

DESCRIPTION OF A PLAN FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CENTRAL PARK, "GREENSWARD," 1858

(As reprinted, 1868)

Topographical suggestions

A general survey of the ground allotted to the park, taken with a view to arrive at the leading characteristics which present themselves as all-important to be considered in adapting the actual situation to its purpose, shows us, in the first place, that it is very distinctly divided into two tolerably equal portions, which, for convenience sake, may be called the upper and lower parks.

The upper park

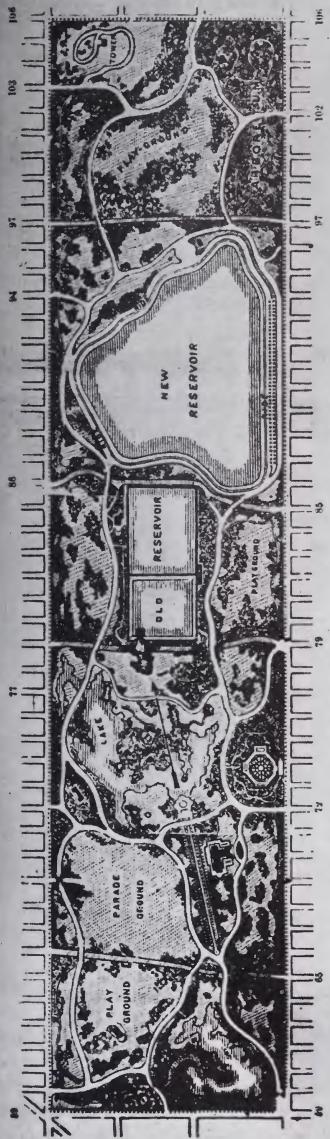
The horizon lines of the upper park are bold and sweeping and the slopes have great breadth in almost every aspect in which they may be contemplated. As this character is the highest ideal that can be aimed at for a park under any circumstances, and as it is in most decided contrast to the confined and formal lines of the city it is desirable to interfere with it, by cross-roads and other constructions, as little as possible. Formal planting and architectural effects, unless on a very grand scale, must be avoided; and as nearly all the ground between the Reservoir and 106th Street (west of the Boston road) is seen in connection, from any point within itself, a unity of character should be studiously preserved in all the gardening details.

The lower park

The lower park is far more heterogeneous in its character¹ and

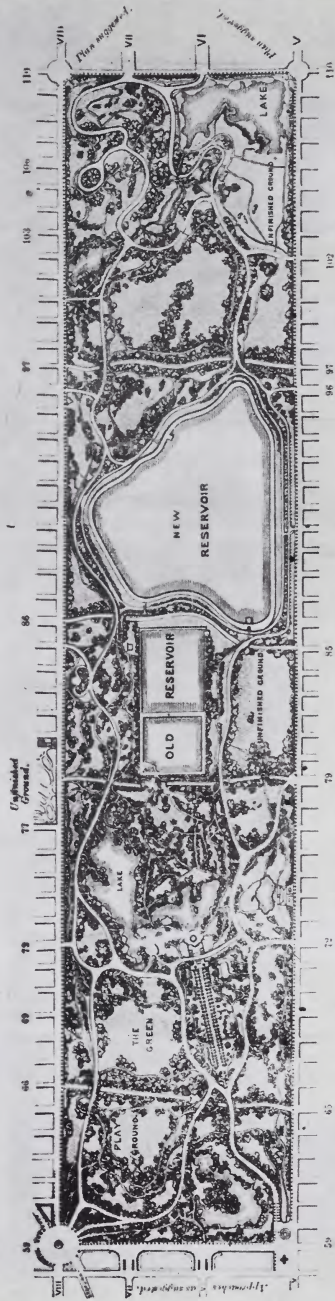
¹ ED. NOTE: The following selection from the Annual Report of the Commissioners of Central Park for 1858, "Topography of the Site—The Lower Park," will give the reader some idea of the condition of the Park lands in 1856 and 1857 prior to the adoption of the "Greensward" plan.—

"When purchased by the city, the southern portion of the site was already a part of its straggling suburbs, and a suburb more filthy, squalid and disgusting can hardly be imagined. A considerable number of its inhabitants were engaged in occupations which are nuisances in the eye of the law, and forbidden to be carried on so near the city. They were accordingly followed at night in wretched hovels, half hidden among the rocks, where, also, heaps of cinders, brick-bats, potsherds, and other rubbish, were deposited by those who had occasion to remove them from the city. During the autumn of 1857, three hundred dwellings were removed or demolished, by the Commissioners of the Central Park, together with several factories, and numerous 'swill-milk' and hog-feeding establishments. Large tracts partially covered with stagnant water were superficially drained, and 10,000



FIRST STUDY OF DESIGN FOR THE CENTRAL PARK.

From a Wood-cut made in 1865.



MAP OF THE CENTRAL PARK, 1868.

From the Reprinting of the "Greenward" Report

The Olmsted and Vaux Design

will require a much more varied treatment. The most important feature in its landscape is the long rocky and wooded hill-side lying immediately south of the Reservoir. Inasmuch as beyond this point there do not appear to be any leading natural characteristics of similar consequence in the scenery, it will be important to draw as much attention as possible to this hill-side, to afford facilities for rest and leisurely contemplation upon the rising ground opposite, and to render the lateral boundaries of the park in its vicinity as inconspicuous as possible. The central and western portion of the lower park is an irregular table-land; the eastern is composed of a series of graceful undulations, suggesting lawn or gardenesque treatment. In the extreme south we find some flat alluvial meadow; but the general character of the ground is rugged and there are several bold, rocky bluffs, that help to give individuality to this part of the composition.

Such being the general suggestions that our survey has afforded, it becomes necessary to consider how the requirements of the Commissioners, as given in their instructions, may be met with the least sacrifice of the characteristic excellencies of the ground.

Preliminary considerations

Up to this time, in planning public works for the city of New York, in no instance has adequate allowance been made for its increasing population and business; not even in the case of the Croton Aqueduct, otherwise so well considered. The City-Hall,

cart loads of loose stone taken from the surface and conveyed to the borders of the Park, furnishing materials for the construction, during the winter, of the present enclosing wall. . . .

"Even after the removal of the buildings of all kinds, and the drainage of the pools, the lower park still presented a most confused and unsightly appearance. Before it had been taken for the Park, the grading of streets through and across it had been commenced, and the rude embankments and ragged rock-excavations thus created, added much to the natural irregularities of its surface. A swampy valley . . . extended from the corner of Sixty-fourth street and Eighth avenue to the corner of Fifty-ninth street and Fifth avenue. A similar valley . . . extended from the junction of Seventh-seventh street and Eighth avenue to that of Seventy-fourth street and Fifth avenue. Between Sixty-seventh and Seventy-second streets, and adjoining Fifth avenue, was a tract . . . of ten acres, moderately smooth, and used as a pasture and market garden. A similar tract . . . of nearly equal dimensions, lay midway between the last mentioned one and the west side of the Park. Both tracts were rocky, and a portion of the smaller was a bog.

"The remainder of the lower park was made up of low hills and hillocks, the rock of which they were chiefly composed everywhere cropping out, sometimes boldly, more generally barely breaking through the soil, not unfrequently with a considerable surface, nearly flat, in the depressions of which a few meagre shrubs and grasses struggled for existence. With the exception of portions of the two swampy valleys and the two ten-acre tracts above mentioned, and about three acres on Sixty-sixth street near Sixth avenue, there was not an acre in which the great underlying ledge of gneiss rock did not, in some form, thrust itself above the surface."

the best architectural work in the State, and built to last for centuries, does not at this time afford facilities for one-third the business for which it was intended. The present Post-Office, expensively fitted up some ten years ago, no longer answers its purpose, and a new one of twice its capacity is imperatively demanded. The Custom-House, expressly designed for permanence and constructed to that end at enormous expense less than twenty years ago, is not half large enough to accommodate the present commerce of the city.

The explanation of this apparently bad calculation is mainly given with the fact that, at every census since that of 1800¹ the city's rate of increase has been found to be overrunning the rate previously established.

