

distinctions among women of different classes as they engaged in bicycling. A more intentional effort toward democratic equality was the William Sharon Playground, built with funds bequeathed by the U.S. senator from Nevada. The following excerpt of a poem written for the opening of the Sharon building in 1888 pronounces the playground as a place for children of all backgrounds—

*Whether black or brown or yellow,
You are welcome, little fellow!
No policeman here to eye you as you pass,
Or to chase you with a club...*

Published in the Park Commission materials, the poem implies that the sentiment of inclusiveness did not represent prevailing attitudes in the rest of the city. Though he provides the reader with references, Young's study does not detail the demographics of early San Francisco or delve into how different populations were perceived by park advocates, whom he presents in contemporary terms as "a relatively small band of native-born, white, middle-class males."

While suggesting that Golden Gate Park introduced distinct social interactions into the city, the strength of Young's study comes from his perceptive analysis of what values motivated certain aspects of park design. Written in a clear and fluid style, the book contains helpful schematic maps and abundant reproductions of period photographs. Apart from offering a slice of San Francisco's history, the book contributes a cogent examination of how landscapes are altered, land use conflicts persist, and changing expectations of nature impact park management.

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1. Olmsted's rejected 1866 park proposal featured open grounds, gardens, and a promenade set adjacent to and extending into developed San Francisco.

Rock Creek Park

By Gail Spilsbury. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; 83 pp., illustrations, notes; cloth \$24.95.

Gail Spilsbury aims to create a "visual commemoration" of Rock Creek Park by weaving in a brief contextual history to revive an appreciation of the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s vision for this now famous urban park. The visual quality of *Rock Creek Park* is impressive and is a worthy companion to diplomat and historian James Bryce's *The Nation's Capital* (1913), an illustrated text that paid tribute to the park. Bryce noted, "I know of no great city in Europe (except Constantinople) that has quite close, in its very environs, such beautiful scenery as has Washington in Rock Creek Park."¹ *Rock Creek Park's* design and its layout of historic and contemporary photographs, paintings, maps, and measured drawings, all reproduced in black and white, evoke the sumptuous look and print quality of early 20th-century books. The illustrations in *Rock Creek Park* alone are a worthy homage to the Olmsted firm and their visionary plan for the Rock Creek valley, expressed generally in the 1902 McMillan Plan and later formalized in the 1918 Rock Creek Park master plan.

At its heart, this book is an unabashed tribute to the Olmsteds and a landscape philosophy that preserved and shaped Rock Creek Park. Three concise chapters highlight Rock Creek's evolution into a national park, the influence of the McMillan Plan of 1902, and the storied careers of the Olmsteds, renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and stepson John Charles Olmsted, and their contributions to park and urban planning in the United States. A fourth chapter describes and excerpts key passages from the Olmsted firm's 1918 report. Appendices cover a park administration timeline, principal flora, notable bridges, and visitor information.

Spilsbury's historical narrative meets its intent of providing the reader with a "pleasurable glimpse" into the complex planning history of Washington, DC, underpinning the development of Rock Creek Park. The book provides source notes and an ample bibliography to pursue further study of those historical themes. Like many books related to the interpretation of historic places or environmental preserves, the intended audience is the general public. For park visitors or local residents who hike and bike in the park and know it well, this book is a handsome keepsake outlining the environmental history of Rock Creek Park and provides a passionate argument for the preservation of its natural beauty. For cultural resource professionals looking to find historical information on the built environment of Rock Creek Park—its historic bridges, buildings, roads, bridal paths, hiking trails, picnic areas, and golf course—the book's brevity will be a drawback as important themes are not explored.

For example, road improvements receive only scant mention. The core of the historic road network of Rock Creek Park, the first major program of park improvements, was in place before the 1918 report. They were a prominent component of Olmsted's park master plan. The study called for an arterial system of parkways that would follow the routes of the main tributaries of Rock Creek and Piney Branch and three major cross-valley thoroughfares (never built as planned). Regraded older existing roads and new roads were constructed under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers. This road network determined the modern character of Rock Creek Park, and the preservation of Rock Creek Park hinges on retaining their alignment, width, scenic character, and control of traffic volume.

Rock Creek Park does achieve the stated goal of the author to share the 1918 Rock Creek Park Report with the public and to renew interest in the historic significance of Olmsted's long-range planning for the park. The report was an indispensable resource for a generation of park managers from 1921 to

about 1950. Its definition of distinctive natural areas and its description of the ways recreational facilities should be carefully woven into the landscape guided park officials whenever major decisions were made. Gail Spilsbury underlines that the Olmsted plan remains invaluable today as a document of the park's environmental condition and demonstrates that this master plan provides historical evidence that much of the park's landscape retains its 19th- and early 20th-century character.

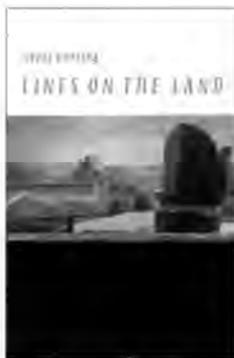
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White House Historical Association

t. James Bryce, *The Nation's Capital* (Washington, DC: Committee of One Hundred on the Future Development of Washington, DC, 1913).

Lines on the Land: Writers, Art, and the National Parks

By Scott Herring. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004; 216 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography; cloth \$49.50; paper \$16.50.



Everyone comes to America's national parks with preconceptions, expectations, and down-right prejudices. When Scott Herring arrived to work for the concessioner in Yellowstone one summer, it was in the guise of an English major steeped in Wordsworth and with Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* in his duffel bag, bringing with him, by his own admission, all the mental baggage that implies. He ended up pumping gas and—inexplicably, since he had no aptitude for it—working as a mechanic at a gas station at Old Faithful. His listening point, the locus for his "national park experience," was a trailer bunkhouse in the nearby service area.

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