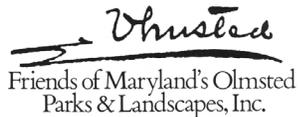


# Guilford's Greenspace Design

## The Olmsted Brothers English Aesthetic



FMOPL Digest

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The second collaboration of the Olmsted Brothers and Baltimore suburban developer the Roland Park Company resulted in Guilford, a luxury suburban development generously endowed with green space. Guilford (1913) coincided with an American mania for English architecture and town planning. Magazines featured Anglo-American Tudor Style homes and Cotswold cottages. Developers and architects made pilgrimage to England's suburban developments.<sup>1</sup> Guilford's charming predecessor, Roland Park (1891), was planned in successive plats without community parks. Homeland (1924), planned just a decade after Guilford, is tightly edited, the result of a harder-nosed economizing. Guilford, however, combines large lots, deep setbacks, English-style greens, squares, and varied parks for the most park-like suburban development in Baltimore.

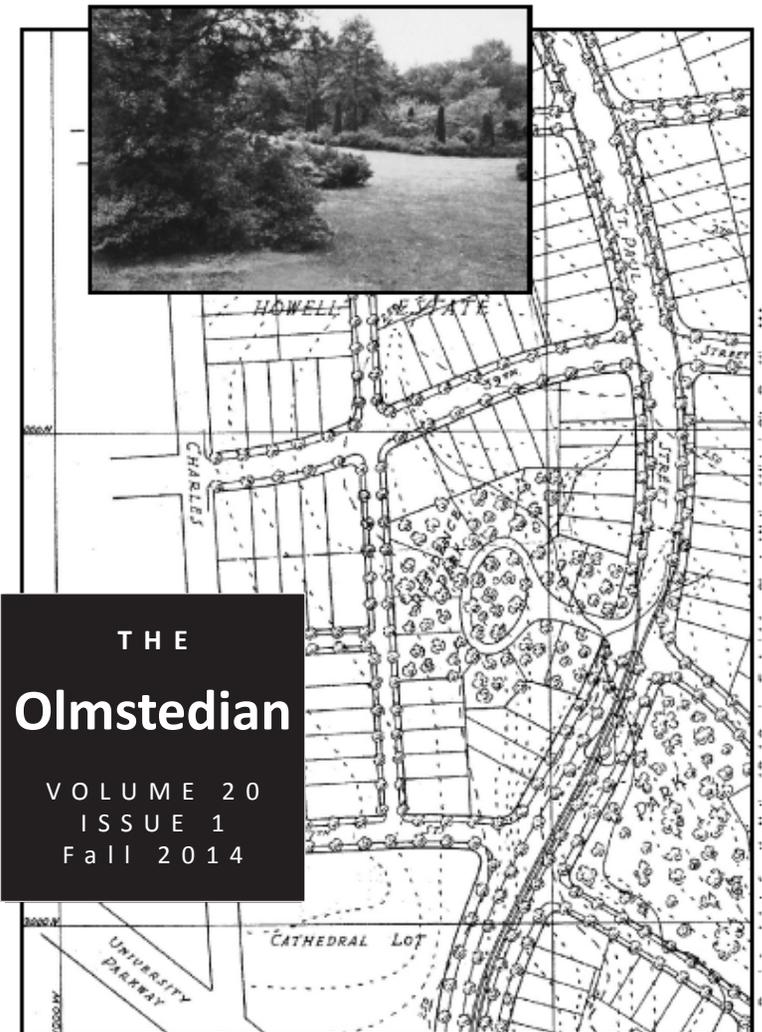
Guilford's delayed development, although fortuitous, was an historical accident. Eyed eagerly by would-be land developers, Guilford, the north Baltimore estate of newspa-

perman Arunah S. Abell, proved frustratingly elusive. Following Abell's death in 1888, there were frequent reports, always erroneous, that the parcel would be developed, or had sold. It was not until 1907 that Baltimore investors successfully negotiated the purchase of Guilford for \$1 million. These investors organized themselves as the Guilford Park Company and filed the deed to Guilford. The Guilford Park Company later merged with the Roland Park Company, headed by Edward H. Bouton.

The Olmsted Brothers took the developer's initial gridiron plan for Guilford and imbued the plan with the Olmsted Brothers' trademark curved streets and green places. Larger homes would be arranged predominately along curving boulevards, around major parks, and on the most important sites. Smaller cottages would be located along shorter streets, settled around cul-de-sacs and arranged in groups around squares. Attached houses would occupy locations along York Road (now Greenmount Avenue) and the southern perimeter. This

strategy accommodated affordable homes, yet maintained the effect of grandeur. Liberal inclusion of village greens, private parks and larger community parks was part of the careful choreography for prospective buyers.