A wise forecast of the future gave the proposed park the name of Central. Our present chief magistrate, who can himself remember market-gardens below Canal street, and a post-and-rail fence on the north side of City-Hall park, warned his coadjutors, in his inaugural message, to expect a great and rapid movement of population toward the parts of the island adjoining the Central Park. A year hence five city railroads will bring passengers as far up as the park, if not beyond it. Recent movements to transfer the steamboat landings and railroad stations, although as yet unsuccessful, indicate changes we are soon to expect.

The 17,000 lots withdrawn from use for building purposes in the park itself, will greatly accelerate the occupation of the adjoining land. Only twenty years ago Union Square was "out of town"; twenty years hence, the town will have enclosed the Central Park. Let us consider, therefore, what will at that time be satisfactory, for it is then that the design will have to be really judged.

No longer an open suburb, our ground will have around it a continuous high wall of brick, stone, and marble.² The adjoining shores will be lined with commercial docks and warehouses; steamboat and ferry landings, railroad stations, hotels, theatres, factories, will be on all sides of it and above it; all which our park must be made to fit.

The demolition of Columbia College, and the removal of the cloistral elms which so long enshadowed it; the pertinacious demand for a division of Trinity churchyard; the numerous instances in which our old graveyards have actually been broken up; the indirect concession of the most important space in the City-Hall park for the purposes of a thoroughfare and the further contraction it is now likely to suffer; together with the constant enormous expenditure of the city and sacrifices of the citizens, in the straightening and widening of streets, are all familiar facts, that teach us a lesson of the most pressing importance in our present duty. To its application we give the first place in our planning.

¹ ED. NOTE: Misprinted 1860 in the text of 1868.

² ED. NOTE: The first report on the Central Park, 1856, mentions the "suburb views" from high places in the Park.

The transverse roads

Our instructions call for four transverse roads. Each of these will be the sole line of communication between one side of the town and the other, for a distance equal to that between Chambers street and Canal street. If we suppose but one crossing of Broadway to be possible in this interval, we shall realize what these transverse roads are destined to become. Inevitably they will be crowded thoroughfares, having nothing in common with the park proper, but every thing at variance with those agreeable sentiments which we should wish the park to inspire. It will not be possible to enforce the ordinary police regulations of public parks upon them. They must be constantly open to all the legitimate traffic of the city, to coal carts and butchers' carts, dust carts and dung carts; engine companies will use them, those on one side the park rushing their machines across it with frantic zeal at every alarm from the other; ladies and invalids will need special police escort for crossing them, as they do in lower Broadway: eight times in a single circuit of the park will they oblige a pleasure drive or stroll to encounter a turbid stream of coarse traffic, constantly moving at right angles to the line of the park movement.

The transverse roads will also have to be kept open, while the park proper will be useless for any good purpose, after dusk, for experience has shown that even in London, with its admirable police arrangements, the public cannot be secured safe transit through large open spaces of ground after nightfall.

Foreign examples

These public thoroughfares will then require to be well lighted at the sides, and, to restrain marauders pursued by the police from escaping into the obscurity of the park, strong fences or walls, six or eight feet high, will be necessary. A public road thus guarded passes through the Regent's Park of London, at the Zoological Gardens. It has the objection that the fence, with its necessary gates at every crossing of the park drives, roads or paths, is not only a great inconvenience but a disagreeable object in the landscape.

To avoid a similar disfigurement an important passage across the garden of the Tuileries is closed by gates at night, forcing all who would otherwise use it to go a long distance to the right or left.

The form and position of the Central Park are peculiar in respect to this difficulty, and such that precedent in dealing with it is rather to be sought in the long and narrow Boulevards of some of the old Continental cities of Europe, than in the broad parks with which, from its area in acres, we are most naturally led to compare it. The Boulevards referred to are, however, generally used only as walks, not as drives or places of ceremony. In frequent instances, in order not to interrupt their alleys, the streets crossing them are made in the form of causeways and carried over on high

arches. This, of course, destroys all landscape effect, since it puts an abrupt limit to the view. Some expedient is needed for the Central Park by which the convenience of the arrangement may be retained, while the objection is as far as possible avoided.

The present design

In the plan herewith offered to the Commission, each of the transverse roads is intended to be sunk so far below the general surface that the park drives may, at every necessary point of intersection, be carried entirely over it, without any obvious elevation or divergence from their most attractive routes. The banks on each side will be walled up to the height of about seven feet, thus forming the protective barrier required by police considerations, and a little judicious planting on the tops or slopes of the banks above these walls will, in most cases, entirely conceal both the roads and the vehicles moving in them, from the view of those walking or driving in the park.¹

If the position which has just been taken with regard to the necessity for permanently open transverse thoroughfares is found to be correct, it follows necessarily that the 700 acres allowed to the new park must, in the first instance, be subdivided definitely, although it is to be hoped to some extent invisibly, into five separate and distinct sections, only connected here and there by roads crossing them; and if the plan of making these thoroughfares by sunken roads is approved, they will, as it appears to us, from the nature of the ground, have to be laid down somewhat on the lines indicated on the plan. If so, the problem to be solved is narrowed in its dimensions, and the efforts of the designer can be no longer directed to an arrangement that shall agreeably use up the space of 700 acres allotted, but to making some plan that shall have unity of effect as a whole, and yet avoid collision in its detailed features with the intersecting lines thus suggested. It is on this basis that the present plan has, in the first instance, been founded. If the sunken transverse roads were omitted, the design would not be less complete in character; but it is, on the other hand, so laid out that the transverse thoroughfares do not interfere materially with its general or detailed effect.

Surface transverse roads

After having planned the park drives agreeably to these views, we observed that three additional moderately direct, transverse roads had occurred. These will afford facilities for crossing the park to all vehicles of classes which it will be proper to admit upon them, such as hackney coaches, and all private carriages; and thus seven transverse roads will be really provided to be used during daylight. Four roads will probably be amply adequate for the

¹ NOTE, 1868.—In execution, the four traffic roads have been carried through the Park in the manner suggested.

night traffic needing to cross the park; but it might be questioned if this number would be sufficient during the day.

The exterior

As it is not proposed that the park proper shall be lighted at night, it is well worth while to consider if the advantages which it offers as an interesting promenade may not yet in some way be obtained at night.

Fifth Avenue

The ordinance that regulates the width of Fifth avenue, provides for an open space of fifteen feet on each side, exclusive of that required for the sidewalks and the roadway; consequently, a space of thirty feet in width is already prepared for on this side of the park for its whole length.

Eighth Avenue Railroad

On the Eighth avenue a similar arrangement may probably be effected, and as there would be no occasion to back up carts against the park side of the avenue, it is feasible to carry the railway tracks close to the edge of the walk, thus leaving a clear space for carriages on the opposite or building side and making the access to the park side more clean and convenient.¹

Fifty-Ninth and One Hundred and Sixth streets

On the southern boundary it is not desirable to reduce the already moderate width of the carriage way. It is, on the other hand, a question whether, as the streets and the park both, in reality, are the property of one owner—the City—this street should not be treated in a similar manner. It will, from its position, be in time rather crowded with traffic, and will, therefore, have some claim to be widened on this ground alone. As a question of beauty of arrangement for the park itself, however, it is conceived that if by this management a more stately character than could otherwise be obtained would be secured to the outer boundaries of the park, it would be cheaply purchased at the sacrifice of a few feet at the south end, off its present length of two and a half miles. In riding along any of the avenues, the eye cannot fail to be struck with the great difference in dignity of effect, between such streets as Fourteenth and Twenty-Third, and those intermediate, and it would be a matter of regret that a source of effect so easily obtained, should be lost in connection with the grand approaches to the park, because it does not happen that its boundaries at present coincide with the wide streets laid out on the working plan upon which the city is being constructed. If, moreover, the advantage of the evening promenade is allowed to be of importance, we

¹ NOTE, 1868.—The sidewalks have been treated in execution as proposed, but the suggestion in regard to the railroad has not yet been carried out. In the Brooklyn Park however the intended arrangement has been fully realized.

should be sorry to dispense with this section of it, which would be the only portion having a direct communication from the Sixth and Seventh avenues.

