FROM the outside the Smith College campus is not easy to find. Except for the banner-topped turrets of College Hall, placed with an almost medieval reference at the top of the view from a bustling downtown Northampton, Smith hardly declares itself. There is nothing emphatic about the position of its entrances and exits, no coherence to its architecture, and the buildings—even the ones that are attached—fail to relate to one another. Nothing lines up, hence a sure sense of where one stands inside can be hard to come by. But inside the beauty of the campus beguiles surreptitiously. Its character is intimate, and it so embraces the charm of river, pond, and the long view of Mt. Tom that its charm seems one and the same with theirs. And indeed it is. This is the gift of the whole of the Pioneer Valley. This valley, part of the broad lap of the Connecticut River as it crosses western Massachusetts, is a setting of rare beauty and gentleness and, as a setting, offers a composition already complete to all its inhabitants.

Only after spending some time growing familiar with the Smith campus does one discover its secret—the artistry at work in its most successful, most seductive spaces. To the conscientious observer, then, it comes as no surprise to learn that for eighty years Smith College has employed master gardeners educated at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew or Edinburgh. The first began his work under the proprietary eye of the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot, designer of the grounds and heir to the singularly American vision of landscape design championed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
Incorporated in 1871 at the height of the Victorian reform era, Smith College was a pedagogical experiment that sought to empower women even as it shaped them according to an image conceived of by a host of visionary men. Enlisted in the far-reaching effort to create this new exemplary citizen was every element of the environment—intellectual, spiritual, physical, cultural, aesthetic. That the natural environment should also be deliberately manipulated to support this effort should come as no surprise; but, strangely, I found it to be the one significant element least explicitly recorded, and soonest dropped and forgotten, as Smith College progressed from perilous experiment to the confident establishment of a slightly expanded status quo.

So prodigious and impressive was the output of the Olmsted firm in its various configurations and so voluminous the record left behind that scholars have studied its work at the expense of not only less well known landscape designers but at the expense of the study of the developing profession as well. Smith College was nearly twenty years old when in January 1892 the Olmsted firm delivered its first set of plans for the campus to the board of trustees. Before that, two other practitioners of the trade—or profession, as they labored to have it called—had already left their imprint on the setting of the young institution.

Before it was first laid out in 1874, a year after Laurenus Clark Seelye had accepted the presidency of a college that existed only on paper and in the minds of less than a dozen men, the Smith College campus was originally influenced by Donald Grant Mitchell, more popularly known during his lifetime as “Ik Marvell,” a Connecticut man of letters well regarded for his rural and sentimental essays, a gentleman farmer and diplomat, and a “landscape gardiner” of some repute.  

1A copy of Mitchell’s most popular book, Reveries of a Bachelor, a volume of sentimental essays first published in 1850, is in the Seelye Papers in the Smith College Archives. An inscription on its flyleaf, written by its donor Mary Adele Allen, class of 1886, reads: “Donald Grant Mitchell was a frequent visitor in Amherst—a friend of President L. Clark Seelye, and also a counsellor in laying out the grounds
planning stages by the Boston firm of Ernest W. Bowditch and Robert Morris Copeland. Bowditch was a civil engineer whose mentor, Copeland, died at about this time, leaving him the unexpected heir of a landscape practice which he continued with Robert’s brother Franklin.

Smith’s founders sought to improve on the various conventions in “campus” design popular during the period. Neighboring examples—Amherst College for men, with its vigorous student culture, and Mount Holyoke Seminary for women—had illustrated “that whether or not men can be educated successfully in the mass, women cannot.” Seclusion of site, strict segregation from the world, constant supervision, and the intimacy of a single, all-purpose structure were thought necessary to protect women from the evils that could attend greater knowledge of the world. While Smith’s trustees shared with their peers a horror of the bluestocking, the aggressive, autonomous, university-educated woman who could take leave of her sphere altogether, they also understood that too cloistered an environment would produce women with “affected, unsocial, visionary notions” which may have suited them to become missionaries, but hardly enabled them to become wives and mothers. High stan-

of Smith College. He doubtless chose a picturesque spot for the President’s cow to graze from knowledge gained on his own farm at Edgewood, New Haven.” See Presidents 32., #281, Seelye Correspondence, Smith College Archives, Northampton, Mass. All quotations from material in the Smith College Archives are by permission.

