was through the war that Jenney and Olmsted became acquainted. While Jenney was working to improve structural defenses, Olmsted was working with the United States Sanitary Commission⁵³, a connection Jenney reminded Olmsted of in a letter dated September 5th, 1865⁵⁴. Jenney included with this letter a resume, which outlined not only his Parisian education, but his engineering experiences during the war as well.⁵⁵ Though Jenney's original entreaty is lost, Olmsted replied almost immediately asking for more information. The second letter from Jenney to Olmsted, dated September 15th of the same year, described Jenney's credentials in greater detail, but more importantly expressed genuine interest in landscape architecture. Jenney asserted that:

“ There is no situation that I can imagine when I should derive more pleasure from the work I might be called upon to perform as one in which Architecture,

⁵¹ William H. Tisler, editor, *Midwestern Landscape Architecture*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 58.

⁵² Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand was in charge of Parisian landscape architecture as Napoleon III's director of public works. Alphand did much to create green space in the city, and often incorporated English-influenced pastoral elements into his designs. Susan Cahill, *Hidden Parks of Paris: A Guide to the Parks, Squares, and Woodlands of the City of Light*, (Charles Griffin and Co. LTD: 2012), 92.

⁵³ Olmsted actually directed the United States Sanitary Commission, a relief organization created to assuage the “rude and imperfect means of ministering to [the soldiers of the Civil War] such aid and comfort as was suggested by the anxious and tender solicitude of their friends, rather than by considerations of the necessities of a military organization.” Charles J. Stillé, *The History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1866), 17-18.

⁵⁴Turak, 75.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Gardening, and Engineering were associates and I most earnestly desire and hope that some such position is within my reach⁵⁶.”

The expressed wish for confluence between architecture, gardening, and engineering perfectly mirror Jenney’s educational history as well as his professional aspirations, and Olmsted was duly impressed. Though Jenney had wrote originally to garner work in the Boston area (where Olmsted was situated at the time), he ultimately decided to move to the midwest, where he had lucrative business options. Another deciding factor in Jenney’s relocation was the woman who was become his wife (a Miss Cobb, from Cleveland) also lived in the Midwest, and they were married less than two years after Jenney’s initial letter⁵⁷. Jenney set up shop in Chicago, slowly building his reputation as a landscape designer and architect. Working on such pivitol projects as the West Parks Commission⁵⁸, Jenney transformed the city of Chicago and inspired the subsequent incorporation of public green space into city and municipal design throughout the country.

In 1869, Jenney was hired onto the Riverside project, most likely to implement the design details that Olmsted and Vaux were too busy to attend to within the suburb⁵⁹. However, in his 1879 book *L’art des jardins*, Edouard André⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Turak, 75-76.

⁵⁷ Turak, 77

⁵⁸ An important commission for Jenney, the West Parks Commission led to the creation of Humbolt Park, Douglas Park, and Garfield Park as well as the connecting boulevard system between the sites. “William Le Baron Jenney,” Columbia College of Chicago, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.lib.colum.edu/archives/college/buildings/lejenney.htm>. Through these parks, Jenney wanted to offer a variety of landscape experiences, incorporating a plethora of water features, botanical oddities, and even zoological attractions. Reuben M. Rainey, “William Le Baron Jenney and Chicago’s West Parks: From Prairies to Pleasure-Grounds,” in *Chicago Architecture: Histories, Revisions, Alternatives*, ed. Charles Waldheim and Katerina Rüedi Ray. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 37-52.

⁵⁹ Turak, 95.

attributes the entirety of Riverside to Jenney⁶¹. Equally probable (and all the more curious) is that Olmsted may have met André when he visited Paris in the 1850s, as indicated by a letter of introduction dated October 31, 1859 in which Olmsted asked Baron Haussmann to arrange a meeting between the leading Parisian architects of the time and Jenney⁶². The fact that André knew Olmsted renders his assertion that Jenney planned the bulk of Riverside all the more convincing.

Regardless of who did what, the planning and implementation of Riverside was an indication of shifting American thought in regards to balance between the urbanity of city living and the charms of rural life. As such, Riverside differs from other suburbs in several key ways, the first of which being the layout of the streets. Influenced by the curvature of the Des Plaines river⁶³, Riverside's curvilinear streets departed from the staid grid pattern of most Midwestern communities⁶⁴. Constructed on a rail line six miles west of the city with the intention of self-sufficiency⁶⁵ Riverside was a predecessor of what is now referred to in modern urban planning and design parlance as *transit oriented development*⁶⁶. However, unlike the modern, high density concept of transit oriented design, nearly half of

⁶⁰ Edouard André was a prominent figure in 19th Century French landscape architecture and was an assistant to Alphand. André also authored *L'art Des Jardins*. Richard Stephen Hopkins Jr., *Engineering Nature: Public Greenspaces in Nineteenth-century Paris*, (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2008), 143.