Treatment of boundary lines

For the purpose of concealing the houses on the opposite side of the street, from the park, and to insure an umbrageous horizon line, it is proposed, as will be seen in the plan, to plant a line of trees all around the outer edge of the park, between the sidewalk and the roadway.¹ On approaching the Fifth and Eighth avenue entrances, this line of trees along Fifty-Ninth street will come prominently into view, and have a handsome effect, if the street is widened; but if Fifty-Ninth street is allowed to remain as a narrow street, it is feared that it will be difficult to prevent this boundary line of the park from having a contracted and somewhat mean appearance. Hence, we have thought it proper in our plan to assume the advantage and practicability of this arrangement to be conceded; but, if this should not be the case, it will be readily perceived that it forms no essential part of our design.²

On the space originally provided for a sidewalk on the park side of the streets and avenues, there will, in any case, be room for such a line of trees as we have proposed. The continuous exterior mall should by no means be given up, even though it cannot be made in all parts as wide as we have proposed. At many points, and frequently for quite long distances, it will form an elevated terrace, commanding extensive views over the park, of the most interesting character, and a mere parapet-wall three or four feet high, will, in such cases, be all-sufficient for the safety of promenaders and the protection of the park from interlopers.

Fifth Avenue entrance

The finest approach from the city is certain to be along the Fifth avenue, and it has been thought necessary to view with special care the angle of the park first reached from this direction, because it will be generally felt that immediate entrance should be had at this point.³

The grade of the avenue has been established so high that considerable filling-in would be required to avoid a rapid descent, but directly this single difficulty is overcome, the ground beyond has great advantages for the purpose of a dignified entrance to the park. A massive rock (*see No. 1 on Folded Map*) that will be found

¹ NOTE, 1868.—This feature of the design has been partially carried into execution and is in progress from year to year, as the street and avenue grades become settled.

² NOTE, 1868.—In execution, 59th street has been treated as here recommended.

³ NOTE, 1868.—We submitted a plan for a much needed amplification in this approach during the earlier stages of the work, but the suggestion has not yet been acted on. (ED. NOTE: see Part II, Chapter VI, p. 392.)

in connection with this requisite made-ground, offers a sufficiently large natural object to occupy the attention, and will at once reduce the artificial feature to a position of minor importance. If, next, we stand upon that portion of the rock which (a little north of the large cherry-tree) is at grade-height, we find that there is another rocky hillock (*see No. 2 on Folded Map*) within a short distance, in the direction a visitor to the park would most naturally pursue—that is to say, towards the centre of the park. This can be easily reached by slightly raising the intermediate ground; by then sweeping to the right, the natural conformation of the surface offers an easy ascent (by the existing cart-way over Sixty-Third street) to a plateau (two rods west of the powder-house), directly connected with the extensive table-land which occupies the centre of the lower half of the park.

From this plateau (now occupied mainly by the nursery) a view is had of nearly all the park up to the Reservoir, in a northerly direction; and on looking to the south and west, we perceive that there are natural approaches from these directions, which suggest that we have arrived at a suitable point of concentration for all approaches which may be made from the lower part of the city to the interior of the park.

The Avenue

Vista Rock (*see No. 3 on Folded Map*), the most prominent point in the landscape of the lower park, here first comes distinctly into view, and fortunately in a direction diagonal to the boundary lines, from which it is desirable to withdraw attention in every possible way. We therefore accept this line of view as affording an all-sufficient motive to our further procedure. Although averse on general principles to a symmetrical arrangement of trees,¹ we consider it an essential feature of a metropolitan park that it should contain a grand promenade, level, spacious, and thoroughly shaded. This result can in no other way be so completely arrived at as by an avenue, which in itself even, exclusive of its adaptability for this purpose, contains so many elements of grandeur and magnificence, that it should be recognized as an essential feature in the arrange-

¹ ED. NOTE: From what is said a few lines below about the inherent grandeur and magnificence of an avenue, and from the frequent deliberate use of symmetrically planted trees in later work both by Mr. Olmsted and by Mr. Vaux, it does not appear that they were, precisely speaking, "averse on *general principles* to a symmetrical arrangement of trees." It probably would be more exact to say, first, that they were averse on general principles to the introduction of symmetrical (or other conspicuously formal) arrangements of trees among the elements of naturalistic scenery, unless done with great discrimination and restraint, with a clear appreciation of the contrast in esthetic character involved, and in pursuit of some well conceived higher unity of design; and, second, that they had a prevailing personal tendency (in harmony with the wide-spread fashion established by the English school of landscape gardening, in the previous century) to prefer the beauty of natural and naturalistic scenery, while clearly and ardently appreciating the greater fitness and appropriate beauty of formal arrangements under special conditions.—F. L. O., Jr.

ment of any large park. The objection to which it is liable is that it divides the landscape into two parts, and it is therefore desirable to decide at what point this necessity can be submitted to with the least sacrifice to the general effect. The whole topographical character of the park is so varied, so suggestive of natural treatment, so picturesque, so individual in its characteristics, that it would be contrary to common sense to make the avenue its leading feature, or to occupy any great extent of ground for this special purpose. It must be subservient to the general design, if that general design is to be in accordance with the present configuration of the ground, and we have therefore thought that it should, so far as possible, be complete in itself, and not become a portion of any of the leading drives. There is no dignity of effect to be produced by driving through an avenue a quarter of a mile long, unless it leads to, and becomes an accessory of, some grand architectural structure, which itself, and not the avenue is the ultimatum of interest. An avenue for driving in should be two or three miles long, or it will be petite and disappointing. We have therefore thought it most desirable to identify the idea of the avenue with the promenade, for which purpose a quarter of a mile is not insufficient, and we can find no better place for such a grand mall, or open air hall of reception, as we desire to have, than the ground before us.¹

The Promenade

In giving it this prominent position, we look at it in the light of an artificial structure on a scale of magnitude commensurate with the size of the park, and intend in our design that it should occupy the same position of relative importance in the general arrangement of the plan that a mansion should occupy in a park prepared for private occupation. The importance that is justly connected with the idea of the residence of the owner in even the most extensive private grounds, finds no parallel in a public park, however small, and we feel that the interest of the visitor, who, in the best sense is the true owner in the latter case, should concentrate on features of natural, in preference to artificial, beauty. Many elegant buildings may be appropriately erected for desirable purposes in a public park, but we conceive that all such architectural structures should be confessedly subservient to the main idea, and that nothing artificial should be obtruded on the view as an ultimatum of interest. The idea of the park itself should always be uppermost in the mind of the beholder. Holding this general principle to be of considerable importance, we have preferred to place the avenue where it can be terminated appropriately at one end with a landscape attraction of considerable extent, and to relieve the south entrance with only so much architectural treatment as may give the idea that due regard has been paid to the adornment of this principal promenade, without interfering with its real character.

¹ NOTE, 1868.—In execution, this avenue has been planted with elms, as suggested later in the report, and is now called "The Mall."

This avenue may be considered the central feature in our plan for laying out the lower park, and the other details of arrangement are more or less designed in connection with it.

Parade ground

To the west is the parade ground, containing about 25 acres, that may, at a moderate expense, be levelled and made suitable for its purpose;¹ and also some eight or ten acres of broken ground, that will be more or less available for military exercises. Such a broad open plane of well-kept grass would be a refreshing and agreeable feature in the general design, and would bear to be of much greater extent than is here shown, if the lot were of a different shape; but under the circumstances, 25 acres seems as much as can well be spared for the purpose. A military entrance from Eighth avenue is proposed to be made at Sixty-Ninth street, which has been already, at considerable expense, cut through the rock at this point, and offers a suggestion for a picturesque approach, with a portcullis gate, and with the main park drive carried over it at a higher level.