2The word “campus” is an Americanism. Its first use, referring to a college’s grounds, dates to 1774, according to the O.E.D., but its current usage, as both buildings and grounds taken together, did not enter the lexicon until 1899. (See Diana Balmori, “Campus Work and Public Spaces,” in Diana Balmori, Diane Kos-tial McGuire, and Eleanor M. McPeck’s Beatrix Farrand’s American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses [Millwood, N.Y.: Sagapress, 1985], p. 128.) William S. Tyler, president of the board of trustees of Smith, used the word self-consciously in his dedication address in 1875, setting it off in italics: “We have purchased a campus of some thirteen acres . . . and we have placed upon it this College edifice” (Introductory Address, in Addresses at the Inauguration of Rev. L. Clark Seelye and Dedication of the Academic Building, July 14 1875 [Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan & Co., Printers, 1875], p. 7).


dards for academic achievement and integrity were their
goal, but they would not sacrifice femininity, which was vir-
tually synonymous with domesticity. And so it was agreed,
as proposed by John M. Greene, who, as pastor, counselor,
and financial confidant to Sophia Smith, was prime mover
in the early years of the Smith College experiment, that the
college should place itself in intimate association with the
town of Northampton and conduct itself in various domesti-
cally scaled buildings.

Smith matriculated its first class of fourteen in September
1875. The early annual “circulars” of the college boast that
its grounds are “both secluded and easy of access, and com-
mand one of the most beautiful prospects in the Connecticut
Valley. They have been thoroughly drained, and laid out
under the direction of some of our best landscape gardeners,
so as to give opportunity for walks, drives, archery, boating,
and out-of-door sports.” Even before the school opened,
however, the campus was criticized. In September 1874 a
commentator for a local paper warned, “Years hence people
will wonder how it [the Smith Female College] came to be
built where it is, so near the road, and so near the center of
the town, and why people did not see the mistake at the
time.”

At the time, “so near the road and so near the center of
town” was exactly what the founders did want, and ever
since presidents have bemoaned the space constraints im-
posed upon them by the location. The site selected was con-
spicuously at the top of the town, originally two homesteads
comprising thirteen acres, with two stately houses, the Ly-
man and Dewey homes, less stately kitchen gardens, pas-
tures, orchards and “mowings” extending in adjoining nar-
row parcels from Elm and West Streets straight west to
Paradise Pond, then a mill pond serving many small factor-
ies. The site had been favored over one “on Round Hill, with
premises more than four times as spacious, and vastly more

5Official Circulars—Smith College—1872-1888, Smith College Archives.
6Daily Hampshire Gazette, 3 September 1874, 10.FSC, folder Na, Smith Col-
lege Archives.
attractive . . . [or] a site at Mr. Watson's, with 30 or 40 acres of land, beautifully situated and wooded." The domesticity of the preferred site, both of the farmsteads occupying it and in its intimate relation to the town, struck a chord with the gentlemen of the board, many of whom derived much of their reform world view from a model drawn from New England village life. It was the saving graces of a measured domesticity that the board sought in bringing Smith's collegians safely through their training, not the stimulation of the lofty or grandiose such as might be achieved on a spacious, removed, and previously unoccupied site.

Bowditch and Copeland placed the main academic building, College Hall, where the Lyman home had been located and it stands there today. The upper campus was gradually ringed by an irregular circle of buildings of a closely related Victorian Gothic style, in a uniform red brick trimmed with brown sandstone—a style the Olmsted firm later characterized approvingly as "informal and unpretentious" and "irregular [and] homelike." The Dewey House unaccountably remained in the center, gleaming white and Grecian. Temporarily serving as a dormitory, it was slated for destruction since, as a wooden structure, it was considered a poor fire risk. President Seelye's daughter, Harriet Seelye Rhees, remembered the early campus much later as

rather sketchy. The elms, which now give it dignity and shade, were, with the exception of the big one behind the president's house, the merest spindling sticks, marching in a double row, with the gravel road between, from the gateway straight across the campus, down the hill and around the meadow below in a wide circle. The meadow and the slopes leading down to it were covered with wild flowers from the time the first violets showed themselves, and were white with daisies in June; there was a tiny brook at the foot of the slopes, so hidden in the grass that one was apt to step in it, and this led down between alder bushes

7Daily Hampshire Gazette, 3 September 1874.
A MAP OF THE SMITH COLLEGE LANDS
AT NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

BY BENJ. SMITH LYMAN, 195 SOUTH FIFTH ST., PHILADELPHIA.

4 JANUARY, 1872.

W. H. STODDARD

CONENTS:

SCALE: 1/200 OF NATURE; OR 100 FEET TO AN INCH.

Fig. 1.—The chosen site, from L. Clarke Seelye, Early History of Smith College. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives.
to a spreading old willow near the present location of the plant house. . . .

