In the summer of 1969 I designed playgrounds for Chicago's Neighborhood Improvement and Beautification (NIB) Program, which was part of the federally funded open-space program. My job was to convert vacant lots into temporary playgrounds—they would stand as long as their owners did not want the land for other purposes. I soon learned that I needed to understand the ultimate purpose of parks in order to design these playgrounds. Looking for guides for action, I began to pay attention to what people and professionals felt were the purposes of parks and open space.

Among the variety of views no single one dominated. Inconclusive debate about the oldest and largest parks, the great nineteenth-century pleasure grounds, epitomized the confusing situation. These older urban parks were under attack. They had already developed a reputation as barren no-man's-lands, unsafe for use day or night, and now hippies, radicals, and war resisters were using them as rallying grounds. The association of parks with deviants, already established by beggars, winos, and bums, was intensified. Because these parks lay unused and dangerous, some people suggested that they be sold for other, more pressing uses, such as housing and schools, which would simultaneously generate revenues for ailing municipal budgets. To those worried about losing open spaces for future generations, others suggested keeping the land in the public domain and
leasing it to developers. The objection was that, once build-
ing were constructed, tearing them down would be hard to justify. Still another possibility was trading sections of the large parks for lots within densely built areas of the city, so that a checkerboard of open and built space would replace the large concentration of park land. Critics responded that only large amounts of land could create the psychological sense of being in nature. But people could now drive to regional or national forests, which suggested that cities had no need for this simulation within their borders. The re-
joiner was that children from poor families without cars could not afford to get to the countryside, so the need for an experience of nature within the city was as real now as when the parks were created. In general the costs of trading large parks for small ones were not well enough understood for anyone to champion the idea seriously as a risk worth taking.

Irresolution about how to treat parks from the past was symptomatic of contemporary uncertainty about the meaning of parks. When I looked to present-day examples of park construction and supervision, I found confusion and failure more often than revelation. The precedent set by the urban designers during the previous two years of Chicago’s NIB program was no help; they had done little more than drop a Bunker Hill climber, a swing, and a slide—all ready-made, standard playground equipment from a catalog—onto the site. These playgrounds had been wrecked within a matter of days after the work crews left the sites, leading me to speculate that people felt insulted by these superficial tokens of recreational service.

The NIB designers had few other models available to them, either from architecture schools, which tend to overlook outdoor recreation design, or from practicing professionals, who had established this scattershot approach in the first place. Contemporary park and recreation designers would typically include berms and curved paths to suggest a naturalistic landscape, gymnastic equipment to accommodate vigorous physical activity, tennis courts to meet demand,
Japanese bureaucrat, only gangsters want a bar rather than a playground on an open site. While American parks are now associated with danger—American film-makers for the last ten years have used parks as symbols not just of tranquility and innocence but also of fear and foreboding—people do not think that the parks themselves are fearsome. Rather they blame external intrusion, and never for a moment do they think that the institution of the park itself might invite conflict because of the ambiguity of the norms for its proper use. Academic attempts to identify any widely agreed-upon idea about the purpose of city parks have fared no better than professional, activist, or lay efforts.

In response to this widespread confusion, and because of my own confusion about what should be done with my vacant lots, I decided to investigate the history of urban parks in the United States. At some point, I thought, taxpayers must have had clear-cut notions about what parks could accomplish; at least when parks were first created, they might have agreed about the wisdom of creating them and articulated some explicit goals for them. I sensed that the choices made in those early years would have an appreciable effect on how people defined and planned parks today, and I hoped to be able to anticipate the trajectory set by prior social conditions. Thus I began a long journey into the past, where I discovered not just one set of ideas about the role of city parks but four distinct constellations. Without a historical, comparative method I would not have been able to discover this evolution. This book is the story of what I learned and an attempt to fill part of the unexplained gap regarding the role of city parks within American social structure and the intellectual and moral life of the culture.

Despite my commitment to a historical method, this study differs from ordinary narrative history in several ways. More like a sociologist than a historian, I sought general trends, often at the expense of the full particulars leading to and stemming from specific events. That is to say, particular points in time were not as important as understanding the forces that shaped the movement. The concern for the movement as a whole required a distinctively interdisciplinary study that weaves together concepts and methods from architecture, landscape architecture, social history, and sociology. This in turn meant that shifting the lens of analysis has been more important than presenting a straightforward chronology. The structure of the book reflects that process of successive inquiry in which ideal types are created, located within social structure, and their cultural function assessed. The device of constructing ideal types from the historical record is associated with Weberian sociology, but its broad outlines recur in many areas. Even Hellenistic Greek sculpture is a composite of the ideal features of human form, rather than a realistic, literal representation of any particular person. This study is more concerned with the construction of models and the internal logic of the type itself than an ordinary narrative history would be.

This study differs not only from historical narratives in general but also from the existing scholarship on parks. It is the first history of the first 130 years of the American park movement in one account, not restricted to one city, one region, or one period. Other studies have looked at one dimension—usually the aesthetic or recreation as a social service—or restrict a fuller analysis to only one city or region or to only one period in time.

In keeping with social research methods, I treated three urban park systems—those of New York, Chicago, and San Francisco—as case studies. Together with occasional comparisons with other American towns and an overview of the urban park movement across the nation, they lead to generalization about the nature of the American park movement as a whole. This is possible because the development of American urban parks has been remarkably homogeneous.

New York is an important case because Central Park was the first public park developed in the context of what be-
came the urban park movement, and the city continued to pioneer in many aspects of park planning. Chicago is significant because the reform park was developed to its fullest there: among park administrations Chicago became famous for the first and highest development of the field house, a distinctive physical prototype with a new philosophy of social programming. San Francisco completes the triad with a western case, and one in which similarities to the others is not simply the result of Frederick Law Olmsted's personal tastes and ideals, as it might be argued with the early parks in the many other cities where he worked.

Parks themselves are still important today in different ways, emphatically not just part of the parenthetical history of gardens or landscape design. From the point of view of understanding society they are an excellent example of how social forces shape and are shaped by the physical world. Social, economic, political, and psychological processes influenced park location, size, shape, composition, and equipment and landscaping. Once these features were fixed, they both limited and stimulated the options available for human interaction.

City parks are also important for the role they played and continue to play in urbanization. They are part of the rise of modern institutions—the successive attempts to gain control over the social and physical consequences of urbanization in the context of industrial capitalism. Their past and potential use in the processes of creating social, psychological, and political order, of planning and controlling land use, and of shaping civic form and beauty make them important today. The earliest park spokesmen, like Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted, believed that park environments could exert a civilizing influence on working-class men, and today policy-makers still acknowledge the physical configuration of the park as an active culture-bearing medium in people's lives, both materially and intellectually.

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Transcending the City
In the conventional opposition of city and country, the country has always stood for simplicity, health, peace and quiet, and the stability of personal, family, and community relations while the cities have always had their critics. The case against them has remained roughly the same: they are too big, too built up, too crowded, diseased, polluted, artificial, overly commercial, corrupting, and stressful. Industrialization, technological innovation, rapid growth, and increased migration up through the 1850s had made American cities especially vulnerable to criticisms. The effects of these developments were particularly great in the newer American cities, because many of them, like San Francisco, had been little more than settlements in the memory of some of their inhabitants, and tradition and established order had little influence on them. Thus a San Francisco Herald editorial of 1854 compared the "half-graded, half-planked, and thoroughly swampy streets" of San Francisco to the "beautiful squares, noble avenues, and tasteful promenades of Eastern States and European countries, devoted to parades, meetings, and holidays," and this was a frequent note.1 Americans attributed the apparent tradition and order elsewhere to the refining effects of parks and art.