Playground

The natural southern boundary of the table-land occupied by the parade ground is a rapid slope that occurs about in the line of Sixty-Sixth street; in this slope it is proposed to sink one of the transverse roads; and on a level plane below it, stretching to the south, a playground about ten acres in extent is located, as indicated on the plan. We have thought it very desirable to have a cricket ground of this size near the southern boundary of the park, and not far from the Sixth and Eighth avenue railroads, which offer the most rapid means of access from the lower part of the city.²

In this playground sites are suggested for two buildings of moderate dimensions: one for visitors to view the games, which would be appropriately located on a large rock (*see No. 4 on Folded Map*) that overlooks the ground; and the other (*see No. 5 on Folded Map*) for the players, at the entrance from the transverse road, by which an exit could be obtained from the playground after the other gates were closed.³ Only one mass of rock of any considerable magnitude would require to be blasted out for the purpose of adapting this ground to its intended purpose; its position is indicated on the plan by a red cross, and the object of its removal will be seen on examination. This part of the design is illustrated in study No. 2. The ground at the southwest corner of the park it is pro-

¹ NOTE, 1868.—A Parade ground was demanded by the schedule of instructions furnished to competitors. In execution this open space under the name of "The Green" has been retained as prominent feature of the design, but has not been and is not intended to be used for military exercises.

² [NOTE, 1868].—The playground has been arranged as here recommended.

³ NOTE, 1868.—The foundation for this building was laid during the last season.

posed to fill in sufficiently to make, on the plan indicated, an agreeable Eighth avenue entrance.

The lower lake

To the south-east of the promenade, and between the Fifth and Sixth avenue entrances, it is proposed to form a lake of irregular shape, and with an area of 8 or 9 acres. This arrangement has been suggested by the present nature of the ground, which is low and somewhat swampy. It is conceived that, by introducing such an ornamental sheet of water into the composition at this point, the picturesque effect of the bold bluffs that will run down to its edge and overhang it, must be much increased;¹ and that by means of such a natural boundary, this rocky section of the park will be rendered more retired and attractive as a pleasant walk or lounge. The proposed effect of this part of the design, as it will appear from the Fifth avenue entrance, is indicated on study No. 1.²

The Arsenal

To the south-east of the promenade will be found that portion of the park in which the present Arsenal (*see No. 6 on Folded Map*) is situated. This ground is undulating and agreeable in its character, and will offer pleasant opportunities for shady walks. The Arsenal itself, although at present a very unattractive structure, and only tolerably built, contains a great deal of room in a form that adapts it very well to the purposes of a museum. It is proposed, therefore, to improve its external appearance so far as may be necessary, without changing its shape or usefulness, or going to any great expense; and as it occurs rather near the Fifth avenue entrance, and is, therefore, likely to occupy too considerable a share of attention if left exposed to view from the south, it is intended, as early as possible, to plant in its vicinity forest-trees, calculated to become handsome specimens of large size, and that will, after a few years, prevent the museum from attracting an undue share of attention in the general landscape.

Music-Hall

To the east of the promenade, there will be a half-mile stretch of lawn and trees extending from the vicinity of Fifty-Ninth street to Seventy-Second street, and this will be the dress ground of the park; and in a prominent position on this ground, and immediately

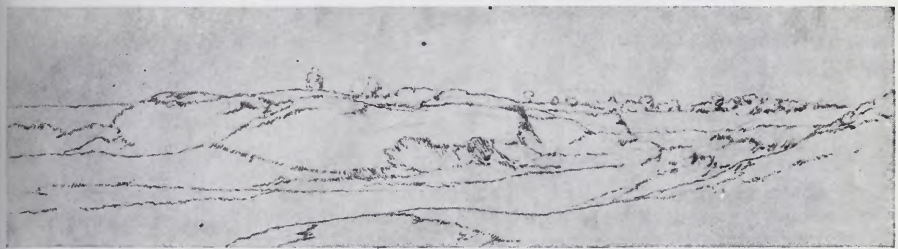
¹ NOTE, 1868.—An improvement of the soil and of the skylines of this rocky section, contemplated at the time the plan was made, was last year carried into execution, by means of earth filling on the more prominent summit levels.

² NOTE, 1868.—The original requirements of the Commission in regard to boundary and expense necessitated, in the first study, a cramped and unsatisfactory arrangement of the entrances on Fifty-ninth street. We have since made studies for the amplification of each of the principal approaches, and the necessary legislation in regard to the entrance at 8th Avenue and 59th street having been obtained at the instance of the property owners in the neighborhood, this improvement is shown on the map of the Park, dated 1868.

"GREENSWARD" SKETCH NO. 1



(Map showed this view was taken from "Point A," near Fifth Avenue and 59th Street)



"PRESENT OUTLINES"



From photostat of sketch

Retouched by W. B. Van Ingen

"EFFECT PROPOSED"

The Lake in the Lower Park

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connected with the grand mall, the site for a music-hall (*see No. 7 on Folded Map*), called for in our instructions, has been set apart; and we have suggested that a palm-house and large conservatory should be added to this music-hall whenever it is built.¹

This site is recommended because it is conspicuous without being obtrusive, and is easy of access from the promenade and from one of the leading avenue entrances; while, to the north, it commands from its terraces and verandas the finest views that are to be obtained in the lower part of the park. It also overlooks the site which we have selected as most appropriate for the flower-garden (*see No. 8 on Folded Map*) called for in our instructions; and this we consider a decided advantage, as the most attractive view of a flower-garden is from some point above it, that will enable the visitor to take in at a glance a general idea of the effect aimed at.

The Flower Garden

The garden is located in low ground to the northeast of the promenade, and close upon the line of Fifth avenue, the grade of which opposite the centre of the garden is about twenty feet above the present level of the ground; this, for the reasons above stated, we consider a desideratum, and have suggested that over the arcade or veranda that we propose should be built against the east wall of the park in connection with the garden, a structure (*see No. 9 on Folded Map*) should be erected, with an entrance on a level with the avenue, so as to give an opportunity for a view of the garden, both from this level and from another story above it. This idea is not, of course, necessary to the design, and the sketch submitted is merely a suggestion to show what may be done at some future time.²

The plan of the flower-garden itself is geometrical; and it is surrounded by an irregular and less formal plantation of shrubs, that will serve to connect it with the park proper. In the centre it is proposed to construct a large basin (*see No. 10 on Folded Map*) for a fountain, with a high jet; other smaller jets are prepared for, as indicated; and, in connection with the north wall, which will be somewhat below the surface of the ground beyond, it is proposed to arrange some such wall fountain as the celebrated one of Trevi. The water for this fountain will, in the present case, be supplied from the skating pond and also from the Reservoir, and will fall into a semi-circular marble basin, with a paved floor. Such a fountain is out of place unless it can be furnished with an ample supply of

¹ NOTE, 1868.—This site is now occupied by a building which we designed for a Ladies' Restaraunt, sites on a somewhat larger scale being reserved for a music-hall and conservatory, which yet remain to be erected.

² NOTE, 1868.—While the construction of the park was in progress Messrs. Parsons & Co., who held a contract granted by the Commissioners, employed us to develop this general idea in the form of a two-story glass building, of which the upper section is the conservatory proper and the lower portion is proposed to be used for the exhibition and sale of flowers, but the design has not yet been executed.

water; but, in the position assigned to it on our plan, there will be no difficulty in procuring all the water that can be required for the purpose: and it seems desirable, therefore, to take advantage of the opportunity offered, for the effect of a sculptured fountain of this sort is quite distinct from that produced by a jet d'eau.

A colored plan of this part of the design is illustrated to an enlarged scale on study No. 11.

To the north-west of the promenade is a slope, offering an appropriate site for a summer-house (*see No. 11 on Folded Map*), that in such a situation should have some architectural pretension; and further to the west, near Eighth avenue, is a stretch of tableland, terminated by an abrupt rocky descent, that suggests itself as well suited for a Casino or refreshment house.¹

From the upper end of the promenade the rocky hill-side to the north, surmounted by Vista Rock at its highest point, comes in full view; and on this rock it will be generally conceded a tower (*see No. 12 on Folded Map*) should be erected—but by no means a large one, or the whole scale of the view will be destroyed.² To the north and north-west of the promenade, a tract of low ground is proposed to be converted into the skating pond called for in our instructions; and the picturesque scenery between Vista Rock and the promenade will thus be heightened in effect, when seen from the south side of this lake, of about 14 acres. A terrace approach (*see No. 13 on Folded Map*), as shown on the plan, and on study No. 3, is proposed, from the avenue to the water.³ This feature, although by no means absolutely necessary, would add much to the general effect, and could be introduced at any future time, if it is preferred at present to treat the ground occupied by it in a less artificial style.