As far as the college was concerned, the whole lower campus was practically ignored . . . anything beyond the present site of the library seemed remote, uncivilized, and suggestive of snakes.9

Our impression of the early campus is of new buildings out of scale with their frame of reference—the farmstead—and of raw space that had yet to cohere by grace of shrubbery and mature trees. President Seelye’s 1873 correspondence indicates a strong concern over the “external features” of the college,10 but beyond that we have no word from these earliest years of the landscape architects’ or Seelye’s ambitions for the aesthetic effect of the landscape while the campus struggled to subdue its barnyards and kitchen gardens as it threw up building after building in pasture and orchard. We can only suppose that the college, or at any rate President Seelye, remained in contact with the landscape architects concerning subsequent development, as he did throughout the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century with the Olmsted firm. We can know for sure only that Bowditch and Copeland worked within the guidelines of a projected student enrollment of two hundred, and that they planted a lot of elms.11

Campus design, in this country, has always been an effort characterized more by waywardness than conviction. Richard Dober, an historian of the American campus, has observed of the campus designs of the last third of the nineteenth century that

The society which produced such educational diversity was unable to do much to give the new universities and re-constituted


10See letter from L. C. Seelye to the Board of Trustees, box 10.FSC (10 July 1873); and letter from L. C. Seelye to J. M. Greene, box 10.FSC (22 December 1873), Smith College Archives.

Fig. 2.—The days of the hammock, when the Orchard was an orchard, c. 1895. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives.

Fig. 3.—The Observatory and President Seelye's cow, c. 1900. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives. Figs. 2 and 3 represent vanishing references to be encoded in the campus interior.
colleges an appropriate architecture. All the conditions for significant campus design were available: open-minded clients, new materials for construction, and strong motivation for order and coherence. But it was a period of contradictions and circumstances. There were few people able to organize an unambiguous response to the bundle of opportunities presented.  

One of the few was Frederick Law Olmsted, who first set forth his vision for American campuses in his work on Berkeley (1864) and the land grant colleges established under the Morrill Act. The act, which brought public higher education to rural America, and which pinpointed the farmer as a significant resource for elevating America’s general level of culture and productivity, was finally signed in 1862 after five years of wrangling. Olmsted was a close acquaintance of Senator Morrill’s, and he had a hand in many of the campuses brought into being by the act. Although Olmsted’s intentions were often thwarted, his thinking on campus design was, for a brief period, influential and widespread. Olmsted’s views, as historian Albert Fein has noted, were formed by “the ‘total community’ ideal of the New England village setting. The antithesis of this concept is seen in the formal, regular pattern of English universities such as Cambridge and Oxford.”  

To achieve the community ideal, Olmsted proposed laying out a campus as a “domestically scaled suburban community, in a park-like setting,” associated with a town or city yet remaining a distinct enclave. In addition he proposed the “cottage system,” which he developed in his land grant college plans. The cottage system opposed the custom of housing students in barracks-like dormitories, recommending instead “large domestic houses . . . containing a respectably furnished drawing-room and dining-room for the common use of students, together with a sufficient num-

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ber of private rooms to accommodate from twenty to forty lodgers.”

Such an arrangement, Paul Turner argues, “was a natural outcome of [Olmsted’s] ideal of a college integrated into a humanly scaled domestic community” and “provided a tangible symbol for the new liberal and democratic ideals of education . . . in contrast to the elitism and formality of the traditional colleges.”

The founders of Smith College certainly shared these ideals; indeed, they may have heard them expressed by Olmsted directly, for in the 1860s he had worked briefly on the Massachusetts Agriculture College at Amherst, hometown of the young Seelye and many of the Smith College trustees. Few of the land grant colleges adopted the cottage system, but some years later Smith’s directors recognized it as eminently suited to the needs of a women’s college, for it partook of that overriding concern for the future of America, the sanctity of the home—and, by extension, the village.

Domesticity was a chord sounding throughout the century among the reformers of the environmental tradition, from Timothy Dwight through Andrew Jackson Downing and Horace Bushnell to Frederick Law Olmsted. Smith’s first landscape consultant, Donald Grant Mitchell, had extolled it in his popular lecture “Home and Its Equipments”:

Whatever avenues of influence may open for woman in the years that are upon us—and they are widening and multiplying day by day—there will remain always this province of Home where she cannot give up her Queenship without peril to the nation. Without her ministering care, without her delicate instinct, without her abundant love, all the equipments we have named will have no more regleament and no more rallying power than a


16Turner, Campus, pp. 141, 150.

17In fact, Olmsted did some modest landscape work on Julius Seelye’s Amherst church in the 1860s. Julius, L. Clark’s older brother, was a professor at Amherst, and later its president, and a trustee of Smith College.
lute whose strings are broken. She can make our homes beloved; she can lay them waste.\textsuperscript{18}

At Smith College, domesticity was assured and preserved while the business of scholarship was conducted by a residence system of "cottages" and close association with the normal routines of a town of some refinement.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the original Smith Campus, centered behind College Hall, had begun to lose its coherence as the college expanded into neighboring lots. At the same time, President Seelye was expanding the curriculum by, among other initiatives, increasing offerings in the sciences, particularly in botany. To bring professional expertise to bear on these developments, in 1891 Seelye engaged the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted & Company, "noted landscape gardeners . . . to lay out the entire campus more symmetrically [sic] and artistically for the location of future buildings and to carry out a plan of a botanical garden arranged so that it should offer as far as possible the best facilities for scientific study and form at the same time an attractive feature of the landscape."\textsuperscript{19} The Olmsted firm delivered the first plan to the college in January 1892 along with a characteristically brusque and strong-willed memo stating their objectives for the campus:

we advise that no buildings, if possible, be erected in the northern part of the grounds until the adjoining ground in question has been at least surveyed and a design prepared for a suitable distribution of College buildings. After such a design has been pre-