The parks that Americans built to improve their cities derived not from European urban models but from an anti-urban ideal that dwelt on the traditional prescription for
relief from the evils of the city—to escape to the country. The new American parks thus were conceived as great pleasure grounds meant to be pieces of the country, with fresh air, meadows, lakes, and sunshine right in the city. Park proponents argued that the presence of these green expanses could do much to alleviate the problems of city life. Throughout the late nineteenth century their writings, beyond complaining about specific pressures of the American urban explosion, stressed the intrinsic drawbacks of urban life to which they viewed the parks as an antidote. For example, Scribner’s Monthly in 1873 decried the loss of space in Hudson River Villages, including New York City, before the creation of Central Park:

There is actually no stroll possible! The hateful railroad... cut off all access to the river-shore, private “places” run down close to the railroad, and, if one climbs the hill to the highway, he finds that fences, walls, hedges, and close huddling houses cut him off from all but a few tantalizing glimpses of the landscape he would enjoy. ... [For a while the Croton aqueduct was open, but soon people put up fences across it.] Only one [property owner left] the aqueduct walk free... the rest have done what they could to shut off the villagers from their one poor chance of recreation.  

Similarly, an article on Central Park published in Harper’s New Monthly in 1879 feared that without it “the great necessities of commerce would swallow up the whole of Manhattan Island and leave no breathing room for its inhabitants.” Such worries about the acute situation of unbridled growth, indoor work, mass communication, and intensification of business life, as well as the loss of breathing space and glimpses of landscape heightened the positive qualities taken for granted in the country. The notion of a park was endorsed as if it were a check on the encroachment of the city rather than as a feature of the city itself.

In a general sense these habits of thought are romantic. Before the country was romanticized thus, it meant the farm and village and environs, rural social and economic life. Its vistas and breathing space might include fences and closely clustered houses. But by mid-century the simple
benefits of the country had come to be popularly associated with nature itself, whatever nature was unimproved by man—woods, plains, mountains, lakes. These associations, though inherited from European romanticism, gained currency in America largely through transcendentalist influence. For Emerson and his followers, nature—attunement with it, contemplation of it, immersion in it—was thought to train the spirit. The softened popular version of the transcendentalist ideals attributed virtues to things found in nature like trees and meadows that could be transplanted or duplicated by human ingenuity and paved the way for park propaganda and park design theory.

**Unstructured Pleasures**

Recreationists from the 1940s onward have typically characterized the early parks as organized around passive use. A summary of the activities that appeared on the pleasure ground shows that by 1895 they were not so much passive as unstructured: racing, galloping and jumping, polo playing, bicycle riding, merry-go-round, toboggan sliding, coasting on rinks, watching shows such as circuses and shooting matches, tennis and croquet, baseball and lacrosse, military maneuvers, and mass meetings. Even the earliest pleasure grounds promoted spontaneous activities organized by families and church groups rather than by paid play leaders. Children were expected to romp, adults to row, ride horseback, and walk, men and boys to play vigorously at sport. The spectators at these picturesque events were expected to be mentally alert in their appreciation of them. Their pleasures were of a different order from those of, say, the modern-day stadium spectator.

Pleasure ground activities were almost exclusively outdoor activities because of the number of hours, shocking at the time, during which people found themselves indoors, in particular working under artificial light. Park commissioners would emphasize outdoor sports not so much as accommodation of popular recreation as a compensation for the widening split between work and leisure. Both clerical
and factory workers' powers of reasoning, ability to deduce cause from effect, memorize, and categorize had all been used actively in the city. A stretch of nature in the city would not merely give respite to the tired worker but also stimulate and exercise the unused part of his mind. Today we might argue that Frederick Law Olmsted and his followers were attempting to stimulate the right hemisphere of the brain, and its powers for perception of space, volume, kineshetic sequence, sound, and music. Writing about New York, Olmsted made explicit the importance of this counteraction; he conceived of the park not only as an open area exempt from the urban environ but as "a class of opposite conditions," a visual antithesis to gridded streets and rectangular houses.

From the "class of opposite conditions," would arise the notion of "aesthetic colony." Rules applied in the park differed from those employed outside. For this reason attempts to promote park values anywhere else in the city were typically met with indifference or resistance. Advertising dramatizes the point: although no one objected to the banishment of signs from parks, property owners chastized city officials for taking the same attitude toward streets.

Ideal Activities

With pleasure grounds designed to facilitate activities that provided exercise, instruction, and psychic restoration, sports supplied the exercise once offered by work but lost in factory production, certain amusements aroused the cultural awareness of the masses, and appreciation of scenery stimulated the psyche to wholeness. Park officials especially promoted walking as an exercise compatible with psychic renewal. In this spirit they built pleasant paths amid agreeable surroundings and treated the promenade as a major pastime. Harper's told New Yorkers that they would understand Central Park much more thoroughly if they would abandon their carriages and explore it on foot where shady, winding paths allow them to "saunter at will, resting...at intervals on the rustic seats which are placed

at every shaded turn." As late as 1893 the San Francisco park commissioners could justify plans for a new forest by deciding that it would stimulate pedestrianism.

Parks were equally available to those on horseback, in a carriage, or on foot, whichever best suited the inclination or means of an individual. Park commissioners in most cities sold rides in phaetons, popular among the less fortunate. During the 1860s rich New Yorkers turned out their fashionable carriages for a Sunday trot around the ten miles of road in Central Park—a Currier and Ives lithograph depicts this scene. Park boulevards and drives offered some of the best roads in town, and particular drives and certain days of the week were designated for steed racing by owners of fine equipment and horses.

Watching the procession of horses and carriages—and the people—became a recreation in its own right:

First comes a man on horseback. His arms are spread out like the cropped wings of a barnyard fowl attempting to fly. He rises briskly up and down in the saddle to the motion of an awkward-gaited horse. He is a clerk in an English insurance office, and labors under the delusion that he cuts a good figure on horseback. A sedate-looking German corner grocer comes next. He is giving his family a Sunday airing in the wagonette which he uses for delivering his goods on weekdays. Then there comes a crowd of more stylish rigs. A rule the real swell set do not turn out on Sundays, but some of them are here this afternoon...[the] President of the Police Commission leads the procession with a magnificently equipped four-in-hands. Nothing more stylish can be seen in Central Park, New York, or Hyde Park, London, during the season...

Next comes a swell stranger...with a four-in-hands from the stables of Thomas Kelly and Sons, the California-Street liverymen. This turn-out is as perfect in all its appointments and details as any private equipage could be...a fast-stepping trotter...is driven by a handsome blonde who is accompanied by a female friend. The blond is one of the mysteries of the city—a mystery of a type that is to be found in all great cities. She lives with her husband in a swagger hotel...they both live well and never seem short of money...Young Doppelkroutz...is a grocer's clerk
with a salary of $30 per month and board. He is only two years out from Germany, and is anxious to show people that he is a blood... One might watch this procession with interest and amusement all the afternoon, for it never ceases.10

Ideally, people would spend an entire day in the park, selecting some portion of it and spending the time there with friends and books, watching squirrels and birds, listening to music, picnicking, playing croquet, boating, watching their children at play, and so on. Spending a day in the park required creature comforts, refreshment stands, comfort stations, and other support structures, even though they were not entirely in keeping with the outdoor ideal of the pleasure garden. Some of these constructions such as lamps, benches, and seaters, offered places of rest, the amenities from which to enjoy military reviews and social promenades. Comfort stations roused some ambivalence; for example, railway companies, not the Park Department, constructed the toilets at the rail terminus in Golden Gate Park. Drinking fountains were provided both for horses and humans, though the latter were supplied less as a creature comfort than as a reform device intended to compete with saloons for the working man's lunch hour. As such, a mineral water concession in Central Park could turn the American social invitation to come and take a drink into a harmless indulgence: "Cold water won't do, and milk is not the thing, either: these sparkling waters answer the purpose, and gratify, besides, that incomprehensible liking... for taking quack medicines."11

All park departments sponsored music, though not all kinds. Administrators excluded German polkas—"oompah" music—on the grounds that they were undignified, overly stimulating, and associated with dancing. By contrast classical music was edifying, though the demand for popular music led to a compromise: light music composed of popular versions of more classical tunes.12

In anticipation of the importance of concerts, planners in all three cities designed roadways to include places for carriages to stop and listen. San Franciscans noted with satis-
faction that park concerts were popular enough to have become established as a public necessity.  