⁶¹ Turak, 95.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Christopher Vernon, *Graceland Cemetery: A Design History*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 98.

⁶⁴ Turak, 95.

⁶⁵ Turak, 95

⁶⁶ While transit oriented development should be comprised of a mixed-use community with high-density residential and commercial establishments within 2,000 feet of the transit stop, Riverside, IL provided two of the main components of this design system, namely easy access to a metropolitan area and a focus on community self-sufficiency. John Randolph, *Environmental Land Use Planning and Management*, (Washington DC: Island Press, 2004) 118.

Riverside was comprised of open public parkland. Subsequently, the layout of Riverside guaranteed personal satisfaction by way of expanded physical space to all who chose to live there, as promised by the Riverside Improvement Company:

“A life at Riverside...is rather the elegant culmination of refined tastes which cannot be gratified in the city, and is the proper field for the growth of that higher culture which finds in art, nature, and congenial society combined a greater variety of pleasures than can be found between the high walls of city houses, and afford a fuller, freer, happier life for man, woman and child, than a home in the city⁶⁷.”

Jenney's work with Olmsted not only stylistically impacted his later work but also may have helped him secure the commission for Riverside Cemetery in Moline, IL. In addition to his work on two major projects (Riverside and the West Parks Commission), notices of other projects, including plates illustrating house designs that Jenney had developed with his partner Sanford Loring, were published in *American Builder and Journal of Art*⁶⁸.

While Jenney was busy building his career, Charles Deere, son of John Deere, was building his family. During his courtship of Chicago socialite Mary Dickenson, Charles Deere traveled frequently between his hometown of Moline, IL to Chicago⁶⁹. During his visits to Chicago, Deere encountered Jenney's house designs, either in print or in person. Deere commissioned a house to be built in Moline, and the result was a Swiss Villa-style dwelling that the family christened “Overlook” in recognition

⁶⁷ From the Riverside Improvement Company's 1871 publication *Riverside in 1871*, as quoted by John Archer. John Archer, “Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (May, 1983), 156.

⁶⁸ Vernon, 89.

⁶⁹ Kathleen Suesy et al., *Echoes From Riverside Cemetery, Moline, Illinois*, (Moline: Heritage Documentaries Inc., 2009), 128.

of the scenic hill-top location. It is likely that Jenney also had a hand in the landscaping of the seven acres surrounding Overlook. Contemporary photos indicate a long, winding road that concluded in a circular drive (fig. 5). In true pastoral style, the grounds featured architectural points of interest such as a gazebo and a greenhouse⁷⁰. The commission and completion of Overlook was much anticipated, and one newspaper predicted that the home would prove “one of the finest residences in the county, equipped with all modern conveniences.”⁷¹ The growing city of Moline could be seen from the home, as well as the factory for the family business, John Deere Plow Works⁷².

Though the early 1870s were a time of financial hardship for much of the country, the John Deere company managed to prosper, even through the Panic of 1873⁷³. However, that prosperity was hard-won. The farmers that made the agricultural equipment company successful were plagued with monetary instability in 1873 and a particularly virulent grasshopper invasion in 1874⁷⁴. As an industrial city, workers in Moline were not immune from the floundering economy, and the 1870s were a time of unrest within the labor sector⁷⁵. Providing financial stability as well as cultural unity for the area was a certainly a goal of the Deere family, and may have contributed to the decision to commission Riverside Cemetery, as rural cemeteries and other public greenspaces were seen as the mark of a gentrified and

⁷⁰ Vernon, 103.

⁷¹ “Moline,” *Rock Island Union*, 20 March 1872, n.p.

⁷² “Deere-Wiman House,” Butterworth Center & Deere-Wiman House, accessed April 12, 2012. <http://www.butterworthcenter.com/index.php>.

⁷³ Wayne G. Broehl, Jr., *John Deere's Company: A History of Deere & Company And Its Times*, (United States: Double Day & Company, Inc, 1984),162.

⁷⁴ Broehl, Jr., 163.

