

# Consult the Genius of Place in All

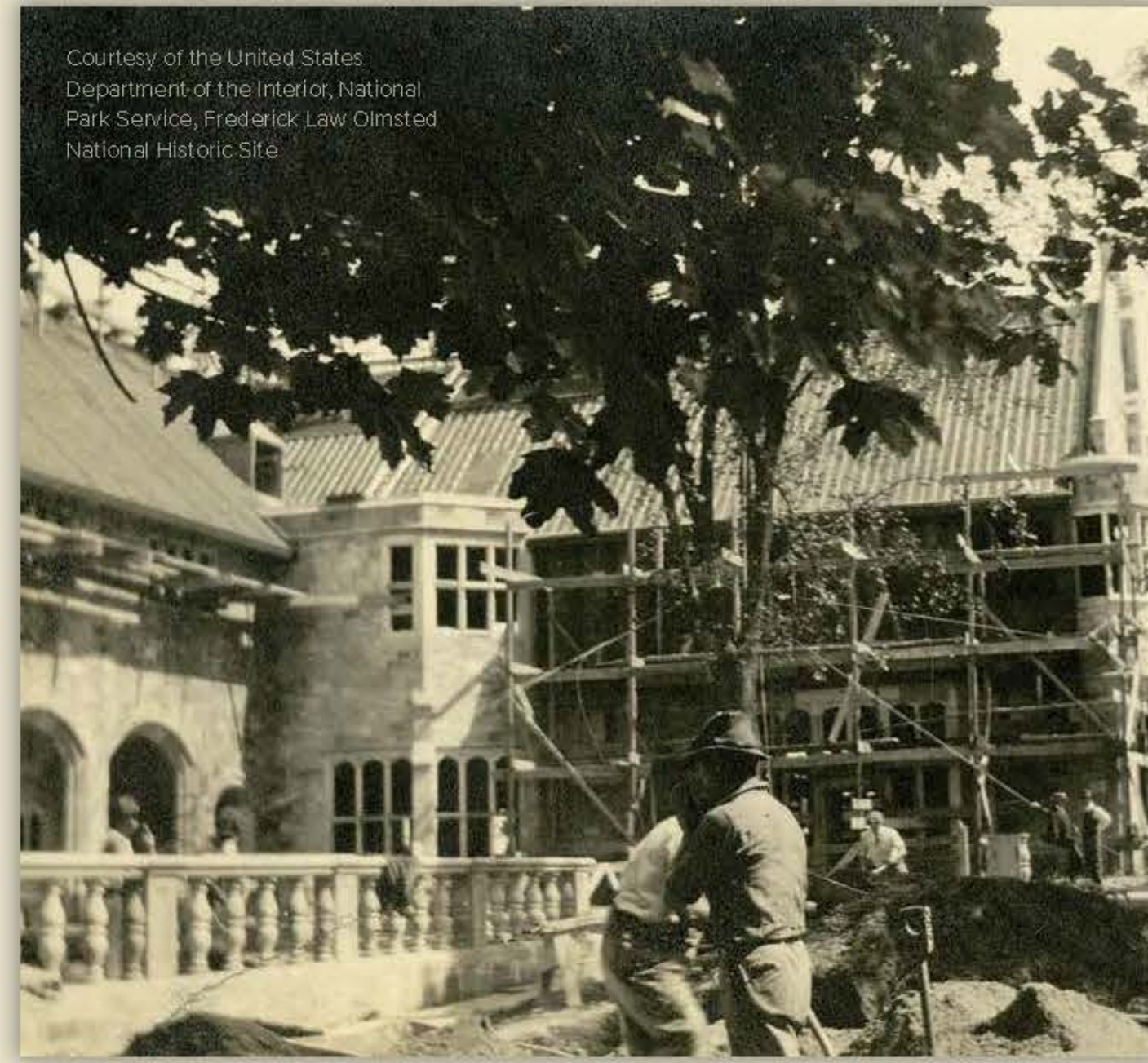
W. R. Coe and his wife, Mai Rogers, began to build the main residence in 1918 after the original estate house was destroyed by fire earlier that year. Designed by architects Alexander Walker and Leon Gillette, the sixty-five room, Tudor Revival mansion was designed to visually associate the Coes with the centuries-old English aristocracy despite their relatively new entrance into the ranks of America's "first millionaire society."

## Olmsted Principle #1: GENIUS OF PLACE

Built on a modest rise in the land, the Main Residence serves not as simply the architectural focal point of the property but as the centerpiece within the constructed pastoral landscapes of the East and West lawns. By selecting this location, the surrounding scenery can be fully appreciated.



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**Below:** The Planting Fields name, associated with this land since at least the seventeenth century, was said to originate from the indigenous Munsee-dialect word for the area and was chosen in an effort to honor the fertility of the soil and the agricultural history of the land. Agricultural components, including the hare, fox, and corn, can be seen on the **seal above the main entrance**; a testament to how W. R. and Mai honored the history of the property.



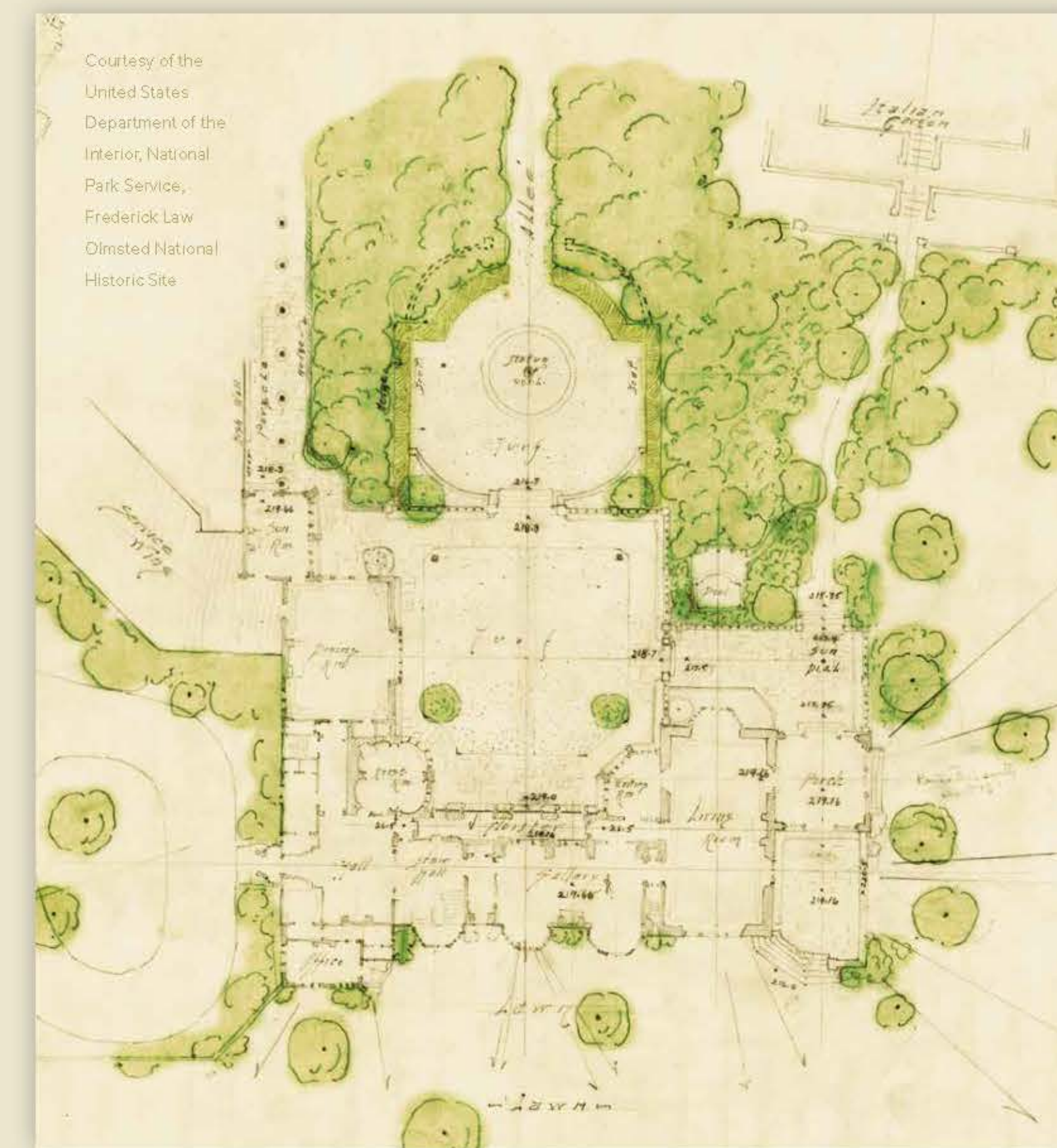
**Right:** The large, cleared expanses around the residence afforded long views meant to evoke the idyllic pastoral imagery of an English country estate. The **design of Coe Hall** included an unusual number of first floor doors and terraces and second floor balconies to allow for the constant opportunity to view and connect with the Olmsted landscape surrounding the house. The plantings around the house soften the hard architectural lines, allowing the building to integrate into the landscape.

**Left:** The new structure was designed to occupy the footprint of the previous building and integrate the residence into the existing landscape, preserving the established plantings around the house.

The **construction** of a grand manor house required the labor of many skilled craftsmen. Letters from W. R. Coe during the early years at Planting Fields reveal that labor shortages and collective labor strikes frequently hampered plans at the estate, which was built during the rise of organized labor movements in the United States. At times the strikes were successful, forcing Coe to agree to increased wages for the workers.

"I was down to Oyster Bay yesterday and some of the men who were striking have returned to work and I hope a lot more will soon come back so that we can get the house finished."

-W. R. Coe to Henry Coe, 1919



## The Creators of Planting Fields



### William R. Coe & Mai Rogers Coe

English immigrant and wealthy businessman William R. Coe and Standard Oil heiress Mai Rogers Coe owned the Planting Fields estate from 1913 until William's death in 1955, after which the property was gifted to New York State. The Coes' enthusiasm for art, architecture, horticulture, and landscape design can be seen today across the estate.

### James Frederick Dawson

James Frederick Dawson learned the art of landscape design as an apprentice with the Olmsted Brothers firm where he would later be promoted to associate partner. In 1918, W.R. and Mai Coe hired Dawson and the Olmsted Brothers firm to design the grounds at Planting Fields, which would become one of the firm's largest private commissions in its history.



Palos Verdes Archives



### Frederick Law Olmsted

The Olmsted Firm began in 1857 when pioneering landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux together designed New York City's Central Park. Though Olmsted and Vaux eventually parted ways, Olmsted continued to build his business and refine his landscape design philosophy until his death in 1895. Today, Olmsted is known as the "father of American landscape architecture" and his design principles have shaped the world we live in.

Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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# Cultivating the Power of Scenery