Skating was both a vigorous sport and a winter form of airing. In 1873 Scribner’s Monthly observed, “No sooner had the commissioners established the Winter Skating Pond than ‘rinks,’ as they were called, were built in the city [of New York] itself, and in the villages in the immediate vicinity, and every owner of a duck pond saw his way to fortune by putting up a shanty on its edge and sending out the tidings of a new skating place.” Ice skating became so popular in New York City that the commissioners and horse-car companies would take pains to let the skating public know when the ice was in good condition. From the day after Christmas until the twenty-third of February, trolleys carried white flags if the ice was strong enough for skating. The sport spread to Chicago, where park management flooded small lakes and maintained the ice.

In the 1890s vigorous athletics took an increasingly large place in park programming. Baseball was the most popular, then football and lacrosse. Baseball had been played since the end of the Civil War, but parks did not accommodate it until the 1890s. Similarly, bicyclists were resisted for some time, but by the 1890s New Yorkers, Chicagoans, and San Franciscans could ride bicycles or velocipedes on paths constructed specifically for them. Even motorcycle races joined Chicago’s repertoire of acceptable activities in 1895 when Lincoln and Jackson Parks both hosted them.

Enjoyment

Commercial activities smacked of the city to which the pleasure ground was an antidote, so park guardians fought them. San Francisco papers feared the possibility of the park’s being turned into a “shop where all sorts of business and games may be carried on,” and Harper’s Weekly resisted the idea that “every man with a project, from a peanut stand to a zoological garden . . . should have a place in the Central Park.” Similarly, commissioners forbade advertising: “where people go for the express object of avoiding of-
sensive objects and appeals to the attention, displays that intend to arrest the attention are clearly public nuisances. When a steel company donated a fence to Golden Gate Park and asked that a sign acknowledge their donation, the commissioners were willing to remove the fence along with the sign if that was necessary to keep the parks as a pleasure ground, not an advertising medium.

Even athletic associations announcing activities could not post a sign.

Not all exclusions were so straightforward. The pleasure ground ideal was subtle, and along with hypocrisy and equivocation it encouraged controversy and the making of fine distinctions. Park proponents were advocates of enjoyment, an ideal opposed simultaneously to mere amusement and instruction. The pleasures derived from amusement operations were considered superficial, and lessons or formal instruction too much like the normal round of rational, daily structured activities. A workable definition of enjoyment emerged from the discussions about whether or not to include museums and other cultural institutions in parks. The purists among the enjoyment advocates resisted museums, exhibits, and galleries. A Chicago booster and officer of the American Builder, for example, insisted that parks should not have any collections of art that would invite examination and study, and in New York Scribners opposed an arboretum, a botanical garden, or a zoological garden for their park because they would detract from the character of the park as a place of recreation: “Science and art are excellent things, each in its way, but they are better outside the Park than in it.” Nevertheless, policy-makers perceived a public need for cultural institutions that could be made sufficiently entertaining to create an enjoyable atmosphere: “if we can give people information in a playful way in the park, it will be a good thing to do.”

This early judgment justified the museums, botanical gardens, zoological gardens, aquariums, arboretums, meteorology observatories, and music halls we see in parks today. Even small, informally organized collections of animals or plants, like the buffalo herds in San Francisco were thought to serve the double purpose of instruction and pleasure.

Overall, American parks were more austere than the beer gardens and amusement parks of American cities like New York’s Coney Island, Chicago’s Riverside, and San Francisco’s Woodward Gardens, or even the pleasure gardens of European cities. Large stretches of the Prater in Vienna, for example, offered its visitors numerous restaurants, cafes, theaters, circuses, bowling alleys, shooting galleries, gymnasiums, and swings. The New York park commissioners did not see the difference as unfavorable to the American model, and Charles S. Sargent, editor of Garden and Forest, was outspoken about the secondary importance of mere amusement:

No mere playground can serve the purpose of recreation in this truer, broader sense—the purpose of refreshment, of renewal of life and strength for body and soul alike. The truest value of public pleasure grounds for large cities is in the rest they give to eyes and mind, to heart and soul, through the soothing charm, the fresh and inspiring influence, the impersonal, unexciting pleasure which nothing but the works of Nature can offer to man.

The transcendentalist cure for the excessive and one-sided stimulation of the psyche was to enjoy nature: “to love trees and shrubs, and open fields, birds and flowers, rivers, lakes, and skies . . . [to] see and appreciate the beautiful things about them.” The pleasure ground soothed one part of the mind while arousing the other. In the concept of the park as a pleasure ground no sport, no matter how wholesome, could appropriately be treated as the purpose of a park, but people misunderstood the function of parks. The drives, rides, and walks became more important than the scenery, and the open greens were used for athletic games, the woods for picnicking, and the waters for rowing, sailing, or skating, according to the season.

As a result of differing conceptions of park purpose even walking on the grass which was being destroyed in the course of use became a controversial matter. While in New
Fanciful activities included this sail- and oar-driven boating ring in Golden Gate Park. Undated. Courtesy the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Although stereotyped as passive, the pleasure ground hosted active sports, including lawn tennis which was popular with both men and women. After 1893, Jackson Park, Chicago. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.
York, the commission was criticized for restricting the use of turf for ball games, in Chicago playing games and even resting on the grass were prohibited. In San Francisco, however, Park Superintendent John McLaren had “Keep off the grass” signs banned. Sargent, a proponent of the pleasure ground principle, argued that the pleasure of walking on the grass was exaggerated, and to another columnist’s complaint that “Keep off the grass” signs looked inhospitable in parks whose purpose is to welcome visitors tired of walking on stone pavements, he replied, “An appeal to the eye is stronger than one to the soles of the feet.”

Some activities were widely popular but excluded from park life; these exclusions further describe the ideal of enjoyment and reveal its class bias. Gambling stimulated the emotions and acknowledged the importance of fate rather than rational control, so it had to be driven away from the park. Folk entertainment like horseshoe pitching, tomahawk twirling, and bullet throwing were not refined enough for city parks despite their popularity, and vaudeville filled the newspapers but not park programs. Other popular activities like baseball and bicycling were assimilated into park programming only after a period of resistance.

Violence and fighting constantly erupted in cities, but fistfighting, wrestling matches, duelling, and any other blood sport or unruly behavior and quarrels were strictly forbidden and were violations of park ordinances. Whenever annual reports and newspapers commented that a crowd had been unusually well-behaved, even for its large numbers, it was evidence that a park event had been successful. Workers pouring into the city from rural areas and peasant immigrants from other countries did not share, of course, standards of behavior in public places, so that rules against spitting, swearing, drinking, raising of the voice, or running underscored the need to create a civic order. The commissioners hoped that through the enforced codes the conduct of the masses would be elevated in all aspects of city life. The fact that these ordinances against improper use of the
park existed indicates the heterogeneous, often unsocialized character of the peoples who visited the parks.