Immediately in the vicinity of Vista Rock is the south wall of the present reservoir. This wall occupies the whole of the middle of the park, and is a blank, uninteresting object, that can in no way be made particularly attractive. We have therefore, thought it necessary to bear this in mind in arranging the general plan, and have given a direction to the lines of drive leading this way from the

¹ NOTE, 1868. This ground still remains unimproved, it being the intention to develop the idea referred to in the report, although the plans for the structure are not yet finally decided on.

² NOTE, 1868.—The foundations for this work were commenced last season on a rocky promontory which formed a part of the Croton reservoir inclosure when it was expected to be bounded by street lines, but which has lately been added to the park territory, in accordance with our suggestion.

³ NOTE, 1868.—The architectural treatment of the terrace approach has been developed in detail during the progress of the work, but much of the intended effect still remains to be realized. (ED. NOTE: Mr. J. Wrey Mould was largely responsible for the details of the terrace, while Mr. Vaux was the architect of the general terrace design. Mr. Mould served in a subordinate capacity in the architectural work of the Park for nearly ten years; and after his promotion (about 1869) remained for five years longer. He was removed in May, 1874, but later returned as Architect of the N. Y. D. P. P. Mr. Vaux said of him that his "contributions to the success of the work . . . have been continuous, original and invaluable.")

lower part of the park, that will enable them to avoid the wall of the reservoir altogether.¹ The necessity for doing this has induced us to commence diverting the lines of drive at the south end of the grand promenade, which seems to offer a sufficient reason for so doing, and to lead them afterwards on their northerly course in such a way that they may pass naturally to the east and west of the reservoir. If any drive proceeded in the direction of the line of avenue, and at once crossed the ground proposed to be occupied by the lake, the reservoir would inevitably become the terminal feature of the lower part of the park, and this would be disagreeable. The skating pond will offer a sufficiently natural barrier to this direct mode of proceeding, and will furnish a reason for locating the promenade in its proposed position, and also for terminating it where suggested; and by carrying a road along the edge of the water, an opportunity will be given to lengthen out the drive commanding the principal views in this vicinity; the lake will also help to give a retired and agreeable character to the hill-side beyond, which is well adapted for picnic parties and pleasant strolls. Even if the reservoir did not occur in its present position, the conformation of the ground is such that the roads would naturally take, to a considerable extent, the direction indicated, leaving the centre of the park undivided by a drive.

The management of the ground between the skating pond and Vista Rock² appears to be indicated by its form and the character of its present growth. It is well sheltered, and large masses of rock occur at intervals. The soil is moist, and altogether remarkably well adapted to what is called in Europe an American garden, that is, a ground for the special cultivation of hardy plants of the natural order Ericacæi, consisting of rhododendrons, andromedas, azaleas, kalmias, rhodoras, &c.³ The present growth, consisting of sweet-gum, spice-bush, tulip-tree, sassafras, red-maple, black-oak, azalea, andromeda, &c., is exceedingly intricate and interesting. The ground is at present too much encumbered with stone, and with various indifferent plants.⁴ By clearing these away, and carefully leaving what is valuable; by making suitable paths, planting abundantly, as above suggested, and introducing fastigate shrubs, and evergreens occasionally, to prevent a monotony of bushes, the place may be made very charming. Where the hill-side approaches the lake, sufficient openings are proposed to be left for occasional glimpses, or more open views, of the water; and glades of fine turf are intended to occur at favorable intervals, so as to offer pleasant spots for rest and recreation.

¹ NOTE, 1868.—In execution, the lines have been carried out as here indicated, and as the trees grow up the old square reservoir is less and less thought of as an obstruction in the composition.

² NOTE, 1868.—The ground here referred to is now called "The Ramble."

³ NOTE, 1868.—This suggestion has been partially realized but yet remains to be fully developed.

⁴ NOTE, 1868.—Many of these which we have marked for removal, have hitherto, for various reasons, been allowed to remain.

Playground

To the east and south-east of the present reservoir, the general conformation of the surface continues to be of the same easy, undulating character as that to the east of the promenade, and can be treated in a similar manner. The whole space is intended to be occupied with stretches of well-kept turf, with fine groups and single trees, so planted that they may appear to advantage, and not crowd each other. That portion which is immediately east of the reservoir is set apart for one of the playgrounds (*see No. 14 on Folded Map*);¹ and in the strip of land between the main drive and the reservoir wall, a reserved garden (*see No. 15 on Folded Map*) is provided for, with gardener's house attached; this will be needed in connection with the flower-garden already described. On the west side of the reservoir the ground is of an irregular character, which continues past the old and new reservoirs to the upper end of the site. The spaces remaining for park use will, however, be so much contracted by the reservoir walls and embankments, that extended landscape effects are out of the question.

Winter drive

It is intended, therefore, as the soil and situation are adapted to the purpose, to arrange in this locality, a winter drive about a mile and a half in length, and to plant somewhat thickly with evergreens, introducing deciduous trees and shrubs occasionally, to relieve the monotony of effect that otherwise might occur. Large open glades of grass are introduced among these plantations of evergreens, as the effect aimed at is not so much that of a drive through a thick forest, crowded with tall spindling trees, as through a richly wooded country, in which the single trees and copses have had plenty of space for developing their distinctive characteristics to advantage.²

Berceau walks

Immediately south and west of the present reservoir, terraces have been already formed, and these can readily be converted into continuous arbors, or berceau walks (*see No. 16 on Folded Map*). Access will thus be provided to all the gates of the reservoir, and the wall will itself be planted out. The effect of these closely shaded walks will also, it is conceived, offer an agreeable contrast to the views obtainable from Vista Rock, in the immediate vicinity.³

¹ NOTE, 1868.—This tract of ground is now recommended as the site for the formal flower garden in connection with a group of architectural structures that will include music-hall, art galleries, horticultural and other museums, and refreshment rooms on a liberal scale; the intention of allowing military exercises on the park having been abandoned, and the Green serving the purpose of the playground above proposed.

² NOTE, 1868.—These plantations have been made as designed.

³ NOTE, 1868.—The idea of the berceau walk has been carried out in execution on the south side of the reservoir. (ED. NOTE: The berceau walk of trained and clipped Hornbeam, on the model of many such walks in France and England was

Police Station

In the northern section of this locality, and in connection with one of the transverse roads, will be found the house of the Superintendent, the office of the Commission, the police station (*see No. 17 on Folded Map*), and other necessary buildings, such as stables, &c. The site is not far from the one at present occupied by the police, and is thought to be well suited for its purpose. By making a private entrance along the wall of the reservoir, the whole establishment can be immediately connected, by means of the transverse road, with the city streets, and at the same time be central and elevated without being unpleasantly prominent. It is proposed, as will be seen on the plan, to make short connections (*see No. 18 on Folded Map*) from the park roads to the transverse thoroughfare north of the present reservoir, so as to admit of visitors shortening the drive in this way if preferred.

Reservoir ride

The new reservoir, with its high banks, will take up a great deal of room in the park, and although it will offer a large sheet of water to the view, it will be at too high a level to become a landscape attraction from the ordinary drives and walks. It is suggested, therefore, that all round it a ride shall be constructed, and carefully prepared for this purpose only; and although this feature may be somewhat costly in the first instance, it is conceived that the result would be worth the outlay, for the sake of its advantages as a ride over a mile and a half in length, commanding the view of the reservoir, and uninterfered with by the regular drives, although in connection with them at different points.¹

On the east of the new reservoir, the park is diminished to a mere passageway for connection, and it will be difficult to obtain an agreeable effect in this part of the design, unless some architectural character is given to it. It is not recommended, however, to attempt any such effect immediately, or out of the funds of the Commission, but to accept the high bank of the reservoir as a barrier to the west, for a few years; because it is thought that as soon as this part of the city is built up to any considerable extent, it will not be difficult to obtain an enriched architectural effect, appropriate to the purpose, without expense to the Commission. An arcade, 100 feet deep, could be substantially built, and the drive could be carried above this arcade on a level with the reservoir, and overlooking Fifth avenue, the remainder of the ground being filled in; and it is thought that as this arcade may be lighted from

suggested by Mr. Olmsted. At one time it attained a considerable degree of perfection, but its later condition is indicative of the great difficulty of successfully maintaining in American public parks any such effects as this, or pleached alleys, or trained espalier trees, which depend upon *unremitting* skilled manipulation of plants, at the proper season, for an indefinite period of years.—F. L. O., Jr.)