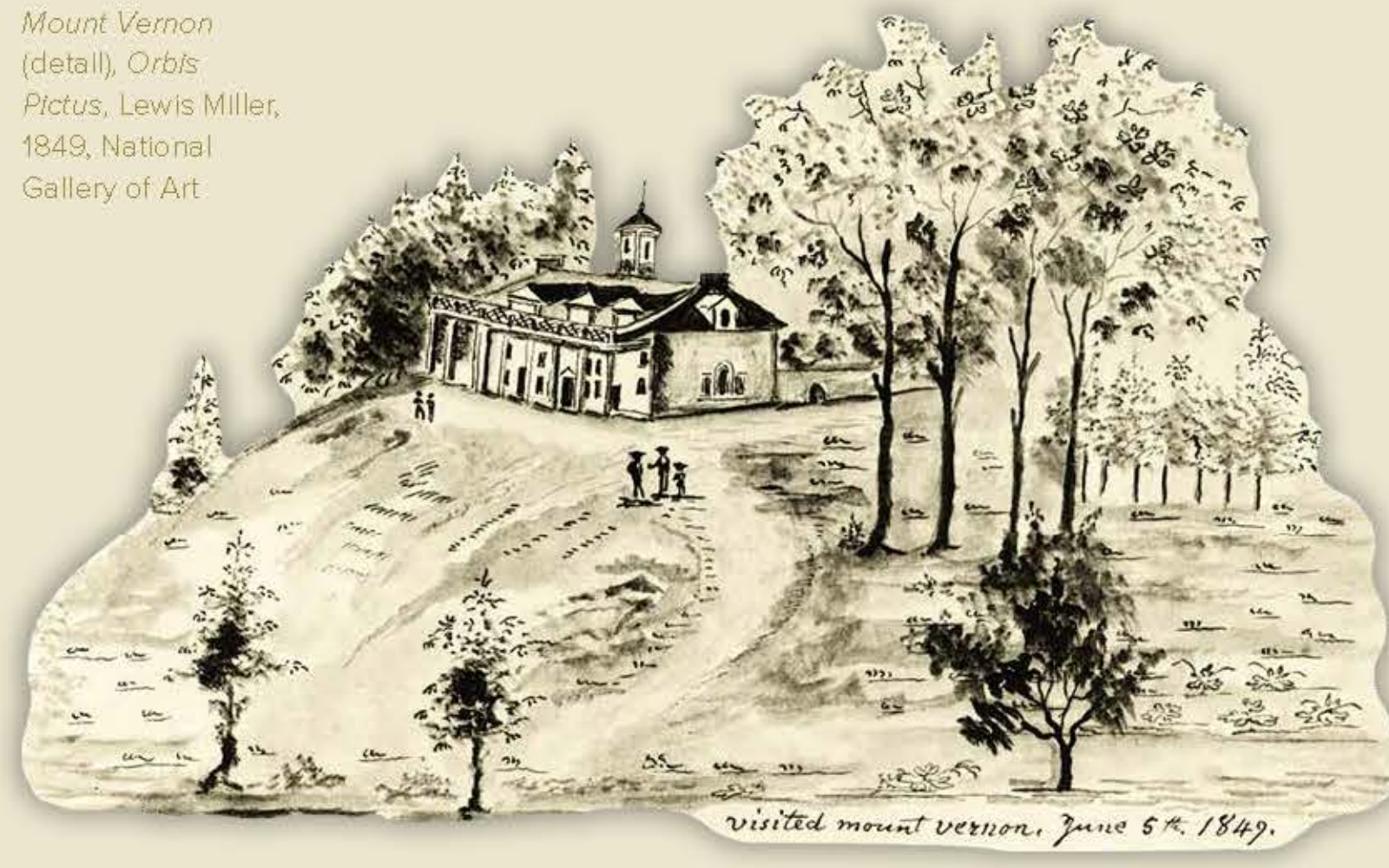
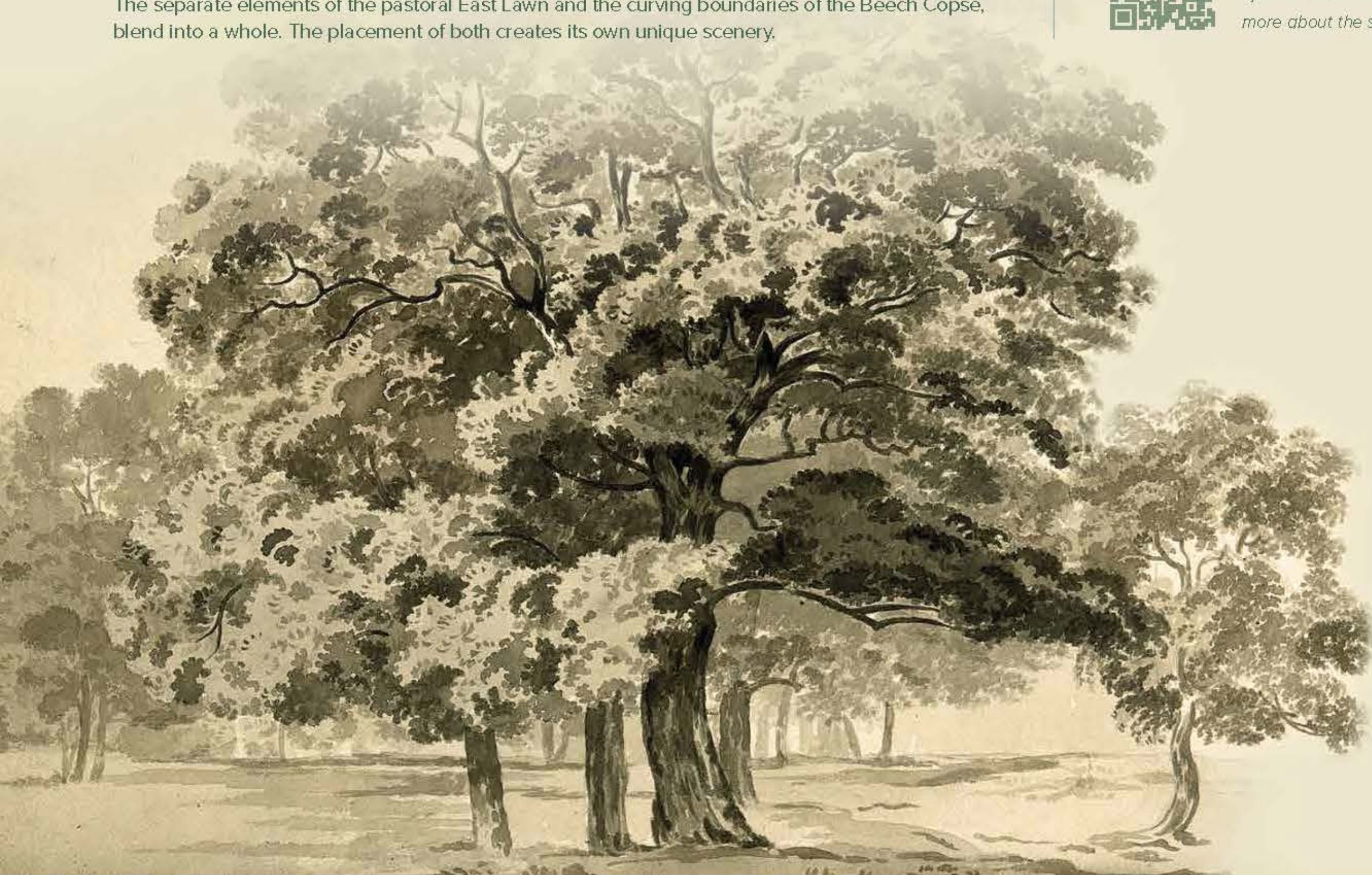
W. R. and Mai Coe set sail for a tour of W. R.'s native England in April of 1921, during which the couple visited many gardens. Coe noted that he had seen “very effective groupings of English beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) with occasional copper beech planted within,” which likely served as the inspiration for the Beech Copse here on the East Lawn. The careful placement of the trees created a massive canopy of beech trees rising dramatically from the otherwise open and flat expanse of the lawn.

## Olmsted Principle #2: UNIFIED COMPOSITION

The planned naturalism of the Beech Copse illustrates the Olmsted principle of unified composition. The separate elements of the pastoral East Lawn and the curving boundaries of the Beech Copse, blend into a whole. The placement of both creates its own unique scenery.



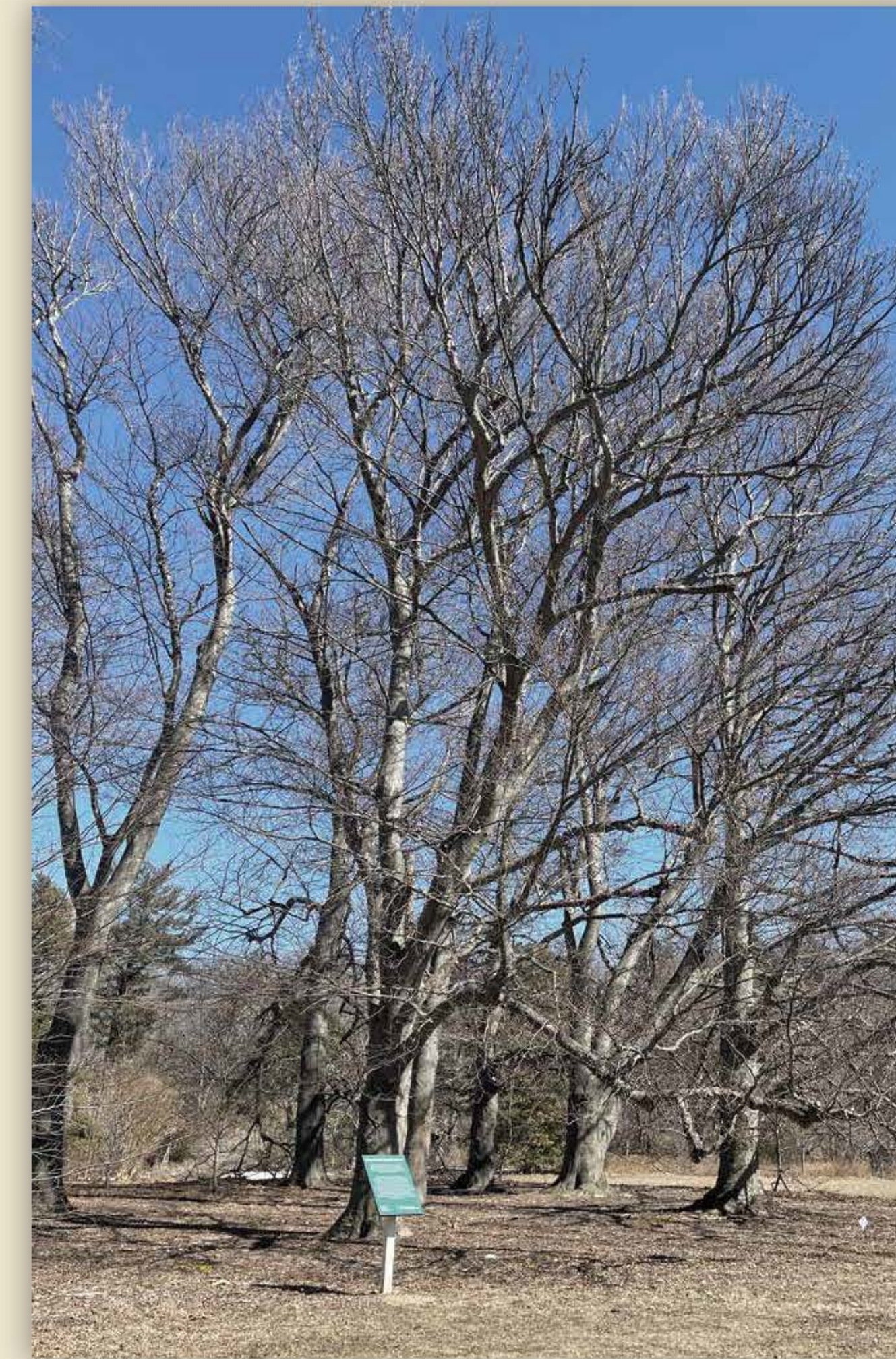
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Mount Vernon (detail), *Orbis Pictus*, Lewis Miller, 1849, National Gallery of Art

**Above:** Small groupings of trees, sometimes known as a “copse,” have long been used in landscape design to create scenery along garden paths or enhance the natural beauty of the land. A visitor to Mount Vernon in 1859 remarked that the ornamental copses of trees added:

“...a romantick and picturesque appearance to the whole Scenery.”



**Above:** In the 90 years since its planting, the **Beech Copse** had lost much of its impact and initial character: diseased, aged, and damaged beeches were removed, thinning the canopy, and plants from nearby gardens encroached on the solitary silhouette of the grove, softening its dramatic effect. In 2021, Planting Fields undertook a complete restoration of the area featuring the planting of nineteen new beech trees 100 feet west into the lawn.

**Left:** In Coe’s vision, the Beech Copse would “float” within the cleared **East Lawn landscape**. The restoration of the grove in 2021 aimed to replant similar varieties of beech trees in the original Olmsted design to achieve the same effect.

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# Education and Ornament

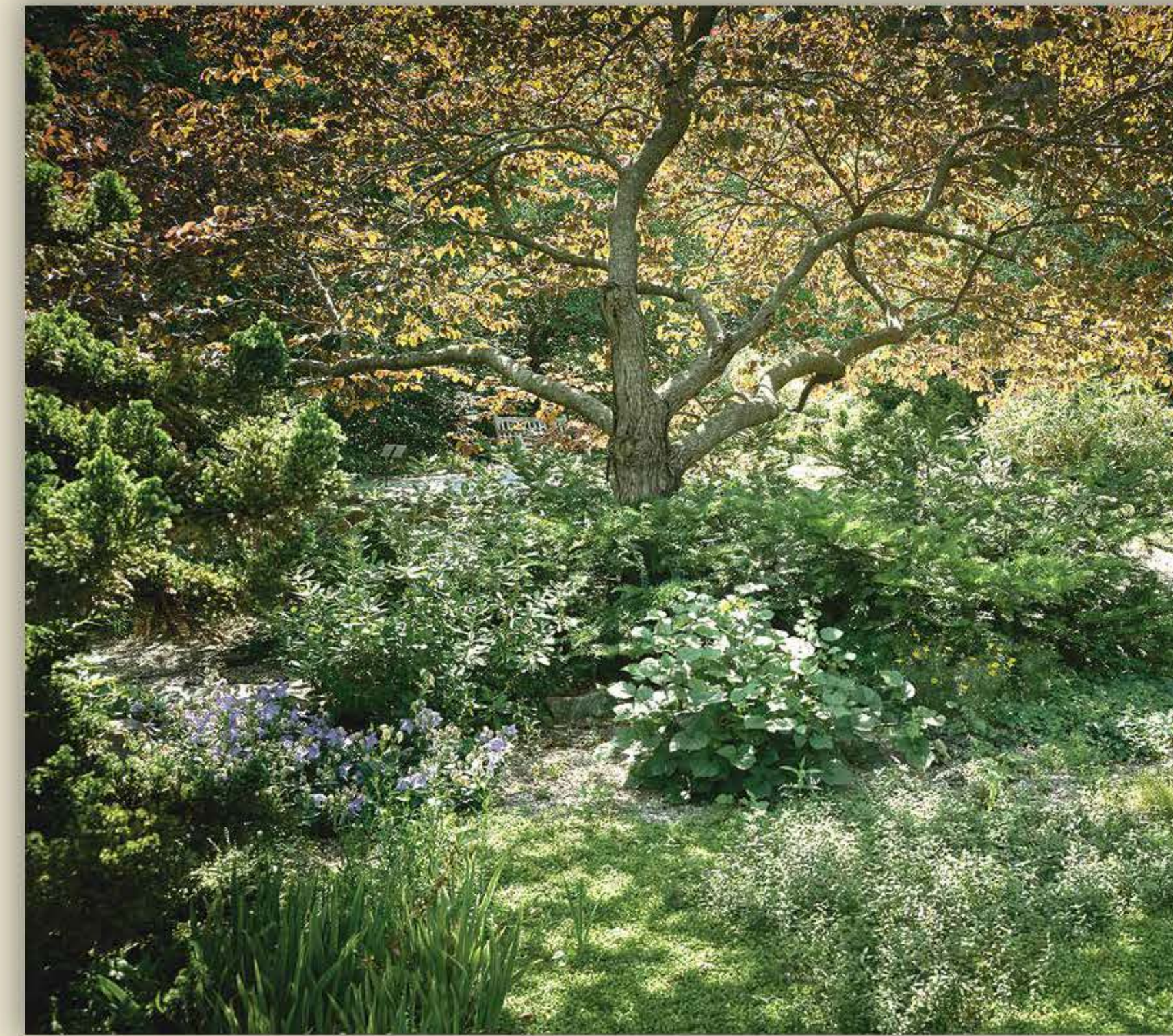
The five-acre Synoptic Garden is unique among the Planting Fields gardens and is the only one of its kind in the United States. Created in 1959 as an educational tool for horticulture and landscape design students, professionals, and avid gardeners, the garden provides a “synopsis” of the over 500 species and cultivars of ornamental evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs suitable for use on Long Island arranged “alphabetically from Abelia to Zenobia” along looping paths.