Restaurants too were regarded as intrusive in the setting of a park, particularly in San Francisco. A children's refreshment depot was prevented from degenerating into a mere restaurant. The Victorian roadhouse in Stern Grove which had been a retreat for the rich, where they could enjoy the lily ponds, beer gardens, deer park, trout farm, and outdoor dance pavilion, was converted by the parks department into a meeting and reception hall. Golden Gate's neoclassical casino was turned into a museum after some scandalous brawls and exposures that it was a haunt of loose women and obnoxious masurers: apparently five rooms on the second floor had come into popular demand for continuous orgies. When seven years later Park Commissioner F. W. Zeile resurrected the idea of the casino, he wanted to dignify its atmosphere with music, clinking goblets, dazzling lights, gay women, gallant men, Tahoe trout, terrapin pates. Yet, even so exalted, it would still be a restaurant, and as such aroused the pointed sarcasm of the media. Even while the San Francisco Examiner mocked the class bias of this scenario, they were just as skeptical about popular German or teetotaling alternatives, questioning the value of a restaurant as a place "where beer shall foam... while pretzels shall tangle the teeth with thirst, where the meatwurst, the sauerkraut and the sausage lay claim... or... [where] the milkshake, the ginger pop, the lemonade and the sandwich prevail." The Bulletin was dubious mainly because the problem of enforcing temperance in restaurants had been difficult in the past, and because on principle the park was constructed for purposes other than eating and drinking. Only the Newsletter favored the casino:

You ride out on a car with your wife and stroll the parks. You become thirsty or hungry or both. There is nothing for you to do but walk back to the cars and come home, or else patronize one of the questionable roadhouses that fringe the Park at the terminals of the Geary Street and Sacramento Street lines. A man who knows anything about the world and respects his wife will not patronize one of these establishments. He has the choice of going hungry, or thirsty, or home.

They rather recommended that the restaurant attract a broader clientele:

Have the milk-shake and the Queen Charlotte and the ginger-pop... and something else for those who want that. Don't make a Sunday-school picnicker out of everybody who goes there. Run the cafe on a businesslike, restaurant-like basis, and it will be self-supporting, run it as a WCTU headquarters and it will always be in the hole and somebody will be watering the milk to keep expenses down.

To avoid violating the park taboo of including a commercial activity, restaurants had to be defined as a public service and thus became enmeshed in competing visions of the good life. Sensual music and food could have provided a clear-cut contrast to the regimentation of urban and industrial life, but they were not welcome; temperance forces were victorious, and drink has been outlawed in most parks to this day. No policy-maker would solve one problem while exacerbating what he perceived as another.

Horse racing may have been a development of ailing, but clearly it violated the ideal of enjoyment. The upper classes, however, did not always find their own frivility as damaging as that of their inferiors, and, when factions among them pushed in all three cities for race tracks in the parks, defenders of the pleasure ground ideal were unsuccessful in stopping them. This challenge to their views forced them to articulate their ideal of enjoyment with particular fullness.

The resistance to a speedway in Central Park in the 1890s was especially vehemence. Naturally, Sargent objected to a speedway as unbecoming both to the form and the program of Central Park:

Just now certain wealthy gentlemen of this city have revived the project to run a broad, straight, and perfectly level road through Central Park along its western boundary line, to be used exclusively for driving horses at speed, and either they do not understand that this will mean the utter ruin of the park as a place of rural recreation, or, if they do
understand this, they consider the use to which they propose to devote it a more important one than that for which it was originally intended.31

The speedway proponents argued, however, that provisions already existed for pedestrians, equestrians, carriage riders, and why not, then, a special place for speed trotters? Sargent answered that the roads and paths existed in the park not primarily as places for walking and driving but to enable people to enjoy the park in different ways.32 He compared it with lawn tennis, skating, and some other sports that complemented the quiet scenery and pointed out that no portion of the park had been turned into a desert, replaced by gravel, or substantially stripped of trees to make room for them. When proponents of the speedway justified the plan on the grounds that the portion of the park in question was unused, Sargent sneered, "It seems to be a prevalent opinion that land which cannot be driven over or trampled on or covered with structures of some kind can serve no useful purpose."33

In March 1892 legislation was passed authorizing the construction of a speedroad. The park board voted funds for the project and ordered their engineer to begin plans. But nearly every newspaper in the city attacked the idea, and a volunteer committee of citizens circulated petitions against it. At a public hearing on the question opponents appeared in force, and the board rescinded the action. Throughout the campaign against the speedway, thousands of names and money poured in to finance and support the citizens' committee, and newspapers kept up the attack. Labor unions defended Central Park against this proposal on the grounds that it had special value for working-class families who could not get away to the mountains and seashore for the summer.

Three years after the exclusion of the speedway from Central Park, new legislation established a speedway along the Harlem River, and by 1898 the annual report of the Park Department could announce blandly that the speedway was a new acquisition to the department, a novelty in park administration, next in public interest after Central Park, and popular with the general public as well as with horse owners.34 The busy scene in Currier and Ives's lithograph "Fast Trotters of Harlem Lane, N.Y." confirms this claim.

Discussions of politics and religion were heated and exciting, and rallies and public meetings over religious and political issues were evocative of the city proper. As a result they were almost always kept out of park programming. Applications for Sunday services were periodically submitted to the park commissioners and always rejected. Boston commissioners did not allow parks to be used for public meetings, and, in defending themselves, they reported that other cities were divided on this issue as well.35 Philadelphia allowed only religious meetings. The South Park system in Chicago forbade public meetings that would lead to crowds and speechmaking, and the West Side Park Department allowed no large gatherings for public meetings of any sort. Brooklyn only permitted such gatherings for a parade of Sunday school children.

Politics and religion were divisive, and commissioners needed the parks to appear nonsectarian to justify public spending. Conceptually, the pleasure ground was meant to transcend, not reflect, the evils of urban life, of which division was a prominent symptom. As a line of reasoning, this was consistent with military use of the pleasure garden, both before and after 1900: politics entails debates within a society; military power was supposedly on the side of one unified nation. In any case the original program for the competition for the design of Central Park called for a military parade ground, and the arsenal was retained within the borders of the park. In San Francisco the park commissioners gave regimental and company officers freedom to use the grounds for purposes of drill.36

Sargent alone waged battle against the military use of Central Park:

If the Park Commissioners do not know that military displays are entirely out of character with the purpose of the
park, which is to afford quiet and refreshment to the people, if they do not know that in this especial case the admission of the military would be utterly destructive of the beauty of the park, and that it would cost thousands of dollars and years of time to restore it, they are incompetent.37

Picturesque Theory
The beauty of the park was to evoke a sense of what art historians call "picturesque." To pleasure ground designers, the informal picturesque approach to organizing the landscape was the ideal antidote to the highly artificial American city. European palace gardens like Versailles were artificial—symmetrical, rational, geometric, and heavily architectural—and thus an unsuitable model. In fact, Olmsted, who was largely responsible for promoting the idea of the picturesque landscape park, felt that pure wilderness would provide the best and sharpest contrast with civilization. But because he recognized that the wilderness would be hard, if not impossible, to simulate within a city's boundaries, he decided that the picturesque—the pastoral middle landscape—was an appropriate compromise. Its informality was democratic, and it offered the right synthesis of the beautiful and the sublime: an overall composition of smoothness, harmony, serenity, and order, with an occasional reminder of the awesome grandeur of a mountain, a deep crevasse, long waterfall, or steep crag.

Olmsted acknowledged that a wilderness park would be impractical, but in any case the theory of the garden in both England and the continent had already established that uncultivated naturalness was undesirable. The European pleasure gardens of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been designed according to three rules prescribing the relationship between nature and art: [1] the garden should orient itself to the image of nature; [2] in mirroring nature, it should be differentiated from the surrounding landscape and recognizable as something different; and [3] this difference should not be an unnatural contrast but rather a heightening of nature in the image of nature and reason.38 Accordingly, the goal for the American
pleasure ground was to heighten the idea of naturalness with forms suggested by nature but not to rely on what nature actually provided.

Despite this, Americans sometimes failed to realize that deliberate naturalistic landscaping was itself artificial. True naturalists tried to keep this artistic concept of a naturalistic setting in check, as did one San Franciscan when a proposal was made to allow a railway to use the unimproved portions of Golden Gate Park:

If the term (unimproved) is applied to the strips of undulating land covered with bent grass, lupine, and crops of wild plants which the vulgar and ignorant call weeds, it is nonsensical and misleading. To many these spots are more interesting than the beds of flowers and plats of lawn so carefully watered but so dreadfully artificial. The Presidio in its wilderness has many charms the Park has lost.