⁷⁵ Broehl, Jr., 236.

cultured city. The Deere family was very conscious that refocusing the attention of disgruntled worker to civic pride may well be able to quell the mounting financial concerns of the region.

As Overlook was completed, the Moline elected the mostly retired John Deere as mayor⁷⁶. As mayor, John Deere became involved with the Moline Cemetery, located at the edge of town. Deere, with the help of the city council, established a board of directors to oversee the cemetery. Through the actions of this council, Moline Cemetery was renamed Riverside Cemetery and a seventy-four –acre plot of land was secured to expand the burial site⁷⁷. Friendly rivalry may have played a part in the ultimate design of the new cemetery as Rock Island had recently (as of 1855) established Chippiannock Cemetery. Occupying some sixty acres, Chippiannock was designed by Almerin Hotchkiss, a famed landscape architect who had laid out the Brooklyn’s celebrated Greenwood Cemetery⁷⁸. Described by the 1908 edition of *Historic Rock Island County* as “beautifully laid out in winding drives and walks,” incorporating grounds that were “sloping, with the hill top flat, backed by a wooded ravine,” which was “nicely timbered with fine old trees⁷⁹.” Moline’s own rural cemetery would be judged against a very high standard.

While only a surveyor is named in the *Historic Rock Island County* entry on Riverside Cemetery⁸⁰, it is likely that either John Deere or his increasingly influential

⁷⁶ Vernon, 105.

⁷⁷ *Historic Rock Island County*, 159

⁷⁸ *Historic Rock Island County*, 136

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Historic Rock Island County*, 159

son Charles suggested that Jenney get the commission for the cemetery layout⁸¹. The matter was decided at a city council meeting in 1874⁸². Though few town records indicate that Jenney designed Riverside Cemetery, his seal is evident on the original plans for the burial ground (fig. 6). Reminiscent of the village of Riverside's winding roadways, Jenney designed sinuous paths through the cemetery that complemented the existing topography. On the peripheral slopes, Jenney utilized his engineering background to transform the bluff into a series of terraces, simultaneously affording greater slope stability and the rolling, irregular terrain favored by Romantic design (fig. 7).

The water features in Jenney's original design evoke the incorporation of water features into the planned suburban community of Riverside, particularly in the asymmetry of the water feature labeled "Lake" on Jenney's plan.

Though the plan does not indicate plantings, a tree survey conducted (See addendum) in April of 2012 shed some light on Jenney's intentions in regard to vegetation. 244 trees were catalogued by location, species, and DBH (diameter at breast height). From the DBH measurement, relative age of the tree could be determined and thus could be used as an indicator of whether or not Jenney might have chosen to plant a particular tree in a particular location, or even if he had chosen to let a particular pre-existing tree to coexist with his own design. However, this method of determining age of a given tree is rather unreliable, especially in an environment that carefully tends to the needs of the tree (providing ample water,

⁸¹ Suesy et al., 128.

⁸² "Special Meeting of the City Council," Moline Weekly Review, 20 February 1874.

sunlight, and space to stretch roots) such as in the well-maintained grounds of a cemetery. The trees are able to reach their growth potential with limited competition under conditions rarely seen in less orchestrated environments. Furthermore, DBH is an even less accurate way of determining age for gymnosperms (a group of seed-producing plants that includes conifers, cycads, Ginkgo, and Gnetales⁸³) as the primary growth (height) is generally a better indicator of age than the secondary (width) growth of these organisms. That being said, other indicators such as growth patterns in root structure can allude to the age of the organism. For example, many headstones in Riverside Cemetery are flanked by two trees (usually Mediterranean Cypress) and many of these trees have grown around the headstones, in some cases shifting the actual monument over time. This shifting would indicate that the trees have been in this location for roughly the same amount of time as the headstones, many of which were dated contemporary to or slightly after the implementation of Jenney's design.

Additionally, the species of the trees is significant in that a predominance of non-native species show a Romantic proclivity towards a predetermined "natural" aesthetic, often imbued with symbolic and sentimental meaning, such as Zebedee Cook described in his instructions for the plantings of Mount Auburn. For example, of the 244 trees surveyed, roughly 40% of all trees were *Cupressus sempervirens*, Mediterranean Pine. As mentioned previously, cypress trees held symbolic meaning⁸⁴.

⁸³ Govil, C.M. *Gymnosperms: Extinct and Extant* (Meerut: Krishna Prakashan Media (P) LTD., 2007), 1-3.