Guilford would be a high-class development with the aesthetics of an English country village. Boulevards and impressive edifices would be constructed on adjacent land. These parcels included the Merryman and Wyman estates plus interstitial parcels—all to be developed concurrently.<sup>2</sup> The newspapers marveled at the project's scope: "Brains, experience, genius and capital are combined in giving Baltimore a new suburban section that will combine beauty and individuality with distinction. The oldest inhabitant will not know his new Baltimore before long."<sup>3</sup> Not everyone was pleased. John W. Barton fumed, "Just think of it, dear Baltimoreans, we are going to pay the wonderful, noted landscape architect from Boston, Frederick Law Olmsted [Jr.], several thousand dollars for something which I

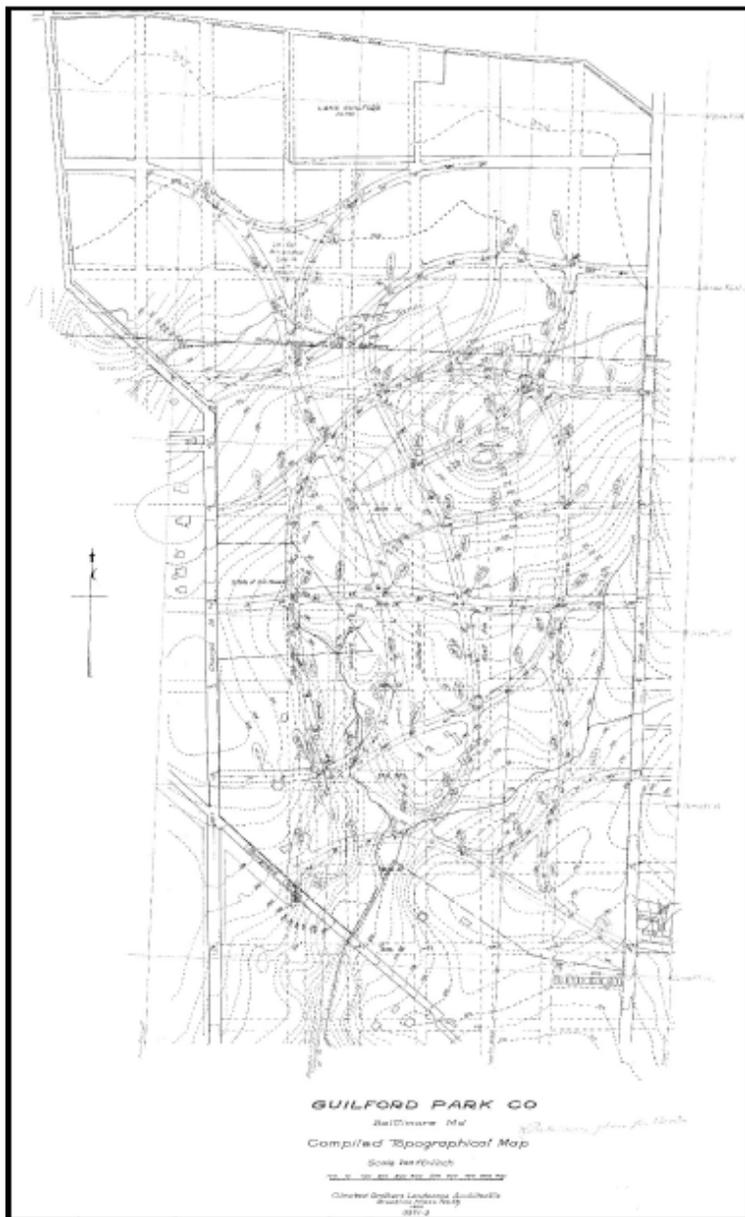


*The 1911 Olmsted Brothers Plan for Guilford's lost park, Residence Park, now the site of Hadley Square, and Guilford's most famous green place, Sherwood Gardens (inset photo) in its heyday. Drawing and photo from the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.*

vouch I can draw with a pad and pencil in just half an hour."<sup>4</sup>

The Roland Park Company selected Chancery Square as the site of Guilford's official debut in 1913. Chancery Square consists

of three large twin Tudor Revival Style homes set around a long rectangular green planted with trees at the junction of St. Martin's, Fenchurch, and Chancery Roads. Set well back from the street, these elegant homes, designed by



Edward L. Palmer, Jr., have facades of brick, half-timber with stucco and steeply pitched slate roofs and prominent chimneys. Chancery Square was English-style affordable luxury. The model homes were impressive enough to show Baltimore's elite what was possible, and modest enough that less affluent buyers saw potential in Guilford.<sup>5</sup>

The Olmsted plan included private greens for the exclusive use of residences on certain blocks, but only a few were created. The three York Courts front onto Greenmount Avenue (formerly York Road). Each court consists of connected brick cottages arranged in a U around a green only available to the residents. Elsewhere in Guilford, several blocks were planned to have private parks with trees, planted beds and tennis courts, accessible only from the houses located around the shared green. Today, one private park in Guilford remains for residents of the block bounded by Northway, Stratford Road and Greenway.