Still another challenged the very policy of imitating nature:

The trouble with many public parks is that there is too much landscape gardening and so on. That is the trouble with Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. It is all too artificial. The beauties of nature have been marred by man’s handiwork. You can’t improve on nature.

**Site Selection**

Site selection was compromised by political, economic, and demographic considerations. One of the first considerations was finding the land. Nineteenth-century cities had only a few parks before the large pleasure grounds were established. In San Francisco the western addition was laid out in 1855, with seven large squares set aside for recreation; the Potrero plan had included three similar squares. The New York City plan of 1811 was not even this generous, offering only a few open squares. Before 1869 Chicago made no plans at all for open space preservation; instead small bits of land—triangles between intersecting streets, unsuitable for other purposes—were donated to the city by private citizens. Before the park movement got underway, recreation took place in whatever small pockets and central areas were nearest a person’s residence or work: burial grounds, plazas, market gardens, tenement courts, settlement houses, schoolyards, and streets, or in commercial establishments like beer gardens, ocean beach resorts, and amusement parks.

Some park advocates promoted the park to replace certain land uses while others saw them as complementary to existing open spaces. In Chicago, for example, a Dr. Rauch would insist that the cemeteries be removed from the city center altogether and replaced by healthful parks, whereas in New York Scribner’s Monthly would endorse Central Park as an addition to the city’s open spaces:

... however beautiful a Mount Auburn or a Laurel Hill might be made with winding walks, and trees and flowers and quiet pools, it could not be a place where one would go to shake off sad thoughts, or escape from the company of care. Cemeteries are good schools, ... but a garden is no less a school, and such places of recreation are necessary in every great city for health of body and mind.

In New York City a dumping ground at Rutger’s Slip was cleared up for a playground, and existing plazas were prepared for a radical transformation. In San Francisco it was the criticized Portsmouth Square, “a general repository for everything, from glass bottles, to drunken women, lime, watermelons, and old rags” that was coveted by park advocates, as editorialized in the *Alta*:

It certainly is a Public Square in every sense of the word, for an individual appears to consider himself perfectly free to occupy it for whatever purposes he pleases. It is converted into a cattle show, mule mart, vegetable and fruit market, hay market, lumber yard, auction yard, wheelwright’s shop, carpenter’s shop, engine house, and cart stands. ... vehicles of all sorts criss-cross it ... it resembles a rag fair or a marketplace in a western city.

The redeemed site would have instead

... trees planted, the fence built, the walks rolled, the benches made, the fresh, bright, green grass springing up, intermixed with fragrant clover; little boys and girls endeavoring to paddle in the basin and catch the goldfish, scout old men in voluminous white waist-coats restraining very small boys from precipitating themselves into the
water, nurses endeavoring to amuse their charges, lovers prattling soft nonsense to their mistresses ... and in the foreground our worthy Mayor contemplating the completion of the picture he drew in his inaugural message.\footnote{43}

The first order of business in the creation of Central Park was to remove squatters whose shanties with their bone-boiling establishments, piggeries, and stagnant water emitted a most offensive odor.\footnote{44}

Sometimes park advocates tried to defeat a morally dubious venture by denying it any land whatsoever: reformers hoped to eradicate the amusement park, the tavern, and the beer garden altogether. Amusement parks, however, were too popular to supplant; they usually survived until burned down or badly deteriorated. Woodward's Gardens in San Francisco, which had its counterpart in most other cities, was visited daily by hundreds. It was considered the best resort on the Pacific slope, offering along with a museum, art gallery, zoo, picnic grounds, boating, a library, a refreshment saloon, Sunday concerts, balloon ascensions, and a popular aviary, a Mecca for outdoor amusement until the popularity of Golden Gate Park increased toward the end of the century.

Contrasts between Coney Island and municipal parks appeared frequently in popular and park writing, but not always in support of the pleasure park, as this excerpt from the New Republic shows:

You come upon it, the municipal Seaside Park, at the end of our dirty white street. Within a thick hedge there is a level greensward. Huge trees shade its borders, like all respectable parks it has flowers and rubbish cans. But with us who go to Coney the park is not popular. Not enough jazz. Too quiet. You can see an old park anywhere, but Coney is the place of the hot dogs, the dance pavilions, the African dodger, the ring toss with its prizes of candy and kewpie dolls. The park department has done its bit for Puritanism with its absurd sign: 'Persons in Bathing Suits Not Allowed in This Park.' Except on the warmest day it is needless.\footnote{45}

Not only was the pleasure ground in competition with the amusement park, but also it had to contend for open land where there were already residential parks like New York's Gramercy Park. Another, in San Francisco's South Park, was a speculative housing project with building lots fronting a central oval nearly a quarter of a mile long, modeled after the ovals and crescents of London. The oval belonged in common to the lot holders, thus offering them spacious ornamental grounds instead of a dusty, sandy, or planked street. This kind of elegance was precisely what the pleasure ground advocates were trying to steer away from: the park they would plan in the nearby Mission district they described as a "people's pleasure ground in every sense of the word, not merely a square amid a lot of houses."\footnote{46}

Thus in practice the sites selected were simply those for which there was no competition at all, those unusable for other purposes. Chicago's South Park system was a swamp, considered wasteland; Louisiana's central park was a swampy jungle inhabited only by Indians; Golden Gate Park was shifting sand dunes, the Back Bay in Boston was selected in part because its gullies were too steep for construction, land for Morningside Park in New York was too rocky for farming or building; Central Park had poor, rocky soil:

Never was a more desolate piece of land chosen for a pleasure ground. The barren ledges of gneiss were covered here and there with patches of unsightly vegetation, or, what was still worse, with clumps of squatters' shanties. ... There were strips of marsh, covered with coarse grass, and in the hollows green, sluggish pools served as bathing places for ducks and geese. ... Pigs and goats ranged over the rocks, and snuffled in the stubble and weeds. Indeed, the soil, spread in a thin layer over the gneiss, was too shallow to support any vigorous vegetable life.\footnote{47}

In the case of Central Park, a remote site satisfied the park's designers in a number of ways: Its remote location made possible its generous size, which could then accommodate lengthy carriage drives and other activities that required open ground. Size also allowed spectators to look on from a safe distance, while still others could seclude themselves in privacy from participants and spectators alike. In
Chicago, a booster congratulated his fellow citizens for their farsighted selection of remote, generous ground:

It is unquestionable that the park and boulevard system of Chicago was planned and carried out far ahead of the city's actual needs. In truth, even at the present writing [1891] they are beyond all proportion to the use made of them. . . . This being so when the city has long passed the million mark, how almost absurd they must have seemed when they were laid out encircling [though far away from] a town of only three hundred thousand souls! They fitted about as well as a wedding ring on a baby girl's finger. . . . If it had not been done when it was, it would have been impossible ever afterward.48

Nonetheless, when the choice of available land was actually made, considerations of landscape, cross-ventilation, view, access, circulation, and topography although not insignificant, were ultimately secondary to economic and political expediency. Often these site selection criteria were simply abandoned to accept gifts. In New York site selection for a public park involved a conflict between proponents of Jones' Woods and the future Central Park area which was weighted with economic considerations. Jones' Woods was a wooded waterfront site of 153.5 acres on the east side of Manhattan near the tenements, while the Central Park area was a treeless, rocky site miles from the city. The legislature first authorized funds to buy Jones' Woods, but the decision was hotly contested.

Jones' Woods was closer to New York's population, had a river front and trees, and would offer immediate returns. The opposition included the horticulturist Andrew Jackson Downing, who challenged the feasibility of using this land for park purposes because it could be used for commercial docking and because a shore site was healthful and pleasurable without a planned park on it. The Central Park area was proposed as an alternative that would offer cross-ventilation, access from two sides, and easier conversion to a park than Jones' Woods, which had too many trees for open space. A tract of land as large as Central Park could better accommodate population growth. The cost considerations of purchasing the land also worked in favor of the

Central Park location. Although as a parcel Jones' Woods cost less, the per acre price of Central Park was lower. The planners could not ignore that in the long run Central Park was to have taxable property on all four sides, although some of the land around the arsenal and reservoir was already public property, while Jones' Woods could not have property owners along the riverside. Much of the public clamor over the choice of Jones' Woods was, however, that the benefits would be disproportionate. The taxing system at that time did not require the adjoining property owners to pay extra taxes even though their property values would go up.