\textsuperscript{18}Donald Grant Mitchell, "Home and Its Equipments," p. 37, Mitchell Papers, folder 107, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Quotation by permission The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

\textsuperscript{19}L. Clark Seelye, An Early History of Smith College, ms. draft, p. 106, box 290, Smith College Archives. At this time the firm was headed by a failing F. L. Olmsted, Sr. Charles Eliot joined the firm in 1893 upon the death of the senior Olmsted's partner Harry Codman, and the firm adopted the name Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot. FLO declined into senility, "retiring" in 1895, and Eliot died in 1897, at which time Frederick Law Jr. and John Charles, a nephew and stepson to FLO, continued the practice as Olmsted Brothers.
pared, it might be safe to erect buildings on the land presently owned by the College, on the assumption that the adjoining private land would be eventually acquired and the design carried out.  

This initial statement reveals the firm’s fierce commitment to comprehensive planning, an obvious but nonetheless elusive cardinal principle of landscape architecture. Much later the principle was defined by Richard Dober as “the dominance of site and program over façade. [It alone] offers hope for continuity within change, and a viable campus design.” The Olmsted firm’s plan concept was based on “the importance of site conditions, including topography, climate, the ‘natural views’ and vegetation,” and it called for site analyses and applied zoning principles that “placed like functions together, or separated functions with landscape or topography when they were dissonant.” The firm’s principals warned of the “architectural anarchy” that must inevitably follow the failure to commit to a plan well before the grand plan concept taking shape at the 1893 Columbia Exposition won acceptance in cities and on campuses. They hastened to expound that “doctrine” to the Smith trustees in a commanding voice that belied their forced resignation to the continual erosion of past successes. Their resistance to the expeditious throwing up of buildings and to the imperiousness of architecture never flagged, and their memos, at Smith and elsewhere, are ringing examples of the rhetoric of persuasion.

While Seelye was clearly asking for a comprehensive design that would bring the fast-growing college under control, the Olmsted firm nonetheless adopted an admonishing tone. Its principals chided trustees that the incongruous Dewey House must be removed and proposed relocating the drives around the borders of the campus rather than through its middle. “If you will give this suggestion due consider-

21Dober, Campus Planning, p. 34.
Figs. 4 and 5.—The rapid growth of the college, as buildings multiply, 1875–1900. Maps by M. Jay Braatz, 1975. Photos courtesy Smith College Archives.
lation, we think you will hardly fail to realize its great importance, and we trust that you may succeed in carrying out some such arrangement before long," they enjoined optimistically. A year later they were still uncertain of their employer's mettle concerning the priority of plan over immediate needs, and they continued to offer cautionary advice: "Almost all of our colleges have been greatly embarrassed through their managers not having anticipated their requirements in the way of sites for large important buildings."22 In 1925 that view would be upheld by German city planner Werner Hegemann, who defined the term "campus" for his countrymen as "a piece of land that is covered with the buildings of an American University."23

Besides grading and laying out walks around some new dorms, the firm's primary business at this early stage was to plant the grounds as an arboretum and to create the botanical garden. Plans for a greenhouse were already afoot in 1893, and a site was determined by the end of that year. The first year's planting of over 1,200 trees and shrubs, probably directed by Warren Manning,24 the firm's chief horticulturist, was supervised at Smith by Elizabeth Bullard. A painter, she was also Oliver Bullard's "talented but unofficial collaborator" in effecting Olmsted's park designs in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and upon her father's death in 1890 she assumed his position there as superintendent of parks thanks to the recommendation of the senior Olmsted. What her position at the college was cannot be determined—whether in art, botany, or landscape work—and her own words suggest that she herself suffered from the ambiguity of her situation. Writing to the firm of her planting work at Smith, she complained that "my connection with the enterprise remains as

23Hegemann is quoted by Turner, Campus, p. 4.
24Born in 1860, son of a nurseryman, Manning went into business for himself in 1896 after eight years with the Olmsted firm. He was one of the founding members of the American Society of Landscape Architects, established in 1899, a watershed year for the "profession."
uncertain and undefined as before.” She reported that no director of the Botanical Garden had yet been found and that she would take the position if it were endowed with pay. Payroll lists in the treasurer's reports of 1890–91 and 1891–92, however, do not carry Bullard's name, but neither do they reflect payments to the Olmsted firm. Indeed, there are no entries for landscape architecture fees until 1914, when a disbursement of $1,250 is recorded, likely to a later designer, John Nolen.