The Little Park is located between Greenway and Saint Paul Street, just north of the paired Gateway Houses designed by Palmer, Willis & Lamdin. The park is the smallest of Guilford's three community parks and was perhaps intended as a children's park. Framed with trees at the perimeter, the park has rolling topography dotted with grassy swells. The original Olmsted plan included a path at the northern boundary to draw pedestrians from the sidewalks on either side. This

path split at either end, creating planted islands. Today, the Olmstedian path and islands are missing and no longer pull passersby into this lovely park.

Sunken Park sits to the north of Guilford and is bounded by Charles Street and Linkwood Road. As the name suggests, this park sits below street level. The entrance to Sunken Park is simply marked with a pair of free-standing fluted columns. Visitors descend into the park by way of a split concrete stair surrounding a planted bed. The steps join a walkway that encircles the park, a round bowl of lawn planted with trees along the sloping sides. This heavily-engineered Olmsted Brothers-designed park was not simply an existing topographical depression. Sunken Park required extensive excavation to make it look this natural.

Best known Stratford Green, a rectangular parcel bounded by Greenway and Stratford Road, is now part of Sherwood Gardens. Stratford Green's origin as an Olmsted

Brothers greenspace is largely forgotten. The original paths, islands and little pond have disappeared, but their absence does not deter visitors. The tulip garden is grafted onto an English-style green, but the park remains Olmstedian. Towering mature trees create a contemplative border. The understory flowering crabapple and ornamental cherry trees create intense but human-scaled spring-time displays. The interior is an open sunny green with select specimen trees for year-round visitor interest.

Guilford Gateways, an accidental park, occupies the triangle formed by Greenway and Saint Paul Street north of University Parkway and south of the Gateway Houses. The Roland Park Company and the Olmsted Brothers strove to configure parkways and boulevards and integrate the Guilford, Merryman and Wyman estates ahead of the Guilford development. This triangular parcel was intended to be a gateway into Guilford but remained undeveloped. In 1939 plans were unveiled for an apartment build-



*Above: By 1908, the Olmsted Brothers had modified the Roland Park Company's gridiron plan for Guilford with curved streets and green places. Right: This photo documents the planting of Guilford's streetscape prior to the demolition of the Guilford Mansion in 1914. Drawing and photo from the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.*

ing at this site, which caused a near riot among residents, who felt the Roland Park Company was not following its own rulebook. John W. Sherwood, creator of Guilford's Sherwood Gardens, was one of several residents who organized the community to take legal action. He stated, "We owe it to our children to see that this thing does not materialize. It may mean the complete downfall of this neighborhood in a generation." The Guilford Association sued the company and won. Residents purchased the land and created the new park. The company donated a large pine tree—a peace offering of sorts.

Bedford Square, at Charles and Saint Paul Streets, is not in fact a square, but was planned as two triangles, one large and one small, divided by roadway. The houses are not truly arranged around the triangles. Bedford Square has a side façade of one house to the north and the front façade of another home just east, but is otherwise bordered with roadway. The oddity of this arrangement is due to the anticipated streetcar traffic from the nearby Waiting Station on University Parkway. Bedford Square was designed as a buffer for the homes just east of this structure. The bust of Simon Bolivar now in Bedford Square is a later addition—an historical accident not anticipated in the original plan.