The committee assigned to study the issue of a public park in New York concluded that both sites should be purchased, but the act authorizing the purchase of the Jones' Woods site was repealed in 1854. In retrospect the argument that Jones' Woods did not offer enough space might seem farsighted, but the charges and countercharges in the New York State Senate minority and majority reports for 1853 suggest that it was financial interests, especially commercial docking operations, that won the day.49

In San Francisco, the selection of the land for Golden Gate Park had highly political motivations. The ordinance establishing Golden Gate Park resolved a violent and bloody conflict between the city and squatters who had made competing claims to land that included the present park site. The squatters were given clear title on the condition that they give ten percent of their claim to the city for the park. In a certain sense the idea of a public pleasure park was compromised through a face-saving trade. Olmsted's plan for a carefully sited system of connected parks at what are now Aquatic Park, Van Ness and Divisadero Avenues and the Mission district in downtown San Francisco was no competition for such a political opportunity.

In Chicago public access was the principle that governed the location and use of parks: Lincoln Park depended on horsecars, but all the other parks were laid out near routes
used by the commuter trains of the major railroads. In practice elsewhere transportation was not the primary design principle, yet Olmsted continued to advocate the use of drives and boulevards to link parks into an entire system that would also define different parts of cities like Seattle, Boston, and Minneapolis and give them structures around which to organize. For New York Olmsted and Calvert Vaux had conceived of a chain of parks from Prospect Park in Brooklyn to the ocean, back up behind Brooklyn linking a series of small parks, crossing the East River into Central Park and over the Hudson River to New Jersey’s Palisades, ending in the Orange Mountains.

Whatever little success designers had with these plans, once a site was selected, its almost invariably peripheral location required that primary attention be given to street connections. In San Francisco proposals were made to link the tops of all the highest hills via boulevards and to run an avenue from city center to Golden Gate Park and from there to the Presidio, a military reservation. In Boston the parkways followed the watercourses of the community—the cheapest way to solve the problem of surface drainage while at the same time creating a pleasant view. In Chicago Horace Cleveland proposed planting the boulevards with every variety of tree and shrub that would thrive in the climate, allotting to each family a length corresponding to its importance. With parkways and street-car lines supplementing carriage travel, and thus increasing popular access to the parks, public grounds need not be located in poor sections of the city. Good transportation was a compensation for a remote location. The San Francisco Report for 1890 explained, “the ever present cable car lines furnish pleasant, cheap, and expeditious transit to and from our great park, thus equalizing the facilities of the entire population for enjoying its advantages.”

**Design**

The ideals of naturalness and informality suggested meandering roads, gradual changes in grade, luxuriant, almost tropical planting, and permanence. Park designers often were pressured to solve problems piecemeal because politicians did not understand the need to treat the landscape as a whole. The general public might be fond of flower gardens or clipped shrubs, but designers insisted that they should be subservient to the larger composition, a park being superior to the mere frippery of a decorative garden. Gardens that are like miniature paintings in their attention to detail had no place where the broad, grand scale of landscape architecture was needed. As an informal adviser to the San Francisco Park commission, Olmsted aptly defended this view in a letter in which he stated that a garden was “no more an essential part of the rural park . . . than is a picture hung in a frame an essential part of the house that holds it.”

The program issued by the park department for the Central Park design competition required four or more east to west crossings, a parade ground of forty acres, three playfields up to ten acres each, sites for exhibition halls, a large fountain, a prospect tower, a speeding ground, and a three-acre flower garden—all for a $1.5 million dollar budget. The winning team of Olmsted and Vaux fleshed out the skeletal requirements in several ways: they devised a complete separation of the east to west crossings from the interior circulation of the park, added cricket grounds, divided the site into two basic parts—a sweeping, broad part to the north and a rocky, more picturesque, part to the south—and planned a wall of vegetation around the perimeter to insure that buildings remained visually insignificant. The Ramble was treated as the heart of the park and offered the epitome of picturesque intricacy and variety with its irregular clusters of shrubbery interspersed with patches of open ground and winding paths that opened up new views or vistas at every turn and conveyed the impression of a much more spacious area than it really was. The popular press took a great delight in writing about the Glorieta, or rustic summer houses, that dotted about in odd corners of the park.

Golden Gate Park’s first superintendent, the young engineer William Hammond Hall, advocated architecture and
gardenesque landscaping for Golden Gate Park, but his reason was that general aesthetic standards for the pleasure ground needed to be modified according to local circumstances. For example, ocean winds required an artificial warmth of feeling that would be supplied by graceful architectural shapes and a gay and sprightly treatment at certain localities. The pastoral landscape could be prevented from becoming monotonous—it could be made sprightly—by the use of "local passages, strongly contrasting in the picturesque and gardenesque." But Golden Gate's next superintendent, John McLaren, was attacked vehemently for failing to meet the standard of unity, variety, and harmony. A fellow landscape gardener charged that he totally ignored "all the theories and principles of the art of landscape gardening. His ideas, executed at great expense, are odd, bombastic, conceited and whimsical."

The consequence of naturalness was that the finished product looked unimproved, and, since the public was asked to spend its money without obvious effect, informal designs were hard to defend. In San Francisco a grading company proposed to grade the entire park, cutting "things down to a plane like a public square. Hills, valleys, undulations were to be done away with. There was a hot time in the inner circles." Although the matter was killed before it reached the board, and the vision of a naturalistic park won in competition with other designs, the vision did not always win against encroachments that were to follow.

**Drives**

The form of internal circulation paths aroused little disagreement, since most designers agreed that they should be curved. The flowing lines of an arabesque would contrast with the wearisome rectangularity of cities. The winning Greensward plan for Central Park avoided long, straight drives in order to squelch trotting matches. In San Francisco a special condition reinforced the curvilinear solution; a system of turning roads and walks, planted with clumps of trees, would avoid the sweep of the wind. Psychologically, in response to the damp climate, more
warmth would be felt in a diversified plan than in one using straight avenues. In the midwest, landscape architect Cleveland dissented, arguing for straight roads if there was no reason for a curve.

The pleasure ground characteristically separated its transportation systems: landscape and planning historians have considered this one of its most distinctive features. Vehicles and pedestrians had different drive- and walkways, so that a toddler, a pair of lovers, or picnickers could use the park without being harried by vehicular traffic. The designers of Central Park separated carriage from pedestrian traffic in the handling of the four transverse roads, but usually ran footpaths close to carriage roads to take advantage of the view of the equipages and their occupants. The parks of Chicago and San Francisco followed this example. Driveways for vehicles, walkways for pedestrians, and tracks for cyclers required special bridges and tunnels, and sometimes roads were sunk at points of intersection so that one kind of road could be carried over another without incident, visual or physical. European carriageways were carried over promenades on causeways with high arches, but this was unacceptable in America because such forms would disrupt wide vistas and introduce unwanted construction.

**Water**
The artificial lakes, important features of large parks, required sophisticated drainage systems to allay fears about seepage, evaporation, lack of movement, and freshness of the water, so designers considered them worth the effort. From certain vantage points broad expanses of water that would merge with the sky would create an illusion of infinity that contrasted with the finitude of the urban grid. Flat sheets of water suggested placidity, so the masterful landscape gardener of Chicago's West Park, Jens Jensen, treated the lagoons as if they were sleepy Illinois rivers, winding their way in typical S-curves through the flat prairies. A cascading stream was useful only rarely where a picturesque element might be needed to enliven a setting; for example, Jensen created a waterfall which cascaded over stones and collected in a great basin before plunging into the placid lagoon.

