

**Annotated Resource List About Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and the Olmsted Legacy –
Provided by Laurence Cotton and James G. Lewis**

Books by Frederick Law Olmsted:

Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England (repr. 2002, with introduction by Charles C. McLaughlin)

The Cotton Kingdom (many editions are available. I recommend one with the intro by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.)

Frederick Law Olmsted: Writings on Landscape, Culture and Society (Library of America, 2015)

Biographies:

FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted by Laura Wood Roper (1973; harder to find, but still excellent)

A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and North America in the Nineteenth Century, by Witold Rybczynski (1999). Excellent biography.

Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted—Abolitionist, Conservationist, and Designer of Central Park, by Justin Martin (2011). A comprehensive biography and the most recent.

Beauty, Efficiency, and Economy: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Landscape Architect, Planner, and Conservationist by Elizabeth Hope Cushing. The first ever full-length biography of FLO Junior, also known as Rick. (2021)

“Biographical Portrait: Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (1822-1903) & Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957),” by Alfred Runte, is a three-page summary of the work of both father and son. [\[PDF\]](#)

On Olmsted Sr. and his landscapes:

Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape by Charles Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau. (A new edition was just published by Rizzoli as a coffee table book. But it is loaded with wonderful content by the “Dean” of Olmsted scholars, Charles Beveridge.)

The Power of Scenery: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Origin of National Parks, by Dennis Drabelle (2021). Tells the story of how America's national parks came to be, with Olmsted's insights and energy serving to link three jewels: Yosemite National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and Niagara Falls State Park.

Architects of an American Landscape: Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Reimagining of America's Public and Private Spaces, by Hugh Howard (2022), is a dual biography of the influential, but largely forgotten, architect and the landscape designer whose works transformed public and private spaces in America, and how we still conceive them.

Olmsted and Yosemite: Civil War, Abolition, and the National Park Idea by Rolf Diamant & Ethan Carr (due out in March 2022). *Olmsted and Yosemite* sets the historical record straight about Olmsted's impact on the creation of national parks as it offers a new interpretation of how the American park—urban and national—came to figure so prominently in our cultural identity, and why telling this more complex and inclusive story is critically important.

Before Central Park, by Sara Cedar Miller (June 2022). Sara's thoroughly researched history will reveal much previously unpublished material covering two and a half centuries of the land that became Central Park. Its residents and events include Indigenous peoples, the early Dutch and English families, the Revolutionary

War and the War of 1812, the African American settlement of Seneca Village, Irish and German immigrant farmers, and the Motherhouse of Catholic sisters and students. The book concludes with the struggle to realize Central Park from concept to creation by Olmsted.

Films:

Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing America—Produced and directed by Lawrence Hott. Laurence Cotton originated this project, served as content provider and Consulting Producer. A production of Florentine Films/Hott Productions and WNED Buffalo/Toronto. On this special website (not the main PBS website), you can stream the original 60-minute PBS film, watch additional video material, and select reading material from a list of essays about the Olmsted legacy.

<https://www.wned.org/television/wned-productions/wned-history-productions/frederick-law-olmsted-designing-america/>

Olmsted and America’s Urban Parks: <https://www.olmstedfilm.org>

Another fine film about the Olmsted parks. There are additional documentaries out there that focus in on the Olmsted park legacies in such places as Upstate New York (Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester) and Louisville.

A (very) short list of recommended resources:

National Association for Olmsted Parks/NAOP: <https://www.olmsted.org/>

Olmsted Online: <https://www.olmstedonline.org/>

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site/NPS: <https://www.nps.gov/frla/index.htm>

Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted/National Archives:
<https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/projects/catalog/frederick-olmsted>

The Cultural Landscape Foundation: <https://www.tclf.org>

Many Olmsted park systems (Buffalo, Boston, Louisville) and individual parks (Central Park, Prospect Park) have well-resourced conservancies with beautiful, content-rich websites that often include information that is far broader than any one park or collection of parks. Plus, many smaller parks and clusters of parks have active “friends” groups (Lake Park, Milwaukee, Seattle, Cadwalader Park, N.J., just by way of a few examples. There are many such groups across the U.S. and in Montreal.) All the friends-of groups have websites loaded with wonderful content. Always remember to check out those websites...and if you are local, make contact. The personnel often include a mixture of professionals and active volunteers who love their park/portfolio of parks, and work to raise funds to maintain and restore those landscapes. Many are trained horticulturalists, landscape design practitioners and historians, and many actively volunteer their time to maintain and restore these parks, and to give tours for these special places. You cannot go wrong by reaching out to these extraordinary park advocates across the nation.