¹ NOTE, 1868.—In execution the design of this separate bridle road has been much amplified.

the rear, and will face a fashionable thoroughfare it will offer, at no distant period, very valuable lots for stores, or other purposes; and as it is a third of a mile in extent, it may be a source of revenue, in rent, to the park fund, instead of a burden on it.¹

Tower on Bogardus Hill

The north-westerly portion of the park, above the new reservoir, is planned very simply, in accordance with what we conceive to be the suggestion of the ground. The evergreen drive is continued nearly to the foot of Bogardus Hill, and then somewhat changing its character, turns to the east. At this point (*see No. 19 on Folded Map*) a branch road crosses a brook, that is made to expand into a pool a little below the bridge; and this road then winds gradually to the top of the hill, which offers an available site for some monument of public importance, that may also be used as an observatory tower (*see No. 20 on Folded Map*). If as is not improbable, the transatlantic telegraph is brought to a favorable issue, while the park is in an early stage of construction, many reasons could, we think, be urged for commemorating the event by some such monument as the one suggested on the plan, and in study No. 9. The picturesque effect of a spring of clear water, that already exists in this vicinity, may be heightened, as suggested in study No. 10.

The central portion of the upper section of the park is left as open as possible, and can be levelled so far as may be required for the purposes of the playgrounds indicated on the plan, and on study No. 7. At present, it is hardly thought that it would be necessary to make the Sixth avenue entrance to the north; but its position is indicated.²

The Arboretum

The north-east section of the upper park is shown as an arboretum of American trees, so that every one who wishes to do so may become acquainted with the trees and shrubs that will flourish in the open air in the northern and middle sections of our country.

This arboretum is not intended to be formally arranged, but to be so planned that it may present all the most beautiful features of lawn and wood-land landscape, and at the same time preserve the natural order of families, so far as may be practicable. The botanical student will thus be able to find any tree or shrub without difficulty. We have selected this tract of about 40 acres, in the upper

¹ NOTE, 1868.—In execution the simpler plan above suggested was adopted, and the arrangement will probably remain intact for a number of years.

² NOTE, 1868.—The postponement of operations in this quarter was recommended because we found that the 106th street boundary of the park required a revision, which could not, with propriety, be urged when the competition plan was made. The northern limit of the park was, subsequently to the date of this report, extended from 106th to 110th streets, and so much of the original plan as applied to the ground to the northward of that here described, was afterwards modified in order to connect satisfactorily with our design for laying out the additional territory which was approved by the commission in April [sic], 1863.

angle of the site, so as to interfere with the more special requirements of the park as little as possible. The spot chosen is in some measure separated from the rest of the grounds, by a ridge of land between Fifth and Sixth avenues, and includes the buildings on Mount St. Vincent. The wooden structures would be removed, and the brick chapel converted into a museum and library of botany, similar to that at Kew, but with more specific regard to landscape and decorative gardening. In the park itself there will be numerous specimens of all the trees, native or foreign, that are likely to thrive; but it is proposed to limit this particular collection to American trees, because the space necessary for a complete arboretum would occupy several hundred acres, and also because it will afford an opportunity to show the great advantage that America possesses in this respect. No other extra-tropical country could furnish one-quarter the material for such a collection. In the whole of Great Britain, for example, there are less than twenty trees, native to the island, that grow to be over 30 feet in height; while in America we have from five to six times that number. There are, indeed, already over forty species of the largest native trees standing in the park, which is nearly equivalent to the number to be found in all Europe.

It is proposed to plant from one to three examples of each species of tree on open lawn, and with sufficient space about each to allow it to attain its fullest size with unrestricted expanse of branches; the effect of each tree is also to be exhibited in masses, so as to illustrate its qualities for grouping. Space is provided to admit of at least three specimens of every native which is known to flourish in the United States north of North Carolina; also for several specimens of every shrub; these latter, however, except in particular instances, are not expected to be planted singly, but in thickets, and as underwood to the coppice masses; as may best accord with their natural habits, and be most agreeable to the eye. Further details of this part of the design will be found in the explanatory guide to the arboretum, submitted with the plan, in which the proposed arrangement of all the trees is set forth in order.¹

The leading features of the plan have now, it is thought, been referred to. It has not been considered necessary to especially particularize the different trees proposed to be used in the various parts of the park. For the purposes of the avenue, the American elm naturally suggests itself at once as the tree to be used; and it is to be hoped that the fine effect this produces, when planted in regular lines, may in a few years be realized in the Central Park.

There is no other part of the plan in which the planting calls for particular mention, except to the south of the skating pond; an opportunity is there offered for an exhibition of semi-tropical trees, and it is intended to treat that portion of the park in the manner

¹ See pp. 335 ff., *post*.

suggested in the study. A list of the trees to be used is appended to the explanation of the arboretum.

The plan does not show any brooks, except a small one in connection with the pool at the foot of Bogardus Hill, which can always be kept full by the waste of water from the New Reservoir. Mere rivulets are uninteresting, and we have preferred to collect the ornamental water in large sheets, and to carry off through underground drains the water that at present runs through the park in shallow brooks.

As a general rule, we propose to run footpaths close to the carriage roads, which are intended to be 60 feet wide, allowing a space of four feet of turf as a barrier between the drive and the path. Other more private footpaths are introduced, but it is hardly thought that any plan would be popular in New York, that did not allow of a continuous promenade along the line of the drives, so that pedestrians may have ample opportunity to look at the equipages and their inmates.

It will be perceived that no long straight drive has been provided on the plan; this feature has been studiously avoided, because it would offer opportunities for trotting matches. The popular idea of the park is a beautiful open space, in which quiet drives, rides, and strolls may be had. This cannot be preserved if a race-course, or a road that can readily be used as a race-course, is made one of its leading attractions.

DESCRIPTIVE LIST OF SKETCHES, ETC., IN PORTFOLIO SUBMITTED
BY OLMSTED AND VAUX WITH PLAN NO. 33 ("GREEN-
SWARD") IN CENTRAL PARK COMPETITION, 1858.

1. View at the Fifth Avenue entrance. (View of Lake from Fifth Avenue and 59th Street—pencil sketches of present and proposed views.) *Reproduced opp. page 224.*
2. Lower playground. (Ball ground looking south. Sketches, present and proposed.)
3. Elm Avenue and Terrace from Vista Rock. (Looking south from Ramble towards terrace—roughly sketched, present and proposed.)
4. Across the Lake towards Vista Rock. (Northeast view from west drive opposite 74th Street towards Vista Rock—large photograph as then and small oil sketch as proposed.)
5. Across the Lake from Vista Rock. (View from Vista Rock southwest across the Lake, opposite view of No. 4—large photograph as then, small oil sketch as proposed.) *Reproduced opp. page 44.*
6. Across the Lake from below Vista Rock. (Nearer view of somewhat the same scene as above—pencil sketches, present and proposed.)
7. Looking south from Bogardus Hill. (Across meadow from high ground opposite 104th Street near Eighth Avenue—pencil sketches, present and proposed.) *Reproduced opposite.*
8. Looking east from Bogardus Hill. (View from same point east—pencil sketches, present and proposed.)
9. Bogardus Hill and Monumental Tower. (View from East Drive opposite 103rd Street looking west—pencil sketch, present, and oil, proposed.)