In October 1893 Elizabeth Bullard wrote to the Olmsteds to express her frustration in setting out the Olmsted plantings: “There was much more which might have been done before winter, but I presume there were financial reasons for stopping now.” Her observation reflects the panic of 1893 which imposed on Smith College “a period of great financial stringency,” as confirmed by Seelye in his annual report for 1893–94. As a consequence, Bullard “had to watch my chance and take the ‘extra-men’ for my work, when they were not otherwise engaged.”

In the early spring of 1894 Smith hired a gardener named Louis Guerineau. The Olmsted firm wrote, “We shall hope to persuade him not to indulge too much in any predilection that he may have for formality in disposition and treatment of plants.” There followed a quick exchange among Bullard, Seelye, and the firm about spring plantings and together they arranged a meeting with the new gardener. Clearly the firm hoped to dominate the situation, for a 29 March letter stated, “We prefer to have Mr. Manning visit

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the grounds immediately upon the arrival of the new gardener in order that he may understand our views as to the work before forming any opinions of his own upon the subject. Mr. Manning will, therefore, come on Monday, as already arranged with Miss Bullard."28

Directly thereafter, Seelye, perhaps acting in self-defense, hired a young botanist, William F. Ganong, straight from his graduate work in Germany. In late spring the Olmsted firm received notice that Manning’s services would no longer be required and that Ganong would now order and procure all plants. Ganong was introduced to the trustees as “showing a broad and thorough scholarship, exciting unusual enthusiasm among the students, and carrying forward with great interest the plans of Messrs. Olmstead [sic] & Eliot.”29 He arrived late in the summer along with a new head gardener, Edward Canning, who had received his training at Kew. Ganong and Canning found that “very little planting had been done in 1894, and a large number of plants had died during the heat and dryness of that summer for lack largely of proper care.”30 What had become of Guerineau or Bullard, we do not know.31 There is no further correspondence between Smith College and the Olmsted firm until 1897, when the need for expansion at the college became pressing.

Over the next decade, Seelye and the firm—principally John Charles and Frederick Law Jr.—and various architects wrestled with the problem of siting more and ever larger buildings on a campus that had grown but little in land (from thirteen acres in 1872 to thirty in 1904 to forty-two in 1910) but greatly in population (from an original enrollment

29Seelye, President’s Report, 1894–95, Smith College Archives.
31There is a great deal of correspondence between Bullard and the firm in the Olmsted Associates Records, series A, at the Library of Congress, but the writing has faded beyond readability, and it cannot be determined how much of it comes from Smith and how much from Bridgeport.
of 14 to 1,000 in 1898 to over 1,600 in 1910). \(^{32}\) The business immediately at hand was to locate two new buildings, a recitation hall and an assembly hall. Patiently, the principals of the Olmsted firm advised:

The greatest convenience would undoubtedly be subserved by having such a building in the middle portion of the college grounds. It is a very natural conclusion, under such circumstances to put each building as occasion arises wherever there happens to be an open space of sufficient size among the other buildings or among important trees. The result of such a process would usually be that in the end the buildings would be somewhat evenly distributed all over the grounds, with no obvious general design, and with a complete absence of contrast between the buildings and the open spaces, and with the absence of effective grouping and approaches.

The memo goes on for six pages, arguing against locating the recitation hall, to be named Seelye Hall, on the central site of “Dewey Cottage.” “In almost all cases, such large buildings would best be grouped on architectural principles, with broad vista lines and with considerable regard to symmetry, but except in particular parts of the grounds such a motive is no longer practicable in this case.” \(^{33}\)

The firm was pointing out that the modest dimensions of the Smith College property, as well as the irregular topography and the informal and asymmetrical arrangements of existing buildings, precluded axial treatment. That the heirs of Frederick Law Olmsted’s naturalistic picturesque were now talking about architectural principles in landscape design when once they sought to obliterate them in foliage, that they suggested broad vista lines when once they called for sweeps of green space and the enticement of curving and elusive views, that now they were speaking in terms of symmetry when their primary concern had always been the pleasure and homeliness of the asymmetrical was evidence

\(^{32}\)See Smith College official circulars (through 1888) and Smith College catalogues (through 1910), Smith College Archives.

that the ideology claiming an affinity with the informal and pastoral was losing its grip on America’s imagination. Strangely enough, the Olmsted firm, and later Warren Manning’s practice, were coming to specialize in straightening out chaotic campuses as yet another wave of fashion, the Beaux Arts, swept through colleges, leaving in its wake monumental, classical buildings entirely out of character with just about everything that existed before. When all was said and done, however, the Olmsted’s never gave up their attention to the details that forgave the architecture its intrusiveness.