## Olmsted Principle #3: ORCHESTRATION OF MOVEMENT

Though not designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm, elements of Olmsted principles can be seen here. The looping, recursive paths gently direct the visitor through the space, drawing them to each plant grouping, allowing for each variety to be appreciated with a subtle orchestration of movement.



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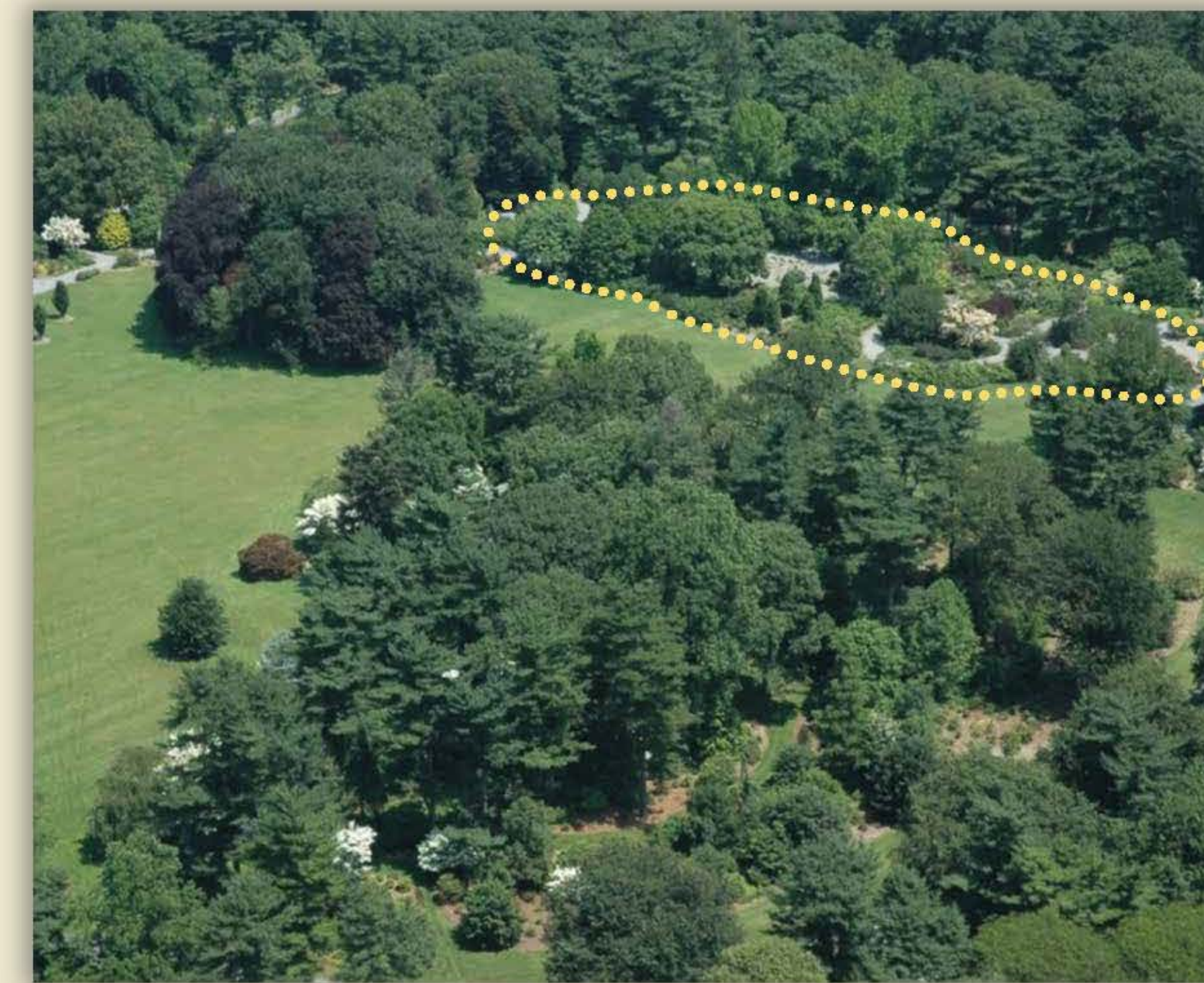
**Right:** The garden boasts one of the largest collections of the sweet-smelling **daphne shrub** on Long Island. To support their growth, a rock garden was designed to encourage the well-drained soil conditions for daphne to thrive, creating a localized microclimate. The same principles used to great success here were later used to support the reestablishment of heather in the Heather Garden.



*Daphne altaica, Plantarum Indigenarum et exoticarum Icones ad vivum coloratae, Lukas Hochenleiter und Kompagnie, 1778, Wikimedia Commons*

**Above: Thoughtful placement** has allowed the garden to thrive; woodland to the north and east provides shade and protects against harsh winds, while open lawn to the west offers bright light. The garden is a living library, and regular changes are made to the plant collections to keep it current and useful. Recent updates include the addition of new varieties of abelia, clethra, dogwood, hydrangea, lilac, mahonia, osmanthus, and viburnums. The Synoptic Garden continues to evolve and offer something for everyone.

**Right:** The placement of the **Synoptic Garden** (highlighted here) on the east end of the East Lawn encroaches on the historic Olmsted open lawn design. And while some sense of the Olmsted intention may be lost, the garden space creates a new view of the lawn, a beautiful tableau framed by beech trees and rhododendrons looking back at the main residence. In this way, the Olmsted landscape blends with the later gardens to form a cohesive whole.



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# Secluded and Distinct

Records show that this gently sloping area received little design attention until the Olmsted Brothers began to plan the Heather Garden in the mid-1920s. Perhaps inspired by Coe's native England, where heather grows abundantly, the design included an evergreen and flowering tree border leading to heather-flanked curving flagstone paths surrounded by wisteria and evergreen shrubs. The groundcover of both heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and heath (*Erica carnea*) offered a dense, undulating growth habit with early and late season flowering appeal.

## Olmsted Principle #2: UNIFIED COMPOSITION

The Heather Garden, as it was originally designed, demonstrated the Olmsted idea of unified composition: the perimeter of evergreen shrubs and seasonal wildflowers, plants also found alongside heather on the English hills, act as subordinating elements to the overall character of the garden.

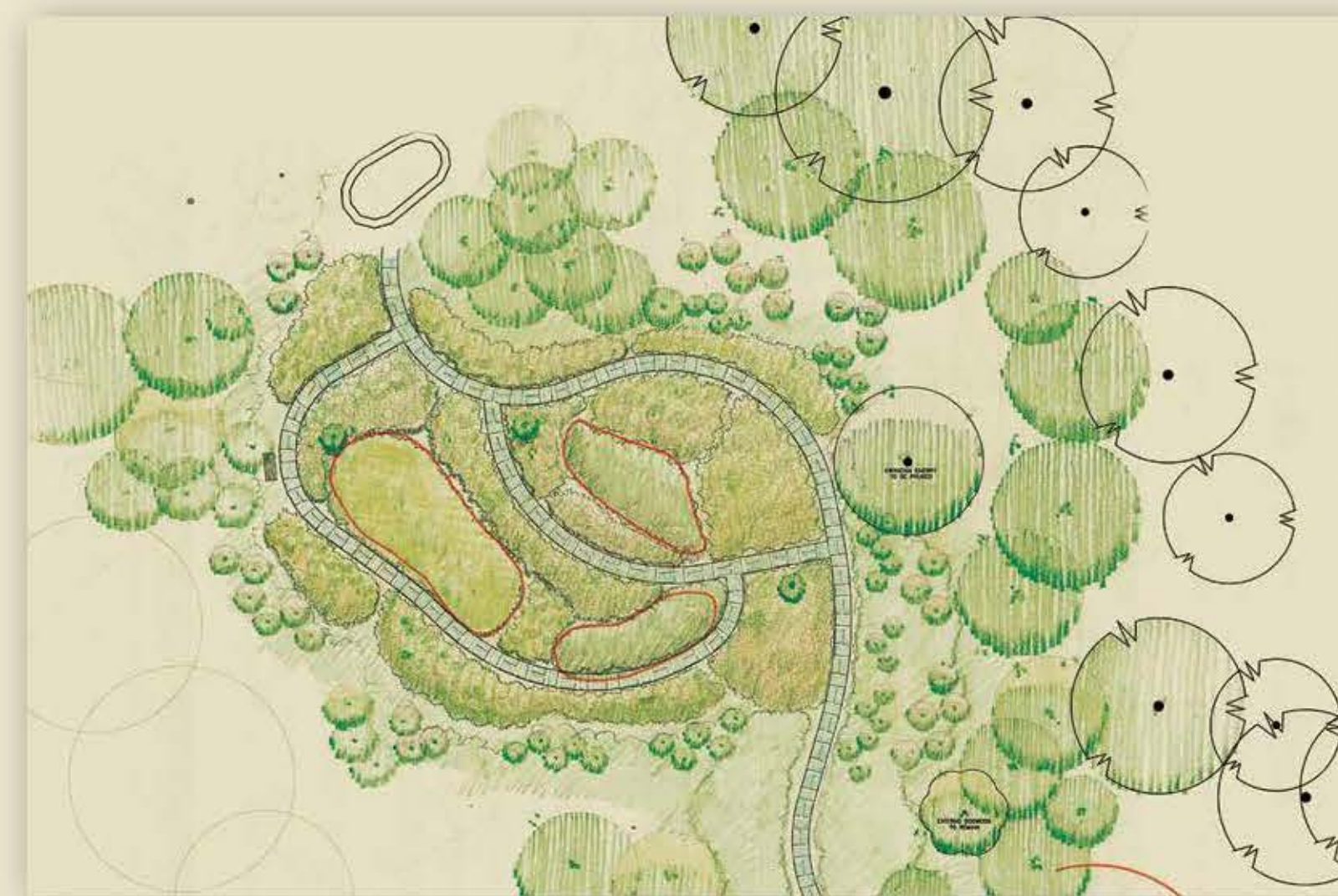


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**Above:** The **original Heather Garden** lasted only a short time, as these cool weather plants failed to thrive in the hot and humid Long Island climate, and the surrounding trees created too much shade. Over time, much of the heath and heather were replaced by azaleas and other shrubs which eventually became the dominant character of the garden. The newly renovated garden features select heather and heath varieties complemented with plants chosen to improve the diversity and sustainability of the space and enhance the visual palette.

**Below:** The slightly sunken nature of the land here along with the commanding border of evergreens and flowering trees created the illusion of a secret, hidden space. The **curving paths** of heather lead to a small pool with a bench for visitors wishing to stay and enjoy the garden's secluded feel.



Heather Garden planting plan by Innocenti & Webel, commissioned by Planting Fields Foundation



Heidekraut (*Calluna vulgaris*), *Lehrbuch der Botanik*, Otto Schmeil, 1911, Wikimedia Commons

**Above:** In 2021, Planting Fields Foundation collaborated with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to restore the garden to its Olmsted period character. Trees were removed to allow for more light and air circulation and the soil was enriched to better support the reintroduced **heather**. Careful soil refurbishment facilitates proper drainage while still allowing the soil to retain the moisture needed for the heath and heather to thrive. These changes aim to create a microclimate to support healthy growth, which along with meticulous maintenance, will allow the plants to thrive for years to come.

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# The Elegance of Design

In contrast with the planned naturalism that guided most of the Olmsted Brothers' designs at Planting Fields, the Italian Garden's stylized symmetry evokes the decorative formality of European villas. In 1916, it took the work of sixteen day-laborers to excavate the 16,000 square yards of soil to create the sunken space initially designed by Andrew Sargent, the previous landscape architect hired by the Coes at Planting Fields.

## Olmsted Principle #4: ORCHESTRATION OF USE

The Italian Garden exhibits the concept of orchestration of use, using layers of tiered plantings to naturally separate the stately gathering place of the garden from the "designed nature" of the Vista Path and West Lawn on either side.



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**Right:** In an Olmsted plan, formal landscapes were typically imagined as gathering places. As a wealthy woman in Gold Coast Era Long Island, garden design and **garden parties** would have been a staple of Mai Coe's social life. The recessed levels of the "giardino secreto" give the space a secluded feel ideal for private gatherings as well as protecting the plants from harsh winds.