The bodies of water artificially created to express the social content of the parks were more important than natural shorelines. In San Francisco Hall complained about the low priority given to treating the ocean beach, and in Chicago the creation of a permanent beach along Lake Michigan took place well after the creation of lagoons and lakes, even though the lakeshore was always in the public domain. New York gave up its shore site at Jones' Woods in favor of Central Park; much later waterfront recreation in New York's Riverside Park was promoted as complementary to the pleasure ground at Central Park.

**Flora**
The value of shrubs and trees lay primarily in their capacity to form and modulate space. The pleasure garden designer arranged masses of trees to form long vistas leading the eye into imaginary distances and to create the kinesthetic experience of moving through spatial sequences. The woods opened and closed around meadows, beckoning strollers forward through narrow passages intended to pique their curiosity about what was on the other side. Banks of trees also created backdrops for the staging of dramatic natural spectacles—occasional reminders of the awesomeness of nature in the wild. Plantings screened the border of ugly urban surroundings.

According to picturesque theory the designer avoided calling attention to the individual tree, its bark, leaves, and other details. Hence native varieties rather than exotic ones were preferred. (Olmsted tried to achieve a tropical effect of luxuriant growth in his parks, but he used hearty native plants to do it.) Specimen planting, later popular in the gardenesque style, was to be avoided, which is why arboreums are not more common in parks and along parkways. In Mount Royal, Montreal, Olmsted chose different plant material for each level to enhance the illusion of height,
Chicago opened its lakeshore for swimming in 1895; photo taken ca. 1900. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

Picturesque flocks of sheep and herds of deer or reindeer kept meadows mowed before departments purchased mechanical mowers in the 1930s. Woodland Park, Seattle. University of Washington Library.
which he intended as an environmental illusion rather than a botanical lesson.

Trees clustered into forests were preferred aesthetically for their sylvan effects and luxuriant foliage and in particular for their imagined role in preventing malaria and the diffusion of fever germs. Pine forests in particular were valued on the theory that the turpentine they diffused into the air would purify it by destroying deleterious gasses. Trees produced a clean, fragrant aroma, valued for its association with health and for its aesthetic release from the stench of the city's open sewerage system. The public, not understanding the scientific justification for pruning and thinning these prized stands, often protested. When they won, trees crowded themselves out of shape, died prematurely, or harbored insects.

Mowed grass was basic to the pleasure ground. An urban park should provide an antithesis to bustling, paved, rectangular street blocks; this requirement would best be met by a large, open, tranquil meadow-like park. In San Francisco dunes and frog ponds were transformed into lawn where buffalo herds, like sheep and deer in the park systems of other cities, grazed on the grass, simultaneously practical and picturesque. Lawn was protected: when a children's playground was proposed on the site of the picturesque north meadow in Central Park, the Park Commission relegated it instead to an area of less important landscape.

Playing fields for sports, such as baseball, football, and even polo, and general playgrounds for less formal ball games were usually relegated to a space near the edge of the park. This provided easy access and preserved the tranquility of the inner core. The park reports, however, gave little attention to the way these sports areas affected boundaries, surfaces, and other landscape elements; their purpose was simply to meet the demand for sport, rather than the more important one of stimulating and orchestrating a special kind of psychological experience.

Some sense of the importance of greenery to the pleasure ground ideal can be derived from considering the extent of the struggle to establish it on the dunes of Golden Gate Park. The prospects were dismal. The dunes attracted no one except men hunting frogs for San Francisco's already famous French restaurants. In 1866 four prominent newspapers denounced the idea of building the park on the dunes. Important civic leaders and landowners also resisted the project. Nevertheless, Engineer William Hammond Hall began to mount a case for the feasibility of reclaiming the dunes. Sand reclamation accounts were translated from French and other European languages, attention was called to the foresting of the Bay of Biscay in France, and the first experiments in planting the dunes were made. But even Olmsted doubted the chances of succeeding on this land.

One objection to reclaiming the tract was that, even if the effort was successful, the winds would blow sand from the adjacent dunes over the new plant material, undoing reclamation efforts. But others optimistically assumed that reclamation of these sand drifts would "stimulate the owners of adjoining property to turn the desert into a garden." Indeed, once people saw with their own eyes that plants could grow on the dunes, their worries subsided. By 1875 all editorial opinion had aboutfaced.

Designers relied on the haze and obscurity of irregular planting to suggest the feeling and idea of distance and tried to avoid the use of flowers or even colored foliage. Olmsted felt that flowers revealed the hand of man, which the park visitor saw all too much of in the city. Sargent decreed that the introduction of bedding plants was "altogether out of harmony with the spirit of the place." He thought that, because bright-hued leaves did not grow in the United States, their jarring, exotic aspect, although fashionable in Europe, must be eschewed here in order to follow nature.

Olmsted relaxed his standards only in the case of large naturalistic bands of one species of one flower or decorative
gardens confined to narrow bands and formal plots around buildings. Even such a policy of restraint, however, proved to be dangerous, for once flowers of any kind were introduced discipline might slack, and this could open the way to Victorian excesses.

Park purists wanted to exclude the Victorian practice of making pictures and allegories with flowers and plants altogether. Planting should be luxurious and permanent, not seasonal: if there were flowers, then they should be wildflowers. But the local press liked to describe the elaborate, sculptural floral displays, and this reinforced their importance.

In fact, carpet bedding was the most powerful force eroding the controlled use of flowers. From the start, Chicago specialized in allegorical planting which conveyed political and religious messages. Flowerbeds were shaped like stars, baskets, cornucopias, and pyramids. San Francisco began to indulge in carpet bedding in the 1890s. Newspapers billed intricate floral works as the latest attraction and proposed floral maps of the United States or California.

**Architecture**

Buildings, like roads and walls, were necessary evils required to make parks usable. As in the case of flowers, even their restrained introduction into the parks posed a danger to the pleasure ground ideal. According to that ideal, architecture was supposed to subordinate itself to the overall composition of the landscape plan. Sargent and Olmsted adamantly denounced architectural features that made a park confused and fussy, like a garden or a rural cemetery. Sargent acknowledged the pleasures of throngs of men and women meeting in a holiday mood on some spacious urban plaza, but he argued that there was no excuse for a vacillating compromise between a pastoral park and an urban square. During the height of the neoclassical revival of the 1890s in New York, Commissioner George Clausen stated that his administration would protect natural scenes from architectural encroachment with the same jealous care as Victorian "bedding out" eroded the naturalistic ideal of the pleasure ground by introducing garishly colored plant material and geometric layouts. Washington Park, 1889. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

In "Rowing for the Presidential Chair," the owl atop the pole asked: "Hoo" will be president in 1892. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.
did the creators of Central Park. Accordingly, he removed buildings in front of the arsenal and replaced them with grass, flowers, and shrubs. A simple wall around a cemetery in New York’s Hudson Park was criticized because it treated the masonry more architecturally than was appropriate to park theory.

Park buildings were generally only one or two stories, to keep a low profile. Galleries and balconies on the second story often provided scenic viewing points. Ideally, large public buildings were to be outside the park entirely, but, if they were necessary for the park itself, they were to be erected on the edge of open grounds, curtained by trees so that never more than one was seen at a time. Commissioners in most cities felt that park buildings should be durable and permanent, and they were willing to build slowly to make the investment in substantial structures. When San Franciscans had to decide what to do with the temporary buildings left from the midwinter fair of 1893, they concluded that park buildings of any importance should be built of stone or marble, “or at least of enduring materials that will possess the elements of beauty and dignity,” and removed them.

Some of the rejected entries to the Central Park design competition vividly illustrate inappropriate architectural treatment. W. Benque proposed a series of four open squares with promenades and formal planting separated from each other by three blocks of buildings, including great boarding houses, schools, block-sized bazaars divided into salesrooms, libraries, opera houses, theatres, and first-class hotels. One scheme, called “The Eagle,” centered on an emblematic national fountain of thirteen star-shaped basins surrounded by American eagles. Water came out of the beaks, then from star to star. The “Rustic” scheme introduced an Italian campanile, seventy-five feet high, with a reservoir on the top. The “Manhattan style” scheme had an Italianate central avenue.