The closing remarks of the Olmsteds’ 1897 memo cautioned against clipping shrubbery “into round forms, as is the almost universal custom. Nothing could be in worse taste. . . . We should be greatly obliged to you if you would caution the men who work on the place very emphatically against clipping the shrubs.”

They went on to observe that certain buildings needed plantings and that elsewhere revisions and thinning were clearly required. Could they be of use?

Such thinly disguised criticism was a habit of John Charles Olmsted’s, to hear Ernest Bowditch tell it. “If I wanted a problem worked out in the best way,” observed Bowditch, “and did not care for the expense, I would give it to John C., put him in a room, lock the door and not allow him to get into a discussion with anyone. . . . He is capable of making a beautiful plan but must always be kept away from customers.”

But Seelye, in his autocratic purposefulness, would seem to have been a match for John Charles, and they thrashed ahead with plans for Seelye Hall. Along with the Olmsteds, Smith’s own William Ganong, director of the botanical garden, also opposed plans for siting the building:

35Ernest Bowditch, “The Olmsteds/H.H. Richardson” typescript, pp. 9, 10, Bowditch Family Papers, box #7, folder #4, Essex Institute, Salem, Mass. Quotation by permission. Bowditch often dogged the Olmsteds’ footsteps, coming before or after them on many jobs. He refers to these episodes in his memoirs in a lively narrative wherein he characterizes the Olmsteds as ruthless competitors and enfants terribles who often terrorized their clients and were invariably extravagant.
As to the Academic Building its position on or near the site of the Dewey House would spoil forever the opportunity for developing one of the fairest College greens in this country, and would give instead a cluster of buildings so closely placed that any attractiveness in their surroundings would be impossible. On the other hand, with the Academic Building upon the site of either the Hatfield or the Hubbard House, and later with the Dewey House removed, the open sweep of the front campus could be of such beauty, and would so much better represent the freedom and openness which should prevail in all things relating to a college, that the moral life of the College would be the better for it as long as the College exists. . . . In a college for Women particularly, I think much account should be taken of the aesthetic in the surroundings. And I am not sure but that a strong argument could be made for the keeping of such features as the open front campus from a purely financial point of view; for, depending as American Colleges must largely upon the gifts of their graduates and friends, the impression which the College and its setting makes [sic] upon the students during their four years of residence, becomes of much practical importance.36

Seelye Hall, stiff, formal, rectangular and entirely out of scale with its closely circling Victorian buildings, now ignominiously shouldered aside, inexplicably contradicts the statements master builder Seelye had made heretofore with his choices for architecture and layout. The Olmsteds accepted the new building but grudgingly. William Ganong remained a vigorous champion of an abundantly planted campus and continued to point out to Seelye ways in which his "society ideal" was contradicted by choices of architecture and siting. In his May 1903 report to the president and trustees, Ganong did not attempt to hide his frustration with "landscape effects."

I have not myself had any training in landscape work, and the Head Gardener views the subject chiefly from the gardener's, and not from the artist's, point of view. In the details of the placing of

36William F. Ganong, Report to the President and Trustees of Smith College, 28 May 1898, Dept. of Botany Record Book, box 52.Sci., Smith College Archives.
plants I think our results are fairly good; but in those broader, larger effects with which it is the province of the landscape architect to deal, I feel that we are weak. It would be very advantageous if we could have an occasional visit and criticism from a skilled landscape gardener at a time when the Director of the Garden could be present for consultation. On the other hand, it must in fairness be said that it is a question whether in our confined spaces, and with the incessant changes that are necessarily going on in our campus, any really good effects in the large are possible. But still we should make the very best of the conditions, and this I doubt if we succeed in doing.37

Why Ganong makes no mention of the Olmsteds is a bit of a mystery, but they were involved, if only on upper level consultations concerning master plans for structures. Until the end of Seelye's tenure in 1910, they continued to wage a campaign for planning and against the wholesale adoption of a formal, axial arrangement. A 1902 memo by Olmsted agent "H.J.K." concerning a meeting with Rand & Skinner, who were bidding for contracts on prospective Smith College buildings, reported that when the architects were cautioned that they were "departing from the general scheme of informal paths about and through the buildings," they responded "that by the method as proposed for the three buildings [library, assembly hall and biological laboratory] that he almost thought that it was a beginning of a formal idea, also that the new building [assembly hall], approved by President Seelye, was of a very formal and dignified character, it being a cross between Italian Rensaince [sic] and the Colonial."38

Rand & Skinner built Chapin House in 1903, but the assembly hall hung in the works in various guises for some time. John C. Olmsted was still admonishing Seelye about it three years later:

37Ganong, Report to the President and the Trustees of Smith College, 3 May 1903, Dept. of Botany Record Book, box 52.Sci., Smith College Archives.
With regard to architectural style, we confess to a certain feeling of reluctance to acquiesce in the adoption of a very pronounced classic style, such as characterizes Mr. Skinner's design for the assembly hall, when so many of your buildings retain little, if any, of the classic feeling, and yet are respectable and appropriate. . . . We cannot but feel that the present use of classic ornamentation is to a great extent a more or less temporary fashion, and that there is danger that, if yielded to too strongly, it will result in time in the college being an incongruous jumble of architectural styles, which might not be a very satisfactory proof of the taste and judgment of a presumably unusually intelligent and cultivated body of Trustees. We have no wish to antagonize or even embarrass in any way your architect or your Board in this matter, but merely to sound a note of warning. . . . If it should prove to be possible for the Trustees to induce Mr. Skinner to revise his designs in the direction of greater simplicity and a greater degree of harmony of architectural detail with that of the older buildings, we shall have accomplished all we desire.\textsuperscript{39}

A year later John C. Olmsted made more concessions as discussions ground on concerning a new library, the assembly hall, relocating Hatfield House, and, just until its proposed destruction, Dewey.\textsuperscript{40} He acknowledged that the growth of the college mandated larger buildings, and that this circumstance together with the fact that the trustees have decided to depart from the architectural style which characterized the earlier buildings and to adopt a rather stiff classical style, seems to necessitate an abandonment, for the most part, of the idea of crooked roads and paths and undulating grades, which characterize the improvements made in the grounds heretofore.

\textsuperscript{39}J. C. Olmsted to Seelye, 23 November 1905, Olmsted Associates Inc. Job Files, series B, job file #1175, Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{40}Dewey House was saved by the alumnae. It was relocated in reference to nothing in particular and remained a wild card ever after through the struggles to set up an axial layout for the front campus, occasioned at first by the construction of four-square Seelye Hall in the midst of an irregular circle. The effort intensified with the puzzle of siting a new library and re-siting Hatfield. The Olmsted firm sited Hatfield with the assumption that Dewey would shortly come down. It never did, and continues to pose, with Hatfield Hall, a seemingly irresolveable, if well tolerated, design problem.
Fig. 6.—A view looking west from College Hall tower, c. 1881—not yet a bower. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives.

Fig. 7.—A view looking toward the library, 1911. Photograph by Katherine E. McClellan. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives.
But this mildly expressed view soon gave way to a thorough airing of his principles, again, and indulgence in one of his favorite pastimes, unhorsing architects:

From the point of view of a landscape architect, it would perhaps have been in better taste to have continued the more or less informal and unpretentious style adopted for the buildings until recently, but architects are so much controlled by fashion in such things that they are unable to give any weight to considerations of general harmony in a group of buildings, if to do so compels them to design a building which is not right up to date in the fashion. So I suppose there is nothing to do but to give up the old irregular, homelike improvement of the grounds and adopt the more dignified and stately formal style in placing the new large buildings and in laying out the necessary roads and walks.41

Three months later, John Olmsted, undaunted, sent another memo concerning the Library-Hatfield shuffle in which he advanced the radical and optimistic proposition:

If it should be expedient to locate the library between Wallace House and the Observatory . . . it would block a view, over the low Observatory, of distant hill and sky which [Seelye] valued very highly, and the loss of which he hoped would be eventually compensated for by removing Hatfield House and thus opening up a similar and perhaps better view from near the Main Entrance and other points on the front campus. I pointed out that the unification of the grounds that would result from taking away Hatfield House and the old gymnasium and carrying the front lawn down continuously to the lower lawn would be exceedingly valuable and might easily appeal some day to some one who would give the necessary money to accomplish it.42

The novel idea of endowing views was clearly well ahead of its time, but the Olmsteds continued to argue forcibly for a unified formal layout that minimized the dominance of architecture and that looked not only all around it for its

logic but forward and back in time as well. Although constantly exasperated, the Olmsteds remained a strong influence. In his 1905–6 annual report to the trustees, Seelye was obliged to spend two lengthy paragraphs justifying his decision to observe academic priorities rather than artistic ones in placing buildings.

In 1907 John Olmsted, still arguing for the need to create a logical space between Seelye Hall and the proposed assembly hall, hoped to forestall relocating Hatfield into the center of this potential space. “It goes very much against the grain with me to attempt to decide on locations for particular buildings without making sure that they are satisfactorily related to a good comprehensive plan for the location of all future buildings,” he reiterated.43 Perhaps his patience was running out, or Seelye’s was, for after 1907 no further memos on the matter proceed from him. Indeed, all correspondence between the firm and Smith ceases after a caustic exchange over the cherished apple trees remaining from the Dewey orchard. Hatfield had been moved in 1909 into the orchard and its hapless juxtaposition with the beloved Dewey House precluded any hope for greensward between the assembly hall and Seelye Hall.