⁸⁴ This meaning is further explained in the *Trees of Riverside Cemetery* addendum.

This picking and choosing and careful arranging of the supposedly “natural” highlights an idiosyncrony in the pervasive Transcendental philosophies of the time. Nature was only considered beautiful and meaningful if the aesthetic was carefully crafted to reflect a particular symbology. In the design of places of mourning, this symbology was perhaps more evident than in green spaces designed to serve a more ambiguous purpose.

One such ambiguous space was incorporated into Jenney’s original design in the form of The Green. Spanning the distance between the terraced hill of the newly cemetery land and the lower cemetery plot, The Green functioned as an unbroken swath of negative space (again playing to the American love of a seemingly infinite expanse of space) that connected new and old seamlessly. Over the past century, The Green has been modified considerably. Around the turn of the century, intense debate was incited over whether or not using a parcel of land designated as a cemetery was irreverent. After years of debate, the Cemetery Board began selling the land between Jenney’s terraced Riverside and the original plot in 1909. The proceeds of this sale went to the maintenance costs of Riverside. 1911 brought the beginnings of a Greek Revival style masoleum that was completed by 1916 and featured #1 Peerless Buff stone, numerous stained glass windows, with 800 single crypts and 48 companion niches⁸⁵. The masoleum is arguably one of the only post-Jenney additions that is in keeping with the style of the original design. As English landscaping was relied heavily on motifs from the ancient world of Greece and Rome (such as the columned gazebo on the grounds of the Deere-Wiman House),

⁸⁵ Kathleen Seusy, personal notes on Riverside Cemetery, n.p.

and 19th Century American landscape architects looked to their European counterparts for design inspiration, the Greek theme is in keeping with the overall feel of the cemetery. Additionally, the positioning of the mausoleum serves to visually connect the original cemetery plot with Jenney's design. More stylistically aberrant changes followed. In 1935, the first iteration of a public swimming pool was installed on The Green. Then, 1941 marked the establishment of the Playground and Recreation Board (now the Park & Recreation Board), and it was this decision-making body that brought about the more major changes to the originally open space⁸⁶. Perhaps the most dramatic change came in the form of the baseball diamonds erected in the 1950s (fig. 8).

Now, the once-expansive connecting strip of land from the old cemetery to Riverside is segmented into harsh geometric shapes. No doubt Jenney, with his love of undulating line and sense of connectivity between one landscape element to the next, would be sorely disappointed with the modern Green. The dramatic shift in aesthetic (from designs focused on endless space and on the confluence of man and nature to a tight designation from one space to another and an almost strict delineation of recreational activity into modules) goes beyond Jenney's potential disappointment. This shift in landscape design is indicative of a philosophical shift.

To be fair, the world has changed a great deal since Jenney's time. A shift in the pervasive secular philosophies is only fitting. Over the past century, the world has been at war twice. Penicillin was invented. Advances in agricultural technologies have led to more (if temporary) food security. Whereas women were

⁸⁶ Todd Slater, e-mail message to author, 3 February 2012.

barely entering the workforce in Jenney's time, women now constitute a considerable portion of the labor pool. A black man was recently elected president, whereas slavery was still rampant through much of Jenney's lifetime. People now have the ability to connect and communicate instantly with anyone anywhere on the planet, yet are increasingly isolated by the same technologies that enable this communication. Out of all of the turmoil of the 20th Century came a pervasive sense of the Postmodern.

Like Transcendentalism, Postmodernism focuses on the experience of the individual. Unlike Transcendentalism, Postmodernism does not espouse any universal, connected truth, nor does Postmodernism fully validate the experience of the individual. Rather, Postmodernism balances tenuously on defined sets of group standards, validating specific and normative standards that apply only to a particular group at a given time⁸⁷. Gone are the days of secular moralizing through ubiquitous symbology.

The Postmodern idea of individual identity as contingent on a momentarily insulated group identity correlates to the need for well-defined spaces within the public realm. How can we know who we are if we don't know who we are with and for what purpose? Explicitly structured spaces offer a solid sense of identity, if only for a brief time – while I am on the baseball field, I am a baseball player – a concept completely at odds with the holistic and timeless Transcendental approach to structuring human and environment interactions. While not strictly natural in that the natural world must be carefully orchestrated to express the holistic, Jenney's

⁸⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age*, 14.

design aesthetic sought to reinforce the eternal connectedness of humanity and the broader ecological environment, and of life and death.

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