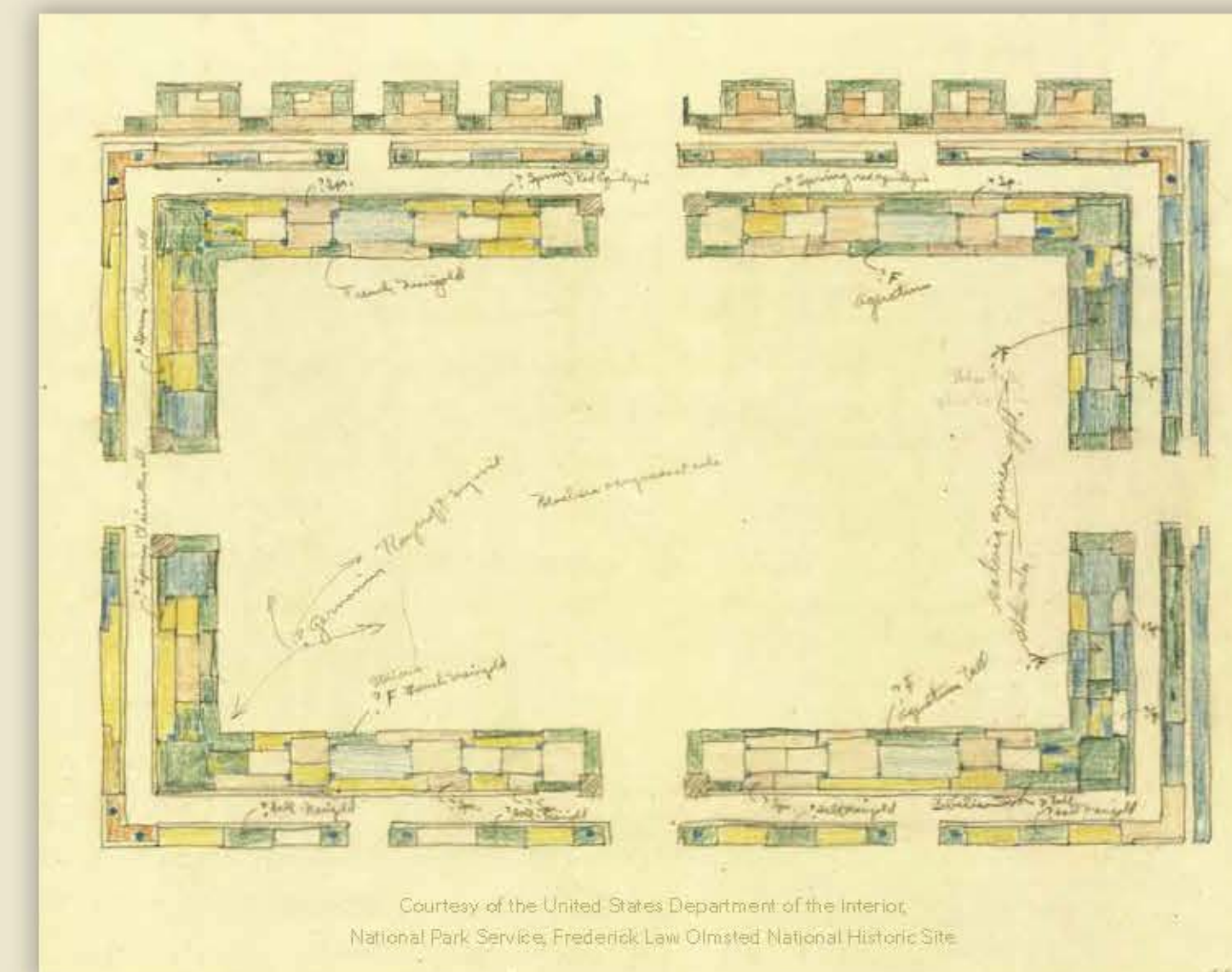
**Above:** Every aspect of the design and crafting of the grounds and buildings of Planting Fields required the work of skilled artisans. Samuel Yellin, a master blacksmith originally from the Ukraine but working in Philadelphia, created the **iron gates** that adorn the north and west entryways into the garden as well as fireplace screens, stair railings, and other decorative features in the main residence. Like many skilled craftsmen and tradesmen, Yellin was apprenticed to a master ironsmith at the age of eleven. He became a leading figure in the American Arts and Crafts movement, which reacted to the Industrial Revolution by celebrating a return to traditional fabrication techniques.



"The Gardens of Planting Fields, the estate of Mr. and Mrs. William R. Coe of Oyster Bay, will be shown tomorrow afternoon for charity."

—Notes of Social Activities in New York and Elsewhere, *The New York Times*, 12 May 1933

**Below:** In this Olmsted fall **planting plan**, both terrace levels were designed to mirror each other with coordinating blooms. The planting, replanting, and maintenance of the gardens and grounds required a large workforce of both permanent and seasonal laborers. In 1921, as many as sixty-one men were hired to implement the constantly changing schedule of planting on the property.



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# Delight the Eye, the Mind, and the Spirit

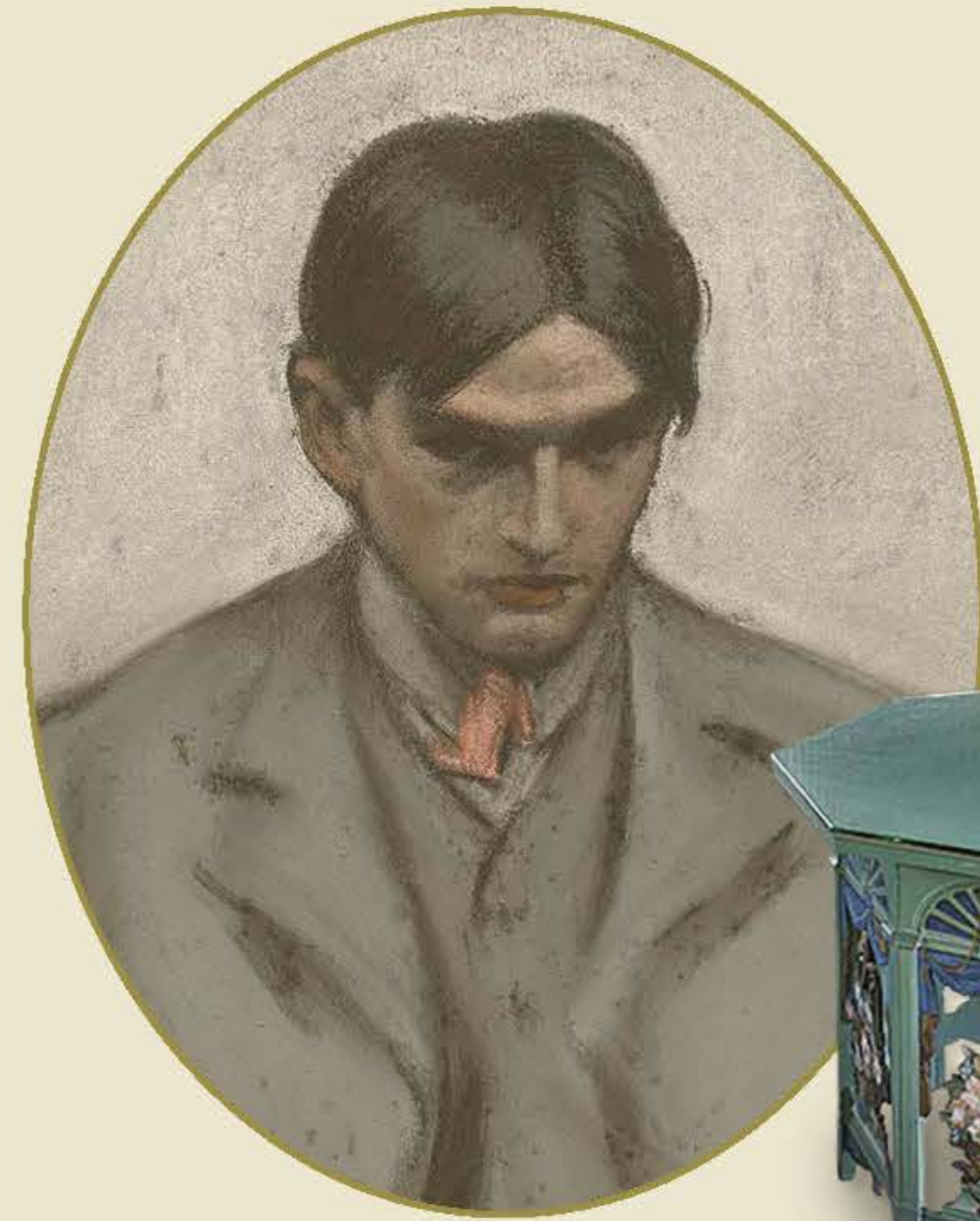
The small structure that would become known as the Tea House was incorporated into the design of the Italian Garden. Within the formalized axial organization of the garden, the house serves to anchor the space along the north-south axis. The Tea House draws the eye up over the sunken pool and beyond the walled terraces, contributing to the layered feel of the area and adding to the picturesque style favored by the Olmsted Brothers.

## Olmsted Principle #4: ORCHESTRATION OF USE

Like the border plantings around the garden perimeter, the Tea House acts as a visual boundary to the spaces beyond the Italian Garden and helps to prevent the visual competition between garden styles, illustrating the orchestration of use principle.



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Everett Shinn Self Portrait, 1901, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



**Left & Above:** W. R. and Mai Coe's patronage of the arts included the collection of **murals** and **painting furniture** created by **Everett Shinn** displayed in the Tea House. Classified as part of the urban realist Ashcan School, Shinn's artistic breadth spans unflinching depictions of poverty as well as the bright ornamental tableaus created for the Tea House. In the charcoal self-portrait seen at left, the rough lines and muted colors are in stark contrast to his later whimsical work seen in the Tea House, which earned him the title of:

**"the Fragonard of the present time."**



**Right: Elsie de Wolfe,**

one of the first women to make her living as an interior designer in the country, was contracted to decorate the Tea House. Many of de Wolfe's signature elements are on display inside; the mint trellage gives the room a light airiness while also adding depth and texture, and strategically placed mirrors lengthen the space.



Elsie de Wolfe, 1914, Library of Congress

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# A Complexity of Light and Shadow

In 1920, the Olmsted plan called for an expansion to the east of the Vista Path. The existing tree canopy was largely preserved, and 1,800 new azaleas and rhododendrons were planted. The curving path of irregular width to give the impression of an unplanned, meandering woodland trail known as the Azalea Walk. Much of the original layout of the walk remained throughout the private ownership era of Planting Fields.

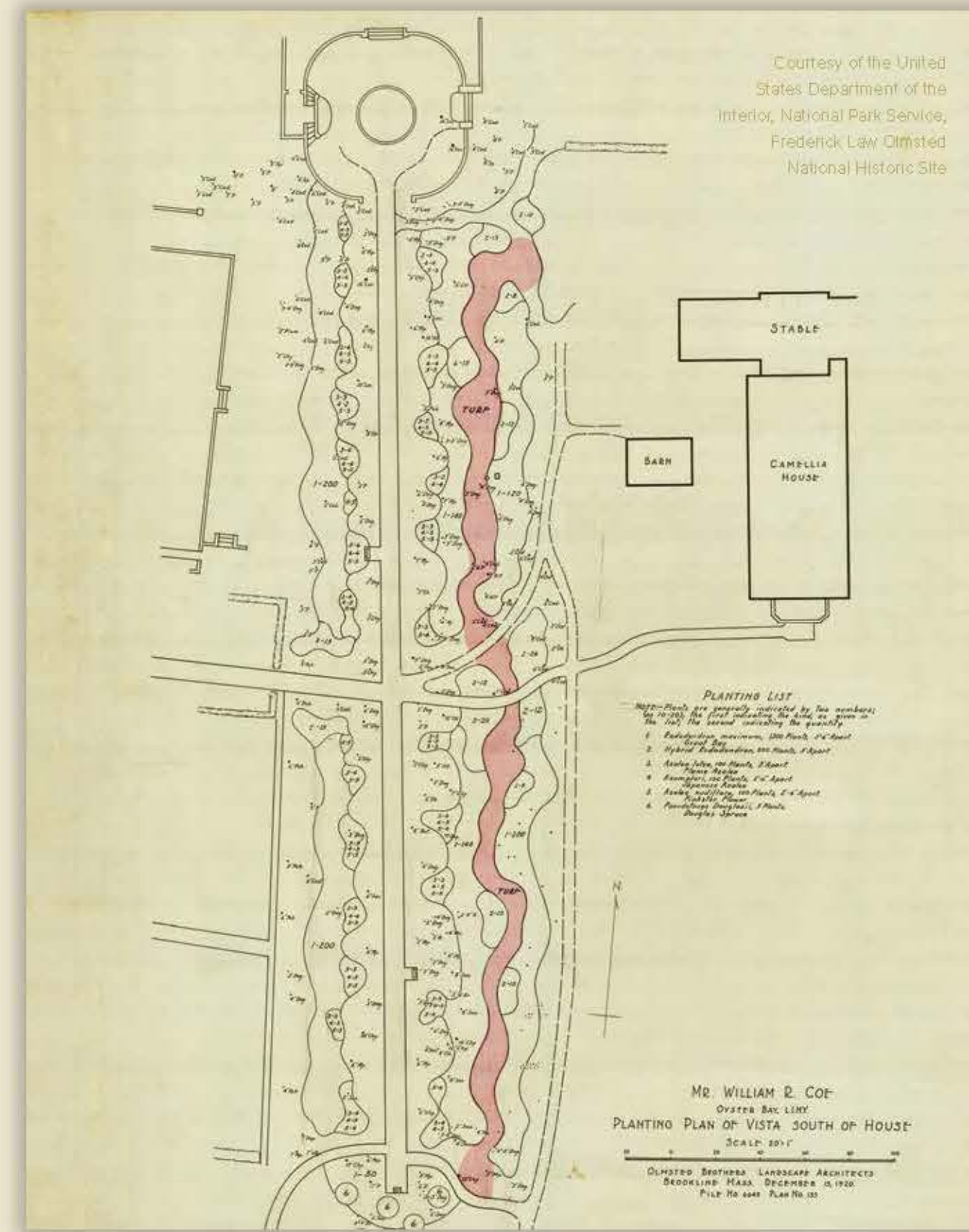
## Olmsted Principle #3: ORCHESTRATION OF MOVEMENT

The carefully placed azaleas and rhododendrons between the Vista Path and the Azalea Walk support the different intentions of each space. A distinct orchestration of movement directs visitors down either the simple, straight promenade of the Vista Path or the curving faux naturalism of the azaleas with no collision of space or character.