In 1914, President Marion Leroy Burton, who succeeded Seelye in 1910, hired architect John Nolen to develop a new master plan for a proposed Smith University which would overlay the existing campus with a formal quadrangular design. That intention was, of course, antithetical in every particular to the ideal of a pastoral utopian village embraced by Smith’s founders and designers. The trustees chose not to attempt it, and Burton betook himself elsewhere.

The Smith College job file of the papers of the Olmsted Associates contains two further entries, the first an exchange in 1920 between F. L. Olmsted, Jr., and Charles Moore of the Congressional Commission of Fine Arts concerning references for a prospective landscape architect for Smith Col-

lege, one Thomas W. Sears of Philadelphia. Seventeen silent years later the file closes with a request from Dorothy May Anderson, established for the previous two years at Smith College as a resident landscape architect and instructor:

I have been told by older members of the faculty here that your office designed The Botanic Garden at Smith College. It must have been several years ago, for the garden is not only very well established in spots, but also run down in other spots. . . . I should like to restore the Botanic Garden as it was originally planned, but I can find no record in any of our files. Would you be kind enough to look it up for me in your files, and send me a print of the original plan? That is, of course, if you did the job.44

The Olmsteds were not the first or the last landscape designers to be forgotten at Smith. A “Plan for Smith College: 1875–1941–1966” drawn up in 1942 by Anderson’s alma mater, the Cambridge School of Landscape Architecture, then affiliated with Smith, was lost shortly after the plan was delivered to the college. Thirty years later, the Architects Collaborative produced a comprehensive plan for Smith which today languishes in archival obscurity.

So much for plans, and it may be just as well that they rest in peace. For it is such quirks as Smith’s irrational devotion to the wayward Dewey Cottage that define the charm of the campus. Smith’s saving grace, in all this seeking after order, while designers, trustees, and presidents were forging or avoiding master plans, is that people closer to the ground have continued to shape and plant the campus with a deftness and abundance that needed no plan. In fact, those efforts produced a campus closer to the Olmstedian ideal than any of the Olmsteds could possibly have hoped for from their experience with upper-level management at Smith. William F. Ganong’s sympathy for the influence of the serene and beautiful and practical environment has already been noted. He hired a succession of head gardeners trained

at Kew, where the naturalistic style was in no danger of running out. A dedicated teacher, he instituted a major in landscape architecture at Smith and encouraged women to enter the profession.

In 1917, Marion Burton was succeeded by William Alan Neilson, a Scot with a love for gardens, who, with resident designer Dorothy May Anderson, hired countryman William Campbell to succeed Ganong as director of the botanic gardens. It is their imprint on the landscape that we enjoy today. Bill Campbell’s cunning and stubborn defense of landscape from the depredations of builders and architects is legendary. Throughout these years, the department of buildings and grounds worked under a sixty-year reign of Kings: Franklin, who came to Smith as a young man in 1888, and his son George. Their crew came to be called “the King’s men.”

Seelye’s tenure lasted thirty-five years, Neilson’s over twenty, Ganong’s over thirty, Campbell’s thirty-seven, the Kings’ sixty. Such longevity and fortuitous juxtaposition of naturalistic inclinations contrived to produce the landscape we can still identify today as nineteenth-century and, rather incorrectly, as romantic. That we so recognize it testifies to its being an “authored” landscape, a circumstance Marwyn Samuels posits as central to an effective landscape. Such a landscape is endangered today—hard to preserve, difficult to achieve—as we moderns are obliged to approach the landscape problem “democratically,” that is by committee rather than autocratically. Furthermore, we have long since “turned away from these visions [of the nineteenth century]. But we have not as yet coherently and persuasively articulated a successor; and so we seem to have, for the moment, lost the capacity—or the temerity—to construct utopias.” 45

With this collapse of vision arises a trivializing impulse which leads us to regard landscape with “sentimental regret” rather than with practical devotion.

Smith College was never a utopia, but it dared to imagine one, and it is the vestiges of an imagined utopia that enchant us today. "Good landscape work seems artless . . . thus its best quality, that of perfect fitness, becomes its greatest danger," a critic in the Architectural Record observed in 1912.46 This reality coupled with the environmental tradition's failure to establish itself politically, and landscape designers' difficulty in gaining professional recognition, assured that the thought and work of nineteenth-century environmental reformers, great and small, would be neglected. Albert Fein wrote about Frederick Law Olmsted in 1972: "The personal tragedy of Olmsted's last years of life—loss of memory—was symbolic of the nation's larger loss—the full understanding of his total efforts."47 To restore our memory of this period of intense environmental concern can do no less than remind us that the landscape of a campus, a village, a region is a complex phenomenon of many layers, experienced by people through many senses as well as by the intellect. To restore our appreciation of all the dimensions of landscape is to save us from the bleakness, the mediocrity, the shallowness of a two-dimensional existence—to restore us to a daily relationship with nature.

47 Fein, Frederick Law Olmsted, p. 67.

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