"GREENSWARD" SKETCH NO. 7



(Map showed this view was taken from "Point G," near Eighth Avenue and 103rd Street)



"PRESENT OUTLINES"



From photostat of sketch

Retouched by W. B. Van Ingen

"EFFECT PROPOSED"

Meadow in Upper Park

10. Winter Drive and Spring on Bogardus Hill. (Picture of spring on Bogardus Hill in pencil. Other sketch, of Winter Drive, missing.)

11. Flower garden. (2 colored views, garden arcade elevation, and plan of flower garden.)

12. Monumental Tower. (The twelfth term in the portfolio is now an oil sketch marked "View from terrace side looking towards Vista Rock showing proposed site for Ornamental water." This is probably the same as No. 12 in the printed list called "Monumental Tower" as there is no reference to any thirteenth item submitted.)

This portfolio of Sketches is now in the possession of the Park Department of the City of New York.

REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PLAN¹

(A REVIEW OF THE "GREENSWARD" PLAN, NUMBERED "33" IN THE COMPETITION)

That they have confined their attention to the important structural features of the Park, upon which an immediate determination is necessary to be had if the work is not to be altogether interrupted.

That, as respects the features of the promenade avenue, the exterior wall and the general distribution of lawn, woodland and water, the first premium plan seems to be satisfactory.

That the principal drives, so far as your Committee have had an opportunity of examining the subject, are judiciously laid down.

Two variations from them only have been proposed that would not interfere materially with the general conception of the plan.

As there is no railroad on the Seventh avenue and as it affords the most direct and convenient approach to the Park for carriages coming up Broadway, west of Fifth avenue, it is suggested that a fine carriage entrance should be provided on Fifty-ninth street, opposite Seventh avenue.² If this is approved, there should, for the sake of symmetry, be a similar entrance-gate opposite the Sixth avenue. But as the ground at that point does not admit of the entrance of a carriage-road, unless at a great expense, and the loss of some striking natural features, it is proposed that at present a foot-way only should be provided for, leaving it practicable to construct a carriage-road whenever in the future it shall be demanded and be so decided on, by the Commission. The corner of Fifty-ninth street and Eighth avenue is not well adapted to a carriage entrance, the turn from Broadway being an awkward one, the angles very unsymmetrical, and the ground within the Park low. At about Sixty-third street, where the ground is more elevated and an easy and direct connection can be had with the main drive, appears to be a favorable point for the main carriage entrance of the Eighth avenue; and the Committee would suggest, in case an entrance from Seventh avenue is approved, that the entrance at Sixtieth street, on plan 33 be removed to Sixty-third street.

¹ Doc. No. 2, May 10, 1858.

² ED. NOTE: Cf. Part II, Chap. VI.

Between Sixty-fifth and Seventy-first streets, the drive on plan 33 approaches closely to Eighth avenue. The drive would be more agreeable if between these two points it were carried with a single sweep (*see No. 21 on Folded Map*) through the interior of the Park; this would contract the parade ground, and carry the drive east of the ravine of Sixty-ninth street. Although the portcullis gate for a military entrance, through this ravine, is a striking and desirable feature, the Committee are not disposed to advise the sacrifice of what they deem to be more essential characteristics of a park, for the sake of advantages for large military displays within it; they would therefore recommend such an alternation in the course of the drive between Sixty-fifth street and Seventy-first street as is indicated in the accompanying diagram.

The Committee consider that the width of the drives, as proposed in plan 33, is greater than is necessary. They are of the opinion that the carriage-way of Fifth avenue is wide enough for a park drive, and that a single foot-path, fifteen feet wide, will be sufficient to be carried side by side with the principal drive. They are also of the opinion that a single bridle-path may, with advantage, be carried side by side with the drive for a considerable distance. As the method of constructing the carriage-road proposed in the description of plan No. 33, adapts it for riding upon at moderate speed, and as an equestrian course, forty-five feet wide, around the new Reservoir, especially prepared for fast riding, upon which no vehicles can intrude, is a part of this plan, the Committee do not deem it necessary that the bridle-road should run continuously through all parts of the Park with the drive, or that it should be wider than is necessary to accommodate four horsemen riding abreast, they recommend that the plan be made to include at least three miles of bridle-road, twenty feet in width, running generally close adjoining the principal drive, but with occasional variations as the surface may best indicate. . . .

Anticipating that considerations of public convenience and of taste will require an extension of the area of the Park to One Hundred and Tenth street, the Committee think it necessary, that before any drives are laid out in the north part of the Park, that it should be known that they are well adapted to such extension.

They recommend, therefore, that the Superintendent be requested to prepare the sketch of a plan for an extension of the Park to One Hundred and Tenth street, connecting such plan with that already presented to the Commission. The preliminary work upon the Park, so far as it can be carried on independently of a plan for laying out the ground, is believed to be completed, and it is questionable if any work is now being done which had not better be left undone.

Before any work upon the plan to be adopted by the Commission can be engaged in, some additional special surveys and working plans will need to be made; before the general drainage of the ground can be undertaken, the necessary grading and the lines of the roads

and ponds must be fixed, and the tile will have to be manufactured and brought to the ground; hence it is important, as soon as possible, to definitely fix upon some part of the plan.

The Committee, therefore, recommend that plan 33 be taken as a basis of improvement, and that the Superintendent be instructed to immediately proceed in the construction of the Park, upon the supposition that its main features, with such modifications as the Committee have suggested, are to be carried out, leaving for further consideration whatever it is not necessary to an economical method of construction should be immediately determined on.

In accordance with these views, the Committee offer the following resolutions:

1. Resolved, That the Superintendent be requested to proceed forthwith to form working plans for the construction of the Park, and to stake out the principal features upon the ground.

2. Resolved, That the Superintendent be authorized to call in the service of his associate, (in design No. 33), and such other assistants, not exceeding six in number, as may be necessary to expedite the purpose of the first resolution.

3. Resolved, That the Superintendent be authorized to order tools necessary for drainage, to be made (in value not to exceed \$500), and to proceed immediately with the further necessary preliminary surveys for the drainage of the Park, and that at the present time he employ the force now at his disposal in any work which may with advantage be undertaken preliminary to commencing the work of drainage.

4. Resolved, That the Executive Committee be requested to consult with the Superintendent, and to advertise as soon as possible for proposals for furnishing and laying tile necessary for drainage of the Park.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

CHARLES H. RUSSELL } *Special Committee*
 ANDREW H. GREEN } *on the Plan.*

DESIGNERS' REPORT AS TO PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS IN THE PLAN¹

ARCHITECT IN CHIEF'S OFFICE,
 CENTRAL PARK, 31st May, 1858.

*To the Board of Commissioners
 of The Central Park:*

Gentlemen:—The amendments² which have been referred to the Architect embrace two propositions: one to modify plan 33, and one to supersede that plan by another of an opposite character in its general conception and detailed effect.

¹ Doc. No. 5.

² ED. NOTE: Offered by Mr. Dillon. See Minutes, May 24, 1858, for full text.

It seems desirable to separate these two suggestions and to speak of them as distinct from each other, although it will prevent the exact order of the amendments as printed from being followed in this report.

[Minor Modifications of the Olmsted and Vaux Plan]

The proposed modifications to plan 33 appear to be, in the first place, No. 3 and 4, 11, 12 and 17. "Strike out the sidewalks for pedestrians on either side the Drive," "all paths for pedestrians," "the ride around the reservoir," "the flower garden," "the music hall, arcade and casino." To these propositions there is no objection, as they are omissions that will not interfere with the general construction of the Park, and may, perhaps, when the work is farther advanced, be considered and determined on to better advantage by the Commissioners.

"5. Truncate the angle formed by Fifty-ninth street with Fifth and Eighth avenues."