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**Below:** It is likely that W. R. Coe was introduced to the showy blooms of azaleas and rhododendrons by landscape architect Andrew Sargent during the early years of the Coe tenure, beginning his life-long pursuit of new and rare varieties. This Olmsted **planting plan** from 1920 shows the proposed placement of 500 specimen rhododendrons and azaleas and 1,500 rosebay rhododendron.



**Left:** After 1956, horticulture students at local state universities rehabilitated the **plantings of the walk**, adding Kurume azaleas and hybrid rhododendrons from the private garden of W. R. Coe's son. New gravel paths were also added, giving visitors more access to the garden but changing the secluded nature of the Olmsted Brothers design. In 2020 and 2021, an additional 400 azalea plants replaced older specimens which had died or were in poor health. Many of these azalea varieties were new additions to the arboretum collection with enhanced aesthetic attributes.

**Below:** Coe's particular fondness for **azaleas** and **rhododendrons** along with the means to indulge in that fondness, resulted in the planting of thousands of individual specimens all over the property. Coe eventually hired as superintendent William Carter, a specialist from England in azaleas and rhododendrons, who would spend the next 15 years creating a collection considered "the finest ever grown in the East."

## William Carter, 61, Long Island Horticulturist

**OYSTER BAY, L. I., Aug. 2**—William Carter, horticulturist and super-intendent of Planting Fields, the estate of William Roebrtson Coe in Upper Brookville, died Sunday night at his home on the estate. He was 61.

Mr. Carter, a native of England, had been superintendent of Planting Fields for 23 years. Previously he had served on

estates in England and Scotland.

He was a specialist in the azalea and rhododendron fields and in the last 15 years these blooms have been among the finest ever grown in the East, his products having been shown for charity on numerous occasions. He also was a producer of orchids and camellias.



Azalea bloom time depends primarily on the weather. Warm springs bring early blooms while cold weather delays flowering. At Planting Fields, the bright pinks and reds of azalea blossoms are typically expected from mid-April to late May.

Tsutsuji rhododendron judicum-azalea, Megata Morikagi, c. 1870. Library of Congress

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# The Narrative Power of Scenery

Forged in 1711 before the invention of mass-produced steel, the Carshalton Gates are representative of exceptional eighteenth-century English wrought ironwork. W. R. Coe purchased the gates in 1921 for £3,000 from a dealer in London, where they had originally adorned the entrance to Carshalton Park. After public outcry over their purchase by an American, Coe was offered £10,000 to leave the gates behind, which he declined. A new entrance drive was created to show off the gates, but the design and implementation of the plan would take more than six years.

## Olmsted Principle #6: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The restrained plantings around the gates typify the Olmsted principle of the comprehensive approach: all the disparate elements are considered, weighted, and given a hierarchy. Here, the plantings are meant to complement the gates, not distract from the overall composition.

**Right:** Created by John van Nost the Elder and placed on **hand-carved stone pillars**, the statues represent Diana and Actaeon. In **Ovid's Metamorphosis** (pictured center), Actaeon startles the goddess Diana while she bathes. In her anger, Diana transforms the hunter into a stag, after which he is killed by his own hunting dogs. A close look at the small antlers on Actaeon's head reveal he has only just begun his transformation.



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

**Left & Below:** As seen in this image from 1927, the **plantings around the gate** and on the teardrop-shaped drive were kept intentionally simple so as not to detract from the grandeur of the gates themselves. Over time, the yew bushes (seen here) had become overgrown and were replaced in 2021 to affect the original design.

**Left:** The initial simple plan for the gates quickly evolved into a much larger venture. It took nearly two years to purchase the five acres needed for the **new entrance** and another year to convince the town to relocate the nearby highway. A high limestone wall was added as well as a full residence within the "Gate Lodge." The photograph here shows sketching for simple shrub additions meant to soften the corners of the gatehouse and door without overpowering the shape and presence.

**"My idea is to put these in the Oyster Bay entrance about 30 or 40 ft. up the drive; so as to show them off better. Get your mind to work on it."**

-W. R. Coe to Frederick Dawson at the time of the purchase of the gates in 1921.



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

## The Creators of Planting Fields

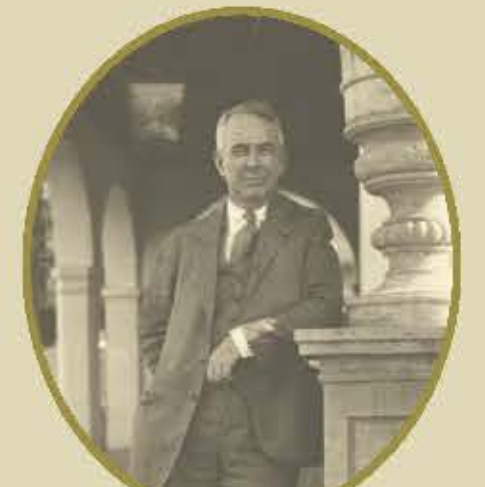


### William R. Coe & Mai Rogers Coe

English immigrant and wealthy businessman William R. Coe and Standard Oil heiress Mai Rogers Coe owned the Planting Fields estate from 1913 until William's death in 1955, after which the property was gifted to New York State. The Coes' enthusiasm for art, architecture, horticulture, and landscape design can be seen today across the estate.

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Palos Verdes Archives



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# The Hospitality of Landscape

To complement the dramatic impression of the Carshalton Gates, a new grand estate entryway was created. It draws visitors up the curved path cut into the hillside along symmetrical plantings of beech trees that are aligned with the gate pillars. Next, visitors are taken into the naturalistic woodland where in the spring, mass plantings of rhododendron and dogwood blooms line the drive, an ideal placement in the shade of the evergreens. When ownership of the property passed to the State, the primary entry was moved to Planting Fields Road where it had been earlier in the property's history.

## Olmsted Principle #5: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

The sustainable design of the west entry drive conserves the natural forest along the road, incorporating the unpretentious but still distinctive woodland character into the designed experience.



Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site



**Left:** Initially inspired by the open lawn “commons” of the grand parks of England, the visual impact of the mature allée (or alley) of **beech trees** lining the far end of the drive relays the drama of the Olmsted design, particularly during seasonal changes, as seen here. The trees draw the eye of the visitor up toward the woodland, blending the park-like lawn with the natural character of the land.

**Below:** A striking entrance, while pleasing on an aesthetic level, was also intended to impress the Coe's visitors. In this news article from 1934 (right), visitors to the estate recount the “dazzling” effect of the landscape. Guests visiting in spring would ascend up the drive among masses of azalea, rhododendron, and dogwood blooms until approached by the main residence where it rose out of the landscape.



## 500 INSPECT ESTATE OPENED TO AID HOME

*Millions of Narcissuses Dazzle Day's Visitors to Planting Fields in Oyster Bay.*

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

OYSTER BAY, L. I., May 1— Planting Fields, the first of the Long Island estates to be opened to the public for the benefit of the Wayside Home for Girls at Valley Stream, attracted almost 500 visitors this afternoon in cars that

bore license plates of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Millions of narcissuses made a flaming carpet of yellow along the miles of curving driveway through the estate and covered the woodland and lawn as far as the eye could see. With the sun reflected from the golden petals, it dazzled the drivers, many of whom were women, and made traffic slow up the winding hill.

Visitors entered by way of the great iron gates on the chicken Valley Road and left the gardens by a gateway into the rural section of the township.

## The Creators of Planting Fields



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Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

# A Sense of Enlarged Freedom

Lacking ground level views of the Sound less than a mile away, Planting Fields landscape designers created their own vistas. Though the tools of Olmsted design were plants, soil, sky, and water combined to appear as a natural landscape, the scenery is a built environment created to impart a specific experience. The receding perspective of the lawn follows the undulating boundary of leafy trees which give way to evergreens before finally transitioning to dense woodlands in the distance.

## Olmsted Principle #2: UNIFIED COMPOSITION

The West Lawn is an example of the pastoral style favored by the Olmsted aesthetic and of the principle of unified composition, forgoing decorative plantings in favor of open expanses highlighting the land itself.



Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site



**Left:** The “lawn” as we know it today emerged in eighteenth century England as a visual statement of the landowner’s wealth. Before modern lawn mowers, **ornamental lawns** like these were cut by hand with scythes and shears, requiring many gardeners to maintain and producing nothing but a pleasing tableau. Even with the aid of modern landscaping tools, one person is ideally needed to maintain every five acres of cultivated landscape.

**Right:** For much of the Coe tenure at Planting Fields, the continuity of the Olmsted **West Lawn**, seen here, was maintained. Eventually, as seen in the 2019 map, the large size of the mature trees and collection of Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) trees were preserved with only a few lost and the open expansiveness of the area continued. Seen here in the map from 1955, the second-generation tree growth around the original trees began to crowd the view, compromising the original intention.

**Left:** The slope and the curving edges of lawn and greenery create **shadow and depth**, combining with exposed boulders to create the “soothing and restorative atmosphere” that was the aim of the Olmsted “designed nature.”



## The Creators of Planting Fields

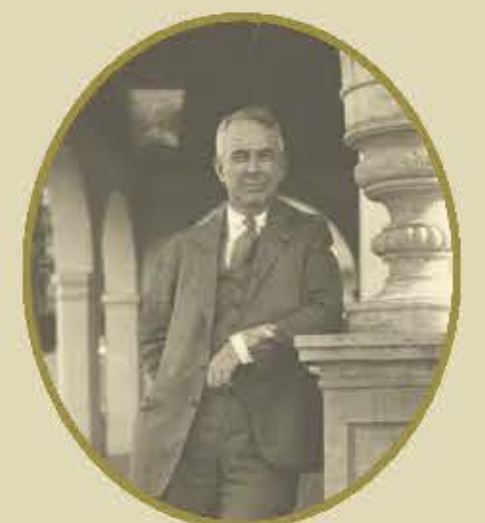


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Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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# A Quiet Reflection on Scenery

The fire that destroyed the original main residence in 1918 allowed the Coes, architects Walker and Gillette, and James Frederick Dawson to design an entirely new space featuring architectural elements that complement the constructed landscape. On a slight rise, the West Portico looks down the gentle west slope (seen right) dotted with individual specimen trees as it disappears into woodland and down the flagstone path toward the Italian Garden filled with layered shrubs and trees.

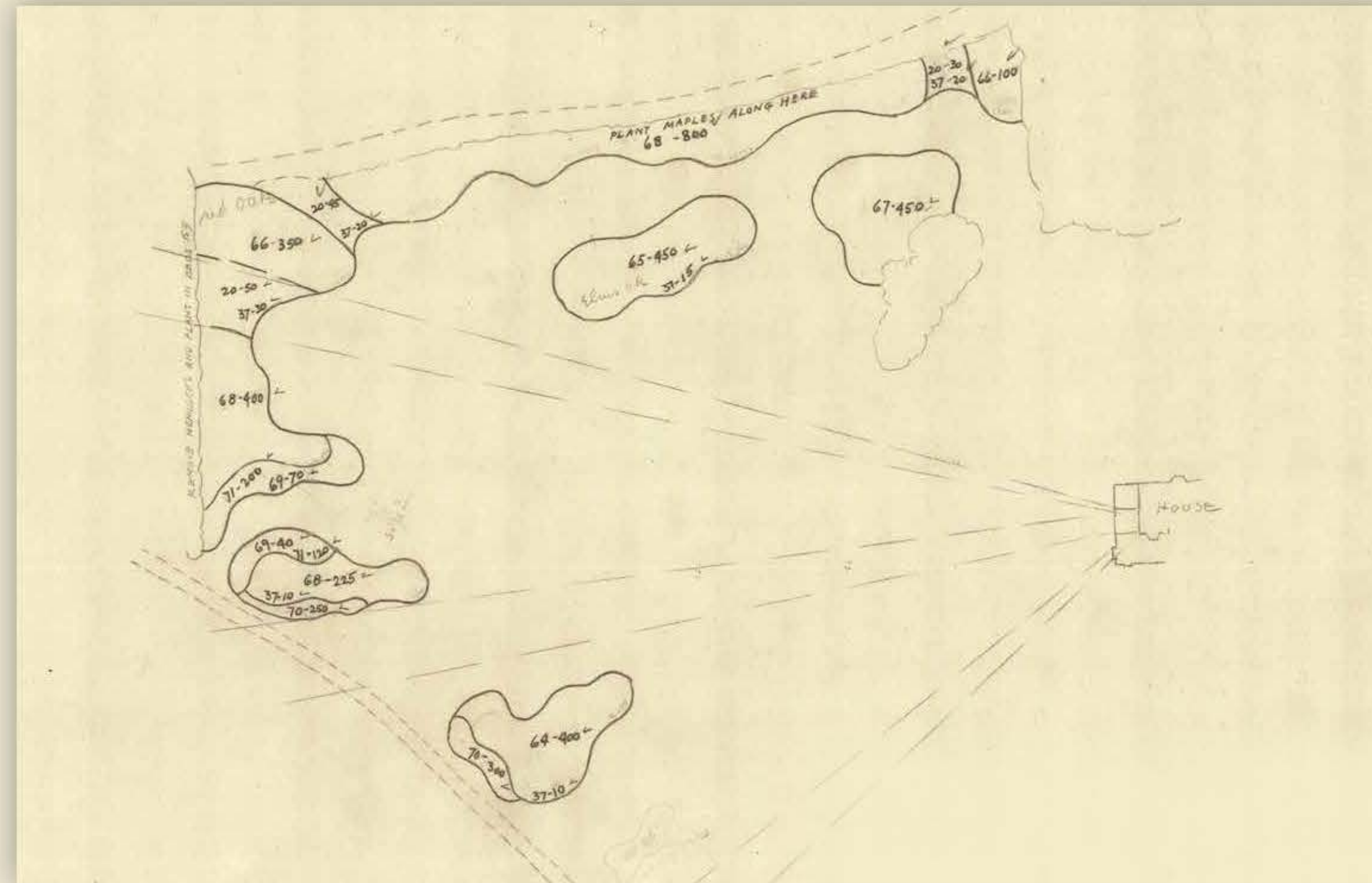
## Olmsted Principle #1: GENIUS OF PLACE

Olmsted believed that contemplating nature soothed and restored the mind and his designs aimed to cultivate an unconscious “susceptibility to the power of scenery.” The West Portico takes advantage of the location of the house to provide an outdoor space to enjoy the scenery of the pastoral West Lawn and the picturesque path to the Italian Garden, an example of the genius of place design principle.



Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site

**Right:** W. R. Coe started his career as a shop boy for an insurance broker, working his way up to claims adjuster and eventually president of maritime insurance company Johnson & Higgins. Despite insuring the ill-fated maiden voyage of the Titanic, Coe’s maritime insurance career was successful, and his connection to the maritime industry can be seen in **decorative elements** on the portico.



**Below:** Over time, elements of the **West Portico** deteriorated. In 2020, Planting Fields undertook the first phase of the restoration of the space.



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

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# Refreshing Rest and Reinvigoration

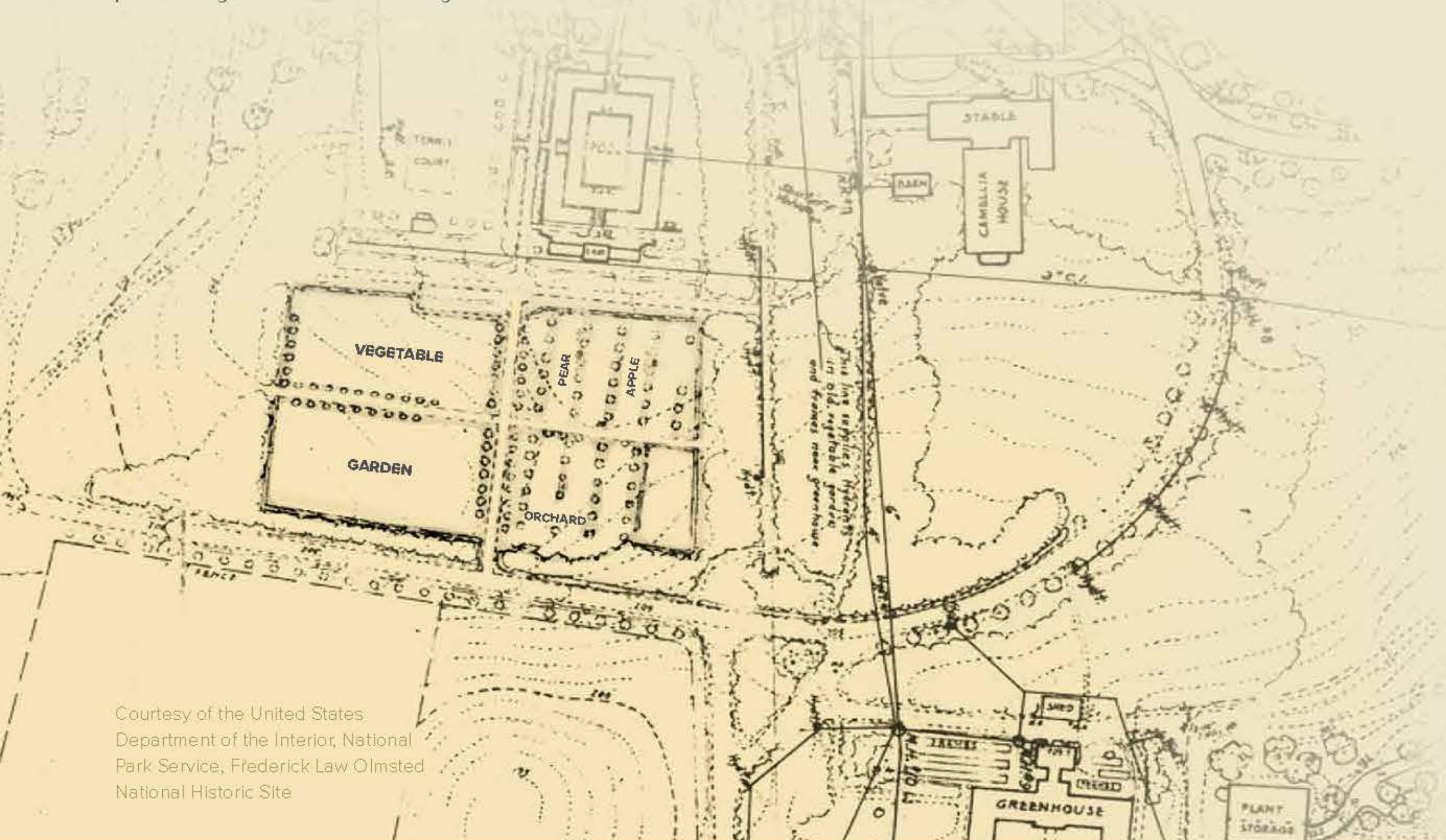
The elements that would become the modern Rose Arbor first appear in designs prepared for the previous owners, the Byrne family. They show overhead cross members down the length of the path (highlighted below) which by 1918 led to a hedge-lined herb garden. Olmsted landscape architect James Frederick Dawson preserved the U-shaped rose arches of the earlier design and added low to high stepped herbaceous plantings and a long intersecting walk with a flower border.

## Olmsted Principle #3: ORCHESTRATION OF MOVEMENT

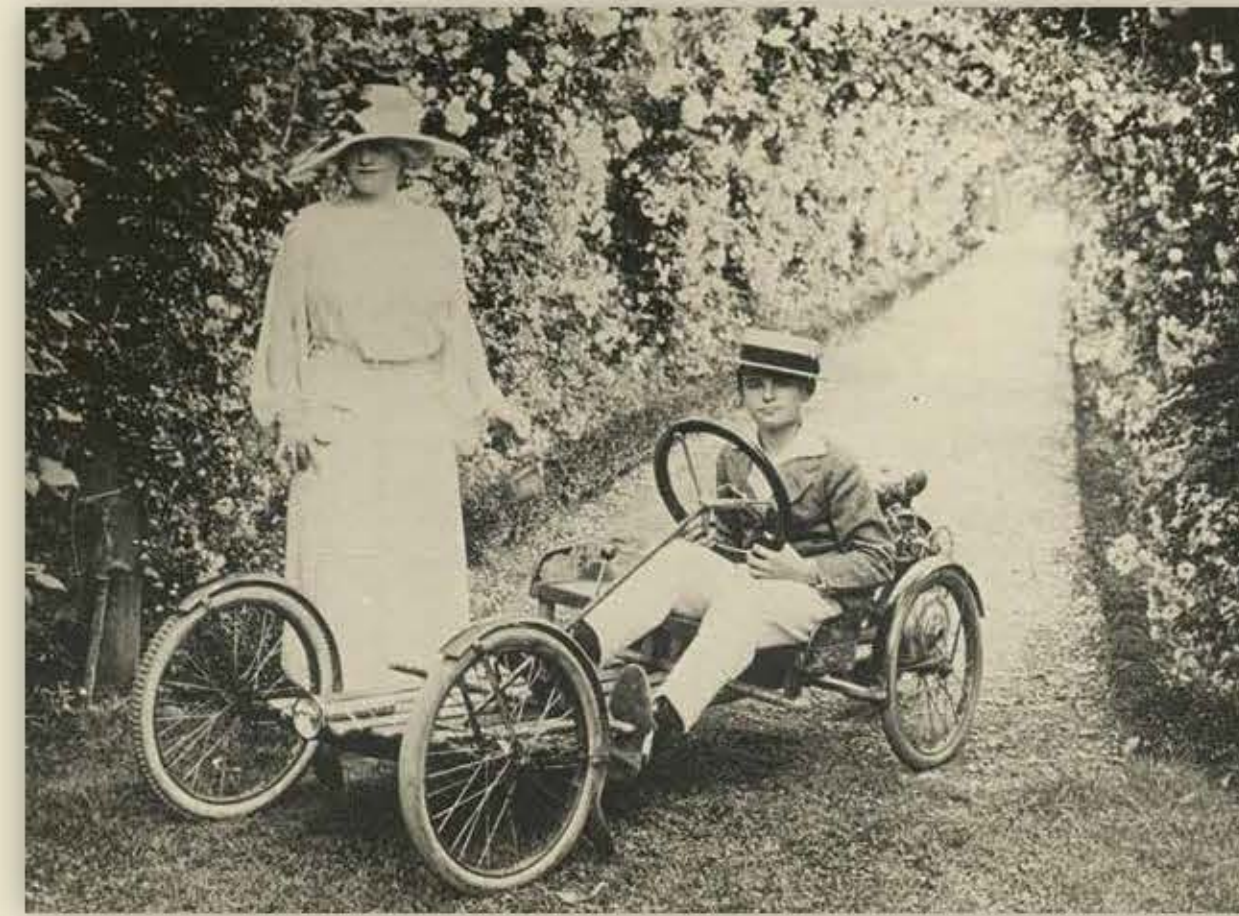
Designed for visitors to “promenade” among the roses, the linear walkway of the Rose Arbor and the intersecting flower-bordered path orchestrate the movement through the space, and tall plants along the borders create long linear views.



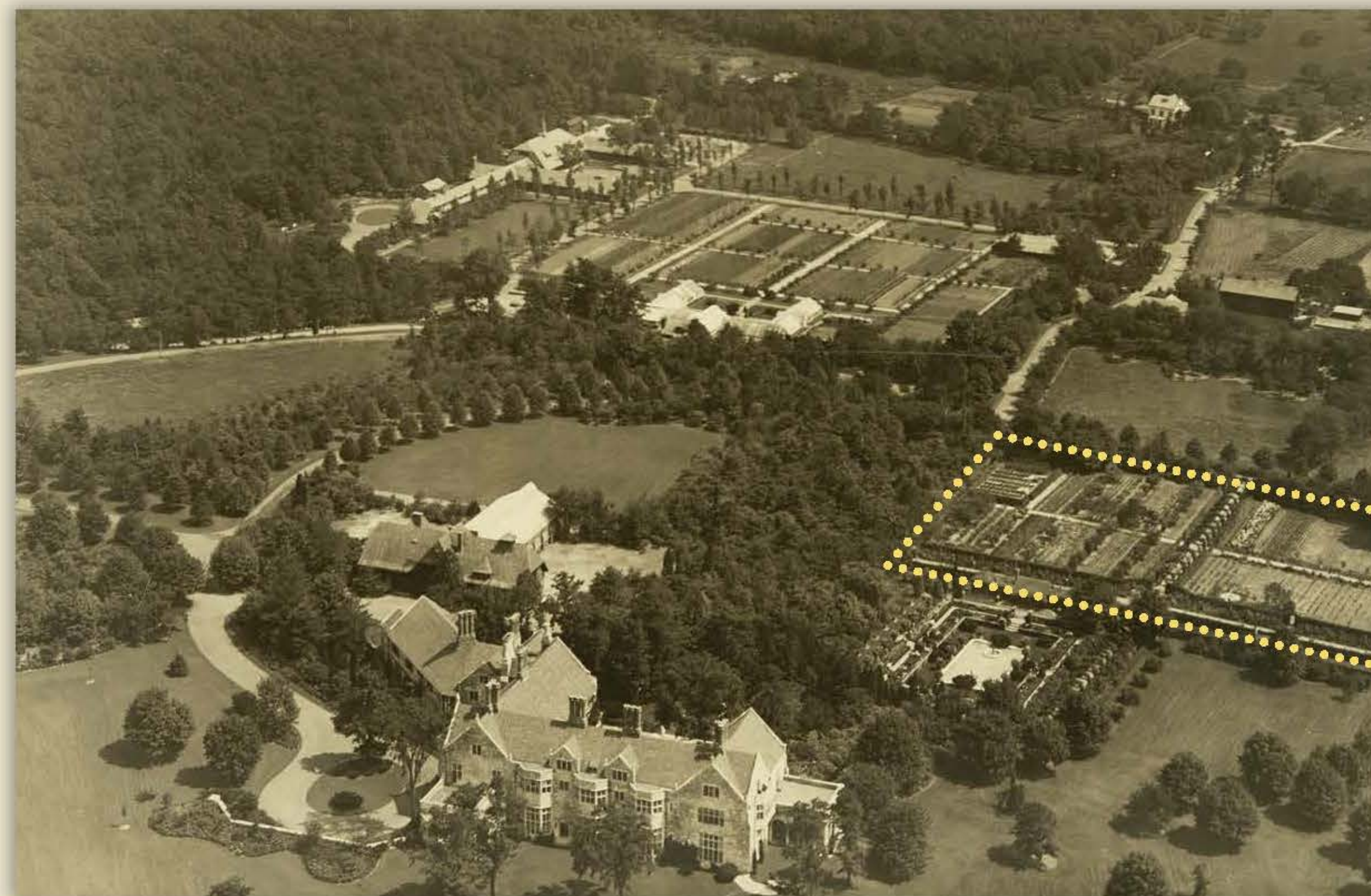
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Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



**Above & Right:** Olmsted believed that **sunlight**, **abundant greenery**, and **fresh air** acted as a relief to the pressures of urban life. The resulting “mental tranquility” produced a “temperate, good-natured, and healthy state of mind.” These foundational ideas about the purpose of a landscape carried through the almost 100 years of Olmsted design.



