

Introduction

Riverside, Illinois, is a suburban village designed between 1868 and 1869 by the landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Riverside is located along the Des Plaines River, nine miles west of Chicago. The design of Riverside is significant because the character of the community created by the designers was unlike that of other suburbs or towns of the time. Olmsted and Vaux prescribed wide, well-built, well-drained roads with gracefully curved lines and generous plantings. The idea was to create attractive and highly functional access interspersed with public grounds for rest and recreation: a community with the best attributes of the country and city.

Today, Riverside remains a vibrant community. The significance of the landscape architecture of Riverside has been recognized at the national, state, and local levels. In 1970, Riverside was designated a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of its historic landscape architecture. Many people within the Riverside community are aware of Riverside's status as a National Historic Landmark; they take pride in their familiarity with the many scholarly works focused on its design, including Olmsted's own writings. The residents' and village leaders' interest in the study and documentation of Riverside has helped to preserve the original design.

Visual communication is a critical component of the landscape architecture profession. Although much has been written about Riverside, our research did not reveal any drawings or illustrations that effectively aid in the understanding and *visualization* of Olmsted's design process and his intended design. A verbal or written description of any object may not clearly communicate how it actually *looks* or *feels*. It therefore becomes absolutely necessary to use effectively all forms of communication: written, verbal, and visual.

A key focus of this master's project is to effectively organize and communicate the principles of Olmsted's design for Riverside, using both written and visual methods. We also investigate the residents' perception of the Riverside landscape and how this relates to the design

Revisiting Riverside: A Frederick Law Olmsted Community

principles. Our intent is to increase the understanding of the principles Olmsted used in the design of Riverside, and the relevance of these design principles in the modern Riverside landscape. We hope that the organization and presentation of the design principles, together with the visual products produced by this master's project group, will contribute to a greater understanding and a unified sense of stewardship among Riverside's residents, its leaders, and the many private groups within the community.

Riverside is a designed landscape that merits preservation, but this can only occur with a thorough understanding of the original design intent, of the design as it was constructed, and of the design that has survived.

Therefore, this project revisits the Riverside community in order to:

- 1.) Identify, organize, and effectively communicate the design principles proposed by Olmsted and Vaux for Riverside.
- 2.) Determine whether Riverside's design has withstood the test of time by:
 - a. Evaluating which elements of Olmsted and Vaux's design are currently evidenced in the Riverside landscape.
 - b. Gaining an understanding of the residents' perception of and preferences for the landscape at Riverside.
 - c. Evaluating the relevance and longevity of Olmsted and Vaux's design in the continuum of suburban design.