A park required many structures that were not buildings in
the fullest sense but, nevertheless, received architectural treatment. Any urban park was thought to deserve a wall to prevent the boundary from being overrun, regular walks neglected, and tracks beaten in the grass. Elaborate entrance gates were common in most pleasure grounds—a message that the parks should be taken seriously as an expression of a high level of cultural achievement. The terrace at the Central Park esplanade, although not a fully enclosed building, had extensive floors of ornamental tile. Similarly, the Central Park belvedere was a cross between architecture and landscape architecture.

The belvedere and terrace were points of focus in the landscape as well as observatories and gathering points. In contrast, buildings like depots, refectories, boat landings, and greenhouses were never aesthetic elements in their own right and were styled to fit modestly into the pastoral setting. Shoewing machinery for what it was might have been natural, but, because it appeared man-made, designers ornamented it. Thus a waterworks in Golden Gate Park was enclosed in a concrete Moorish style building, and the valley surrounding it was designed as an old-time fairy dell rather than betray an intricate twentieth-century piece of steam machinery. 

For about ten years, the park departments preferred a rustic anything: railings, bridges, pergolas, pavilions were made from small trees with the bark intact. For Golden Gate a special tree was imported from Japan because it branched evenly into a Y-shape at the right height for a railing. Pergolas and bandstands were light, airy structures, usually wallless with peaked or gabled roofs in the Victorian stick gothic style. Museums and other places of exhibition that required walls compensated for the intrusion by their unusual shapes and associations with exotic places. Most conservatories were built of wood and glass and resembled the delicate Victorian pavilions erected at late nineteenth century expositions around the world. The rustic and Victorian stick styles soon gave way to Richardsonian Romanesque—sloping roofs, asymmetrical plans, staggered rusticated
Top:
The rustic style could be found nationwide from Seattle to the Bronx. Pelham Bay, 1916.

Bottom:
Rustic materials and style were naturalistic but difficult to defend as worthy expressions of public spending. Lake Washington Park lunch room and bicycle path, 1900–1907. Seattle Historical Society.

The Victorian Gothic and Richardsonian Romanesque became favored for public buildings because the solid materials and large scale seemed worthy of public expenditure, yet these styles retained informality: asymmetrical plans and elevations, sloping rooflines, turrets and garrets, irregular windows, varied materials, and arched entry. West Chicago Park Commission Offices.
Top:
Richardsonian Romanesque arches offered an easy-going formality at this boat landing in Humboldt Park, Chicago.

Top, Opposite:
Rusticated stone work, shingling, and half-timbering reinforce the informality of the irregular plan and elevation of these stables in Humboldt Park, Chicago.

Bottom, opposite:
Private donors often preferred the symmetry, colonnades, and polished stone of neoclassical monuments in exchange for their generosity. Douglas Park, Chicago.
stonework, irregular window placement and shape, and round turrets—which also provided a picturesque contrast to commercial buildings. Yet the informal picturesque ideal was somewhat undermined by the neoclassical revival, which was given a great boost by Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893. In Golden Gate Park music was initially performed in the open air or in Victorian bandstands, but its new music concourse was designed as a "grand corso 160 feet in width and making a complete circuit of the coliseum" which would permit a double stream of carriages to move in opposite directions without interruption. The new stand, a gift of Claus Spreckels, sugar magnate and civic leader, was in the Italian Renaissance style, and, hardly an inconspicuous support structure, it proclaimed clearly the impressive status of its donor.

Ornament
Despite neoclassical competition, the picturesque ideal was never abandoned entirely. As late as 1893, the year of the Chicago Fair, the design of the boathouse in Strawberry Lake in Golden Gate Park was informal, rustic, and picturesque. But the statuary that was introduced into the parks by ethnic groups and wealthy donors was a blatant intrusion, as remote from the picturesque as the speedways, another intrusion of the rich, were from "airing."

Statuary reminded the viewer of man's handiwork, not nature's, and, because it was associated with European aristocratic formal gardens, it was an anathema to democrats. Some San Franciscans expressed a desire that "the passion may never come to make our park a pantheon, remembering that art is subject to criticism, but vegetation pleases all." Chicagoans, ever pragmatic, said statuary, fountains, and artificial decorations of all sorts could be introduced but shrubbery and landscaping should take precedence. Most designers objected to statuary in general, although laymen tended to object only to specific pieces. The American Park and Outdoor Art Association was wholly against what it called effigies in the parks:

This rustic staircase was redone in 1916 as neoclassical, reflecting the move toward more ostentatious styling. New York.
There should be no place in them... for granite pantalooned remembrances of dead musicians and soldiers and statesmen. If we cannot teach people to realize that they should keep their effigies of statesmen where they belong, then let us hide them in thickets. ... We should put nothing in our parks which suggests unrest or anything disagreeable, or that will frighten children, but we should put in objects that will suggest woods, trees, water and nature.\(^2\)

Only in limited circumstances would theoreticians consider statuary and ornament appropriate. Formal promenades were permissible settings, and rustic vases full of plants and blossoming vines punctuated the planting beds along Chicago's parkways.

Sargent explained that pressure for statuary was formidable:

We may give our commissioners too much credit if we take it for granted that they all know how bad the "Scott" is, or the "Morse," or the "Elias Howe," or the "Tigress with her Cubs," but some of them do, and these could give reasons that might convince the rest... however, you have still to convince the public, and this is a harder task. For, the public is only half-educated in matters of taste, and not only admires these very bad figures, but is continually pestering the commissioners to put up more like them.\(^3\)

They would have to be more than men, he said, if they could face the wrath that would follow their refusal. Thus a memorial arch to Golden Gate Park was donated in the memory of a widow's husband and son, and both Chicago's and San Francisco's German communities installed monuments to Schiller: "Whenever a German emigrates, Goethe and Schiller emigrate with him."\(^4\) The temperance advocate, Henry Cogswell, donated an elaborate fountain inscribed with the words Vichy, Congress Water, and California Seltzer—all intended to proclaim the virtues of ordinary drinking water.

**Transition**

Gas lighting could not be used near trees without killing them, but in any case Olmsted did not want manufactured
For a few years planners thought they could create small versions of the pleasure ground in tenement districts. In this transitional small park the buildings are inconspicuous, berms obscure surroundings, the open meadow and lazy body of water create soft edges and serenity. Chicago Park District.

lighting fixtures marring the pastoral illusion, so he accepted the constraint happily. For most cities' parks he proposed that only a large, open meadow be lit for night use. As the importance of direct use, however, came to rival that of picturesque effect, the way was open to electric lighting. In San Francisco, for example, the owners of the pleasure resorts and restaurants near the Cliff House area organized in 1895 to promote the lighting of park drives. Liverymen, cycleries, members of bicycle clubs, and wealthy horsemen joined the owners in making private contributions to the electric lighting scheme. Yet there was truth as well in McLaren's democratic rationale that "lighting the park would make it available to many who, working in shops and factories through the day, cannot go out except in the evening." By 1898 the bicycle paths in Golden Gate Park were electrically lit from 6:00 p.m. until midnight.

In fact, by the end of the pleasure garden era around 1900, administrators showed an equal interest in the use of parks and in their form. Despite forces of disintegration the ideals of the picturesque which had dominated park design for fifty years persisted into the reform era and beyond. The first playgrounds tried to integrate play equipment into an overall picturesque composition. Designers organized these playgrounds around a central open field, encircled them with curved walks and clusters of shrubbery, and protected them with berms. Architecture stayed to the side, and, where possible, a lake or mere completed the pictures. Because the principles of layout were so similar, with only the size and location of the site changed, this transitional type was called the small park. But in a short time new principles of composition and a new language governed their design.