**Left:** On either side of the Rose Arbor, a kitchen garden (highlighted here) planted and tended by estate laborers would have fed not only the Coes and their guests, but also the live-in staff working on the grounds and in the main residence. By 1955, nearing the end of the era of private residence at Planting Fields, most of the fruit trees were gone, and the vegetable planting beds were converted to turf with dahlias, daylilies, peonies, and additional roses.

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# Tranquility and Rest of the Mind

Before the Coe tenure, landscape architect James Greenleaf designed a simple garden in conversation with the Beaux-Arts-style mansion that preceded the current main residence. A circular pool was set in an oval garden arranged along a north-south axis with some flower plantings that echoed the symmetry of the space. On behalf of the Coes, landscape architect Andrew Sargent extended the garden south, adding the intimate, tree-lined, linear Vista Path to contrast the open Greenleaf design.

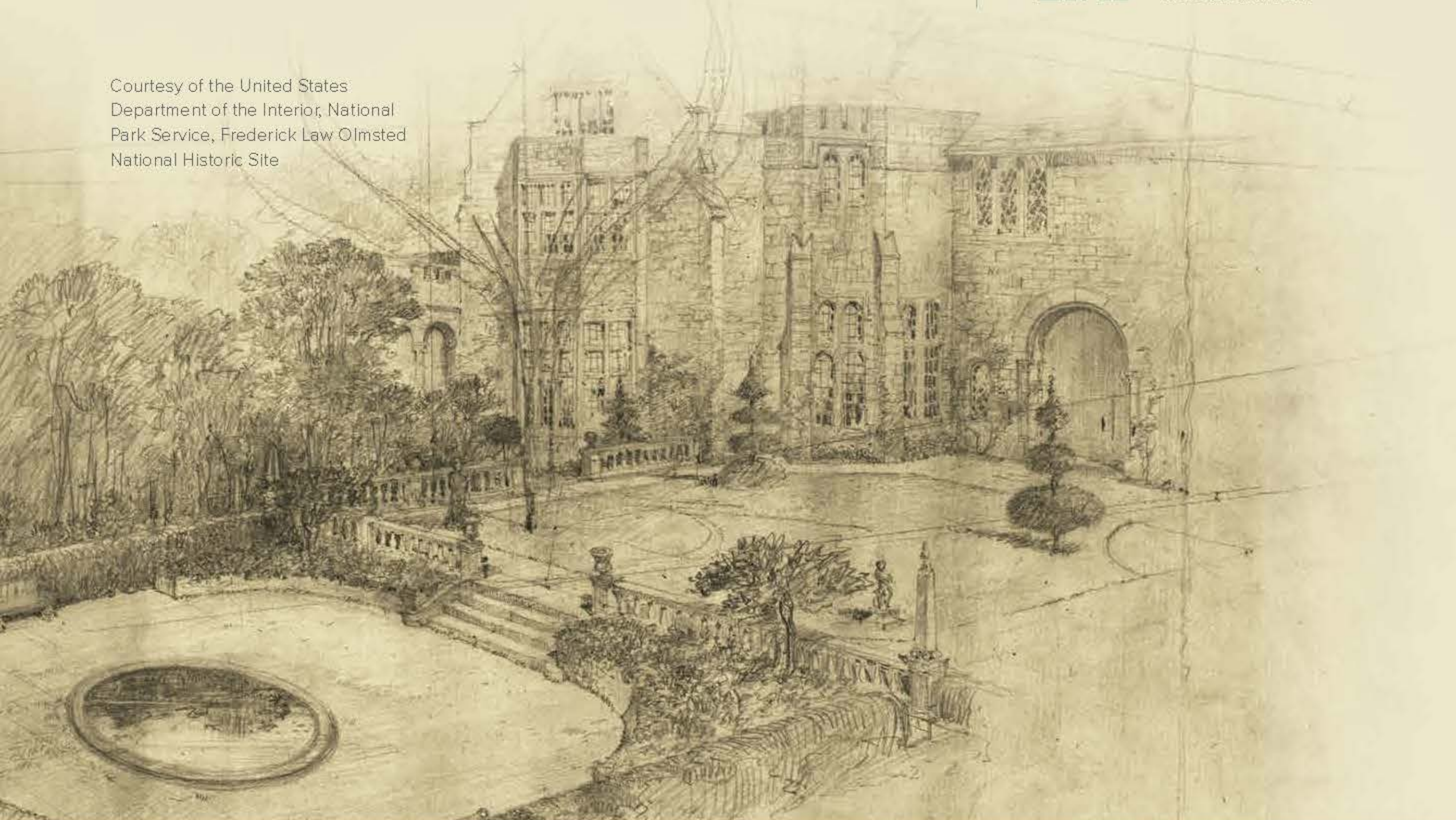
## Olmsted Principle #4: ORCHESTRATION OF USE

The sequential nature of the design, with each space delineated by border plantings, orchestrates the use of each area and allows the character of each space to be maintained.



Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site

Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



Mattie Edwards Hewitt, Frances Benjamin Johnson, c. 1890–1910, Library of Congress

**Above:** Pioneering architecture and landscape photographer **Mattie Edwards Hewitt** was contracted in 1921 to document the visual glory of Planting Fields in its prime. Largely self-taught, Hewitt carved out a successful photography career in the early twentieth century, making her name capturing the grand estates of the period. Her photographs of the landscapes and gardens in full bloom continue to serve as a crucial guide in Planting Fields' ongoing restoration and rehabilitation work.

**Left** The Olmsted Brothers **redesigned the garden**, which was disrupted by the construction of the main residence in 1918. The axial organization of the space was maintained, drawing visitors through the formal and manicured upper Cloister near the house down through the softer edge plantings in the lower Cloister and finally the naturalistic Vista Path. The space acts as a private, intimate opposite of the wide expanses of the West and East Lawns.



**Above & Below:** The Olmsted Brothers plan for the **lower Cloister** softened the edges of the pool with the addition of a groundcover border echoed in the arc of hedges mirroring the shape of the pool. The signature Olmsted sense of layered greenery is on display as the eye travels from the low ground cover to the mid-level boxwood hedges and up to the canopy of evergreens and flowering trees.



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# Creating a Natural Effect

Since the beginning of the Planting Fields estate, the main drive has served as a focal design element, winding through the existing woodland and culminating in the Main Residence forecourt. Early in the Coe tenure, the east entrance was lined with European beech trees in a double allée formation to enhance the stately formality. By 1918, the Olmsted firm began filling in the area with new plantings such as pine, spruce, and azaleas.

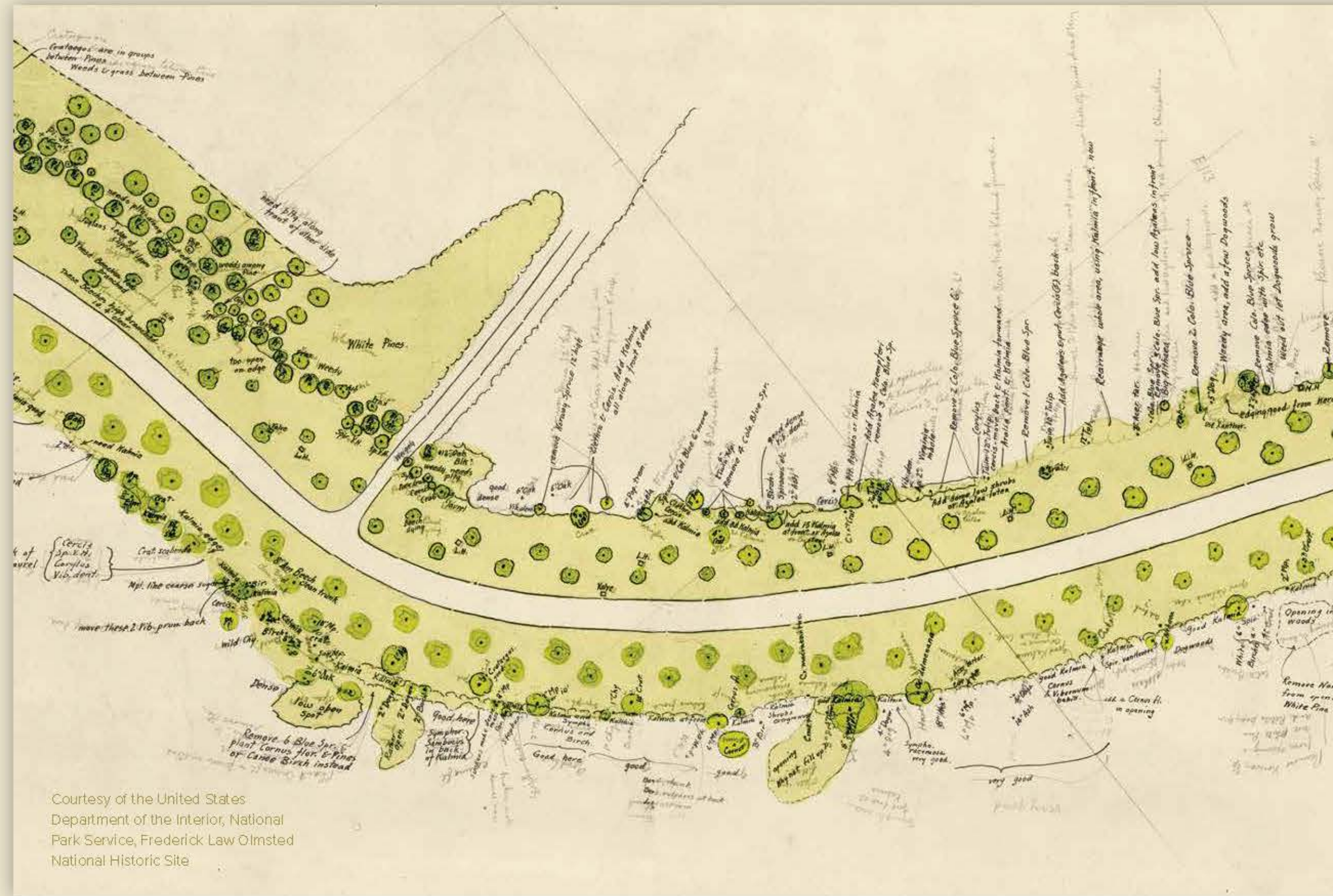
## Olmsted Principle #2: UNIFIED COMPOSITION

The design of the main entrance serves multiple goals. The functional purpose of transportation combines with the line of beech trees to convey a sense of ceremony. Behind the beeches, the thick wall of pines, spruces, and flowering shrubs blend into a naturalistic backdrop. All elements combine to create a unified composition, both utilitarian and picturesque.



Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site.

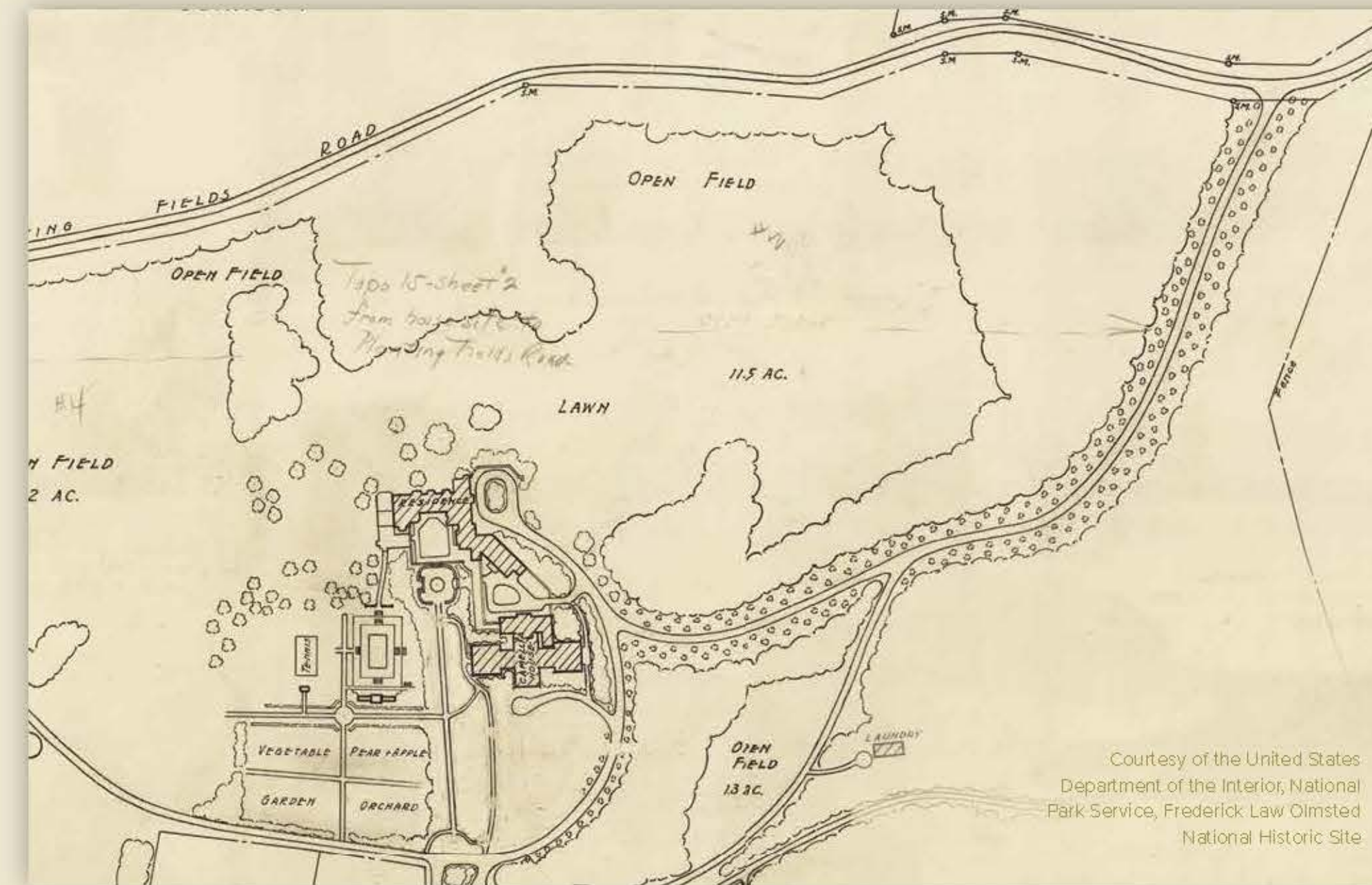
Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

**Right:** This 1920 plan view of the Main Drive shows the beech trees as planted by landscape architect Andrew Sargent before his death. By this time, the trees were established in the landscape and further Olmsted additions would augment the existing character of the drive.