The reasons for avoiding in plan 33 the truncated angles in these positions were: first, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a dignified architectural entrance on a short truncated angle. In planning a suburban country place of limited extent, occupying an angle of two cross-roads, the idea has been developed by the writer on a small scale with a good result; but it is not recommended as a desirable arrangement for the principal entrance to a large park, because it is thought that these gateways should be designed with reference to the general architectural lines of the other buildings on the streets in which they occur. In the case of the Fifth avenue entrance, the ground suggests the course of drive proposed in plan 33, and the entrance is arranged accordingly, and is also so planned as to leave an ante-park or square outside the boundary in which carriages for hire may wait without obstruction to the thoroughfare. It is thought that many persons who do not keep carriages will be glad of an opportunity to drive in the Park at a moderate expense, and for this reason it has been proposed to introduce the vestibule or ante-Park shown on the plan. A liberally arranged Fifth avenue entrance at Fifty-ninth street on the line proposed by amendment 5, would involve the necessity of a rapid descent into the low ground shown as a lake on plan 33, or this low ground would have to be filled up for a considerable distance at very great expense, and with disadvantage to the general lines of the scenery in this part of the Park.

On the corner of Eighth avenue, the intersection of Broadway, as shown on the city map, cuts up the streets and avenues, into so many irregular three-cornered odds and ends that it was thought advisable in plan 33 to avoid the angle altogether, and to enter the Park opposite Sixtieth street. In point of economical construction, it would be nearly as feasible to make the truncated angular Eighth avenue entrance as any other short of the entrance near

Sixty-third street, proposed to the Special Committee and recommended in their report.

"6. Strike out the cross-drive running north to the commencement of the promenade." This would prevent a circuit drive through the Park, an advantage which it seems desirable to retain.

"14. Strike out the sunken transverse roads." Experience on the Park is already constantly showing the necessity for some contrivance by which direct transit may be secured across the Park for the inhabitants of the adjoining parts of the island, and much dissatisfaction is expressed with the present arrangements, the nature of which the Architect can better explain verbally.

With regard to the necessity for cross-roads that shall not interfere with the Park drives at the point of intersection, and that shall be always open, lighted at night and under the control of the city, all that can be said is included in the report on plan 33, and the designers of that plan are aware of no argument for disregarding the necessities of the case as there presented, or they would endeavor to reply to it. With regard to the detail of construction of those roads, whether they shall at all points where it is practicable be carried somewhat below the surface, or whether they shall, except at the intersections, be made surface roads as far as possible, being separated from the Park only by iron railings, is a question to be decided by a specific examination of the various circumstances of each situation. A further survey, made since the recent action of the Commission adopting plan 33, shows the feasibility and, perhaps, desirability of carrying a considerable proportion of the cross-road above the Arsenal on a level with the general surface by a slight deviation from the course represented on the map.

It is difficult to understand what advantages are proposed to be gained by amendment 14, which proposes that "passage across the Park may be made, but not with such facility of grade and level as to invite passage for purposes of trade or traffic," because such a crossroad is only called for by the necessities of trade or traffic, there being no possible objection to the introduction of pedestrians or private vehicles into any part of the Park.

With regard to the elevated wall proposed, it does not seem to offer any advantages over the plan of more easily concealed walls pertaining to the roads, indicated on plan 33.

Amendment number 16 proposes to strike out the designation for places for parade ground and play grounds. There are obvious advantages to be secured by the adoption of the proposition with regard to the parade ground. It is questionable, however, if the point of concentration for play, suggested in the lower part of the Park, should not be reserved and put in order as soon as possible; all the other situations for play grounds may conveniently be left open for further consideration.

[Radically New Plan]

It is difficult to form a judgment on a design for laying out a large park without any illustrative plan and a careful examination of the site with special reference to the leading features supposed to be introduced. The new design roughly indicated in the amendments Nos. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, necessarily assumes, so far as the portion of the Park above the new Reservoir is concerned, an extension of the boundaries to One Hundred and Tenth street, and as this has not yet been surveyed or mapped, it is impossible to say what would be the best plan for its improvement. The addition of the extra length would lead to some alteration in any plan restricted to the present boundary lines. It is not necessary, however, to consider specifically the upper part of the Park, as proposed to be amended, as it seems to be a repetition, as far as practicable, of the conception [proposed in these amendments] for the lower Park. The leading idea of the plan [thus proposed] for the lower part of the Park is a straight promenade avenue from near Fifty-ninth street to the Reservoir, with entrances at Sixth and Seventh avenues. Two rows of trees of this length would unquestionably be a beautiful feature in itself, and the reasons why the avenue on plan 33 is commenced and terminated at the points indicated, is because, in that situation and with the limitations there assigned to it, it will interfere but little with the present lines of the landscape; while, if extended in either direction, it will destroy scenery, at great cost, which a few months' labor may render far more refreshing and agreeable than the constructed avenue would be after a growth of fifty years. The introduction of the suspension-bridge at the point indicated, merely for the sake of getting across the comparatively slight depression occupied by the lake, would, it is considered, have a forcibly artificial look, that would be out of harmony with the present character of the scenery, which would consequently have to be demolished and made artificial so as to correspond with the new leading feature that is proposed by the fresh plan to bisect it. The wire bridge, with its towers, although doubtless intended to be of elegant design, would destroy the appearance of expanse and the breadth of effect which at present makes this part of the Park so agreeable. If a more rapid and direct communication with Vista Rock is desired than is shown on plan 33, a light bridge can be at any time thrown across at as low a level as possible, between two points a little west of the line indicated by the amendment, but it was designedly omitted on the plan so that the hill to the south of the reservoir might always remain more retired and rural than the ornamental and highly-dressed grounds on the other portions of the site. A simple and unartificial treatment with variety and some degree of intricacy, seems to be preferable in a City-Park to straight lines of trees or stately architecture. These belong not to parks for the people, but to palatial gardens. A tolerably direct continuous walk from the lower end of the Park around the two reservoirs to the upper part of Bogardus Hill, if

thought necessary to be introduced, can be at any time arranged without a sacrifice of the present scenery of the Park, or a division of the landscape into two parts by a prominent architectural structure crossing the ravine at Seventy-third street. This could be done in such a way as to avoid bringing the pedestrian in contact with the drives or rides. The walk around the reservoirs is unobjectionable, but it seems undesirable to accept them as important objects for the walk, because they must always be disappointing. They are tanks or cisterns, on a large scale it is true, but perfectly comprehensible and uninteresting after one or two visits of examination. It is considered that they are unfortunately situated, because it is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances. The time will come when New York will be built up, when all the grading and filling will be done, and when the picturesquely-varied, rocky formations of the Island will have been converted into foundations for rows of monotonous straight streets, and piles of erect, angular buildings. There will be no suggestion left of its present varied surface, with the single exception of the few acres contained in the Park. Then the priceless value of the present picturesque outlines of the ground will be more distinctly perceived, and its adaptability for its purpose more fully recognized. It therefore seems desirable to interfere with its easy, undulating outlines, and picturesque, rocky scenery as little as possible, and, on the other hand, to endeavor rapidly, and by every legitimate means, to increase and judiciously develop these particularly individual and characteristic sources of landscape effects.¹

Respectfully,

FRED. LAW OL MSTED,
Architect-in-Chief.

¹ ED. NOTE: The following statement by Olmsted and Vaux of the importance of enhancing the effect of broad meadows in the general design is taken from the Brooklyn Park Report for 1865 (dealing with the new Prospect Park).—

"We shall be pardoned for referring to a portion of the Central Park, New York, where somewhat similar conditions [to Brooklyn] formerly existed, and where our views have been adopted and realized. Entering by the turn to the right, at the Merchant's Gate, in a few moments the visitor's eye falls upon the open space called the Cricket Ground, where originally was a small swamp, enlarged at great expense in the construction of the park, . . . by the removal of several large ledges of rock, and now occupied by an unbroken meadow, which extends before the observer to a distance of nearly a thousand feet. Here is a suggestion of freedom and repose which must in itself be refreshing and tranquilizing to the visitor coming from the confinement and bustle of crowded streets. But this is not all. The observer, resting for a moment to enjoy the scene, which he is induced to do by the arrangement of the planting, cannot but hope for still greater space than is obvious before him, and this hope is encouraged, first, by the fact that, though bodies of rock and foliage to the right and left obstruct his direct vision, no limit is seen to the extension of the meadow in a lateral direction; while beyond the low shrubs, which form an undefined border to it in front,