Over time, individual beech trees were lost despite efforts made to preserve. These included cabling reinforcement, pruning, mulching, and the treatment of diseases. In an effort to maintain the elegant tree-lined character in a more sustainable way, all of the remaining Beech trees from the original 187 were replaced in 2023 with durable, native white oak.



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

**Left:** In this 1918 design for the drive, James Frederick Dawson planned the addition of Kalmia (Mountain laurel), dogwood, and other plants to supplement the formal beech arrangement in the drive foreground, developing the signature Olmsted sense of multi-tiered richness that mimicked the natural disorder of native roadside trees and shrubs.

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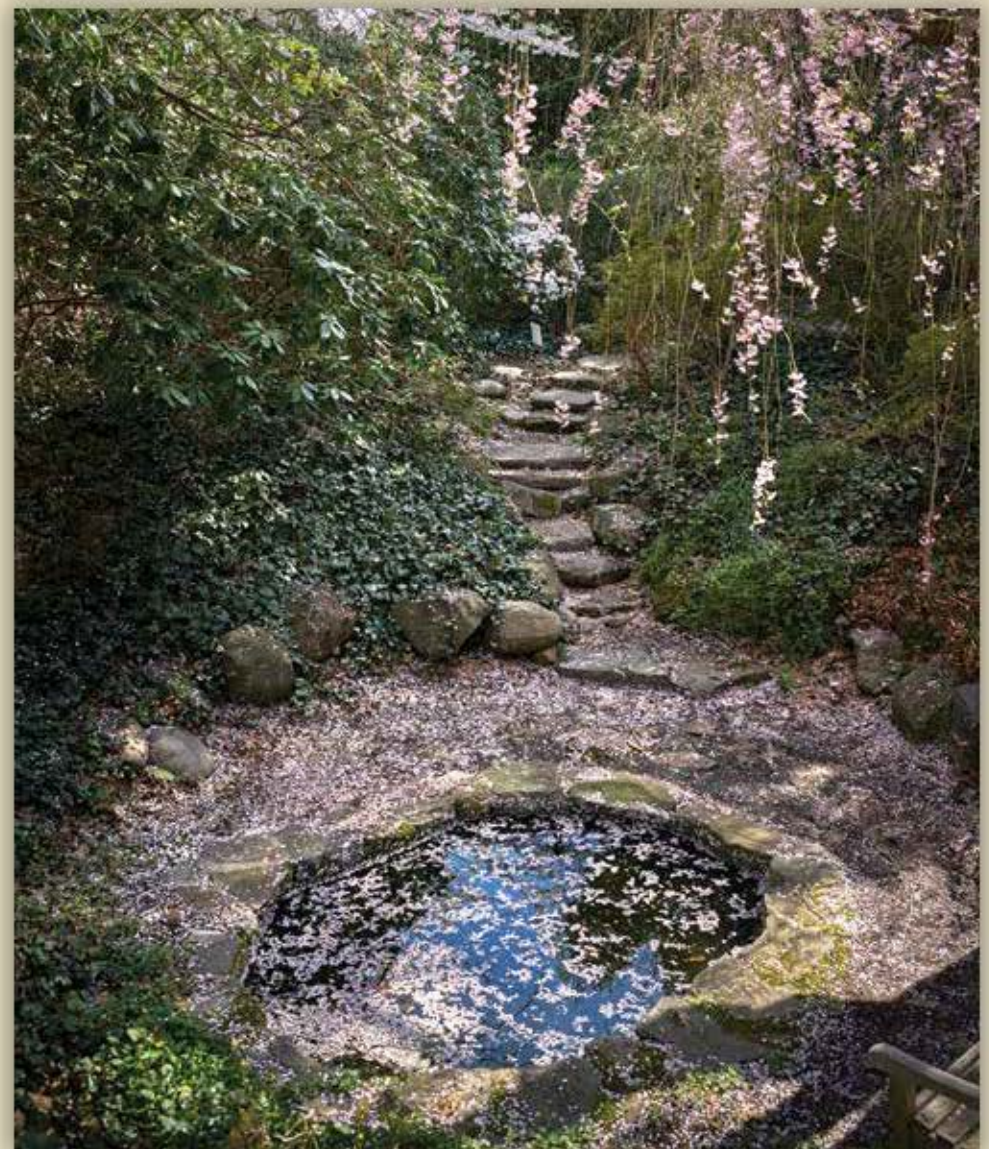
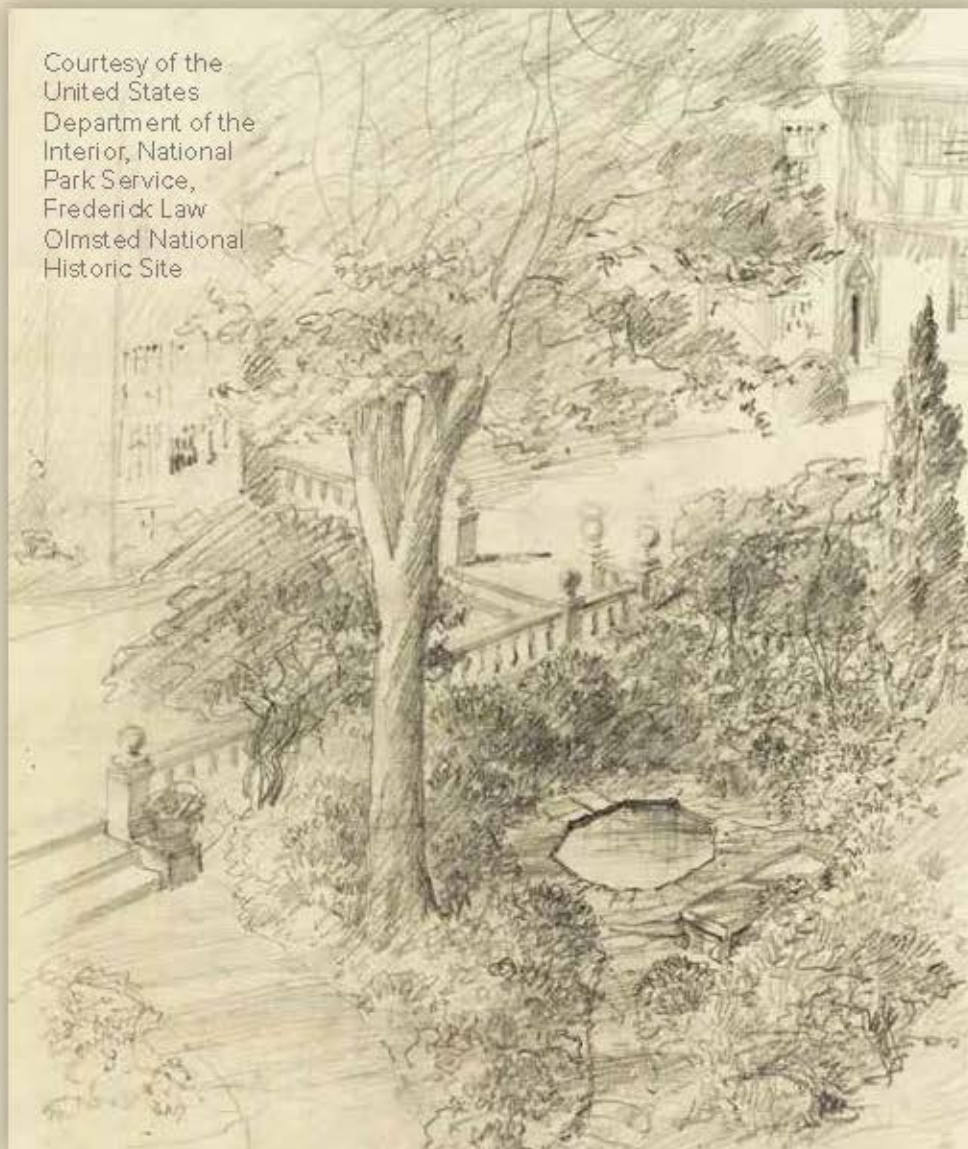
# A Wild and Secluded Character

The intentionally modest Surprise Pond is tucked away between the formality of the main residence and the grandeur of the Italian Garden to the south, an example of the Olmsted Brothers predilection for fabricated rustic design elements to counterbalance highly formal spaces. The lush rhododendrons, cherry trees, and Japanese holly along the gently curving walkway to the Italian Garden obscure the flagstone path down to a small pool lined with irregular stones.

## Olmsted Principle #5: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Despite its small size, the dense, naturalistic plantings of shrubs, trees, and groundcover create the dappled light, dark shade, and sense of mystery typical of the Olmsted **picturesque** style. The low maintenance plants fulfill the Olmsted principle of sustainable design, ensuring the perpetuation of the original design intent.

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# Gradually the Charm Comes Over Us

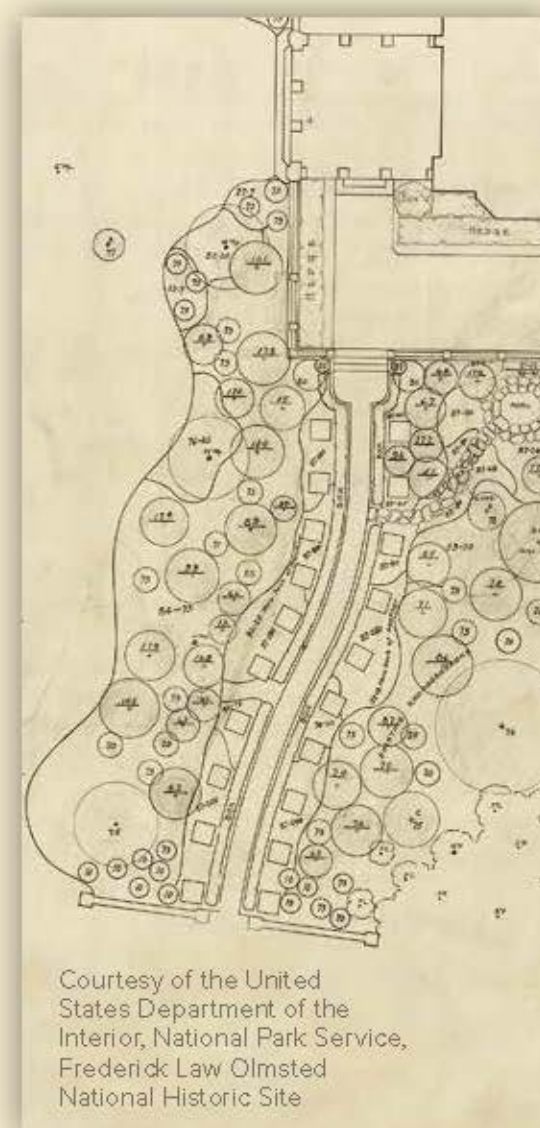
In the original Olmsted design, even a simple, utilitarian path becomes a potential space for the enjoyment of scenery. The 1920 Olmsted Brothers planting plan for areas southwest of Coe Hall shows a general softening of the walkway leading to the Italian Garden. A reimagined path curves south, edged with boxwoods flanked by plinths for display pots. The layered planting plan also called for vertical interest with clouds of cherry trees and rhododendrons to hover above the boxwoods, creating the feeling of “passing through the remote depths of a natural forest.”



## Olmsted Principle #3: ORCHESTRATION OF MOVEMENT

Olmsted designs seek not only to provide restorative scenery but also to direct movement through the scenery. This path draws the visitor down from the main residence, enclosing them within the layers of blooms and trees before opening up again at the Italian Garden.

Scan here to access additional language options and to learn more about the site



Courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



# Fairhaven Beech

The original “Fairhaven Beech” tree was transplanted from Mai Coe’s childhood home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts in 1915. Weighing over 30 tons, it was barged across the Long Island Sound to Oyster Bay. Teams of horses were required to transport the enormous tree from the harbor to Planting Fields, where it would stand until 2005.

Eventually, the tree succumbed to disease and insect infestations, poor root growth, and environmental stresses, among other factors. This new tree before you was a seedling propagated from that historic tree, planted to carry on the Fairhaven legacy for future generations.