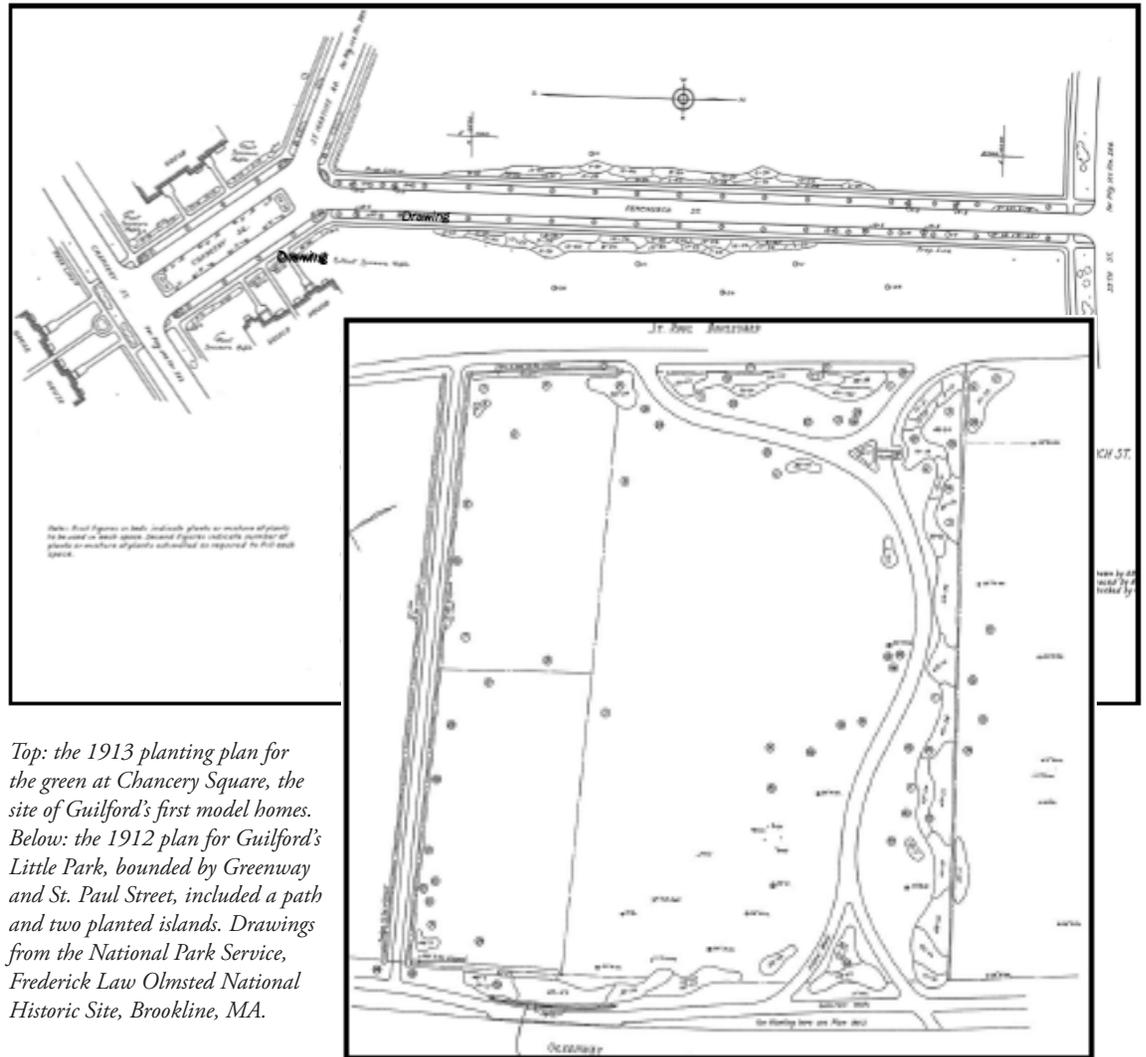
The Olmsted-designed Residence Park was never built. The Roland Park Company had hoped to purchase the nearby Howell estate,

which a competitor subsequently developed as Hadley Square. Originally, the Olmsted plan included this land with additional park space just to the south of that parcel. Residence Park would have been at the center of a large residential block, bounded by homes on the north and south, Charles Street on the west and St. Paul Street on the east, to create a hybrid version of a community park and private green.

With the development of Guilford, the Roland Park Company was both more assured and more ambitious than with early Roland Park. The developer's desire for grandness of scale and luxury amenities resulted in a development richly endowed with Olmsted hallmarks. The concern with a formal entrance, the park-like planning, generous and varied green spaces, large lots, deep set-backs and the deliberate manipulation of a largely flat terrain to create visual interest, are unmistakable. Guilford, now a National Register Historic District, remains a showcase Olmsted Brothers suburban development.

*Ann G. Giroux, FMOPL Board Member, former Guilford Association Board Member and Guilford Architectural Review Committee Member. Retired architectural and historical consultant, Ann is currently working on a catalogue documenting Roland Park Company projects. Special thanks to David R. Holden for speaking with me on this topic.*

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*Top: the 1913 planting plan for the green at Chancery Square, the site of Guilford's first model homes. Below: the 1912 plan for Guilford's Little Park, bounded by Greenway and St. Paul Street, included a path and two planted islands. Drawings from the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.*

<sup>1</sup> Letchworth and Hampstead Garden were popular London suburb destinations. The Roland Park Company's president, Edward H. Bouton, and chief architect, Edward L. Palmer, Jr., visited these developments in 1911 while Bouton was developing portions of Roland Park, planning Guilford, and actively working on the Forest Hills Gardens "model city" suburban development in New York. They also travelled to Germany, Belgium and Holland. (*The Baltimore Sun*, October 4, 1911)

<sup>2</sup> The visual harmony achieved by unified architectural vision and careful site planning was compared favorably to what Olmsted, Sr. had accomplished at The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. 'Notes on the Building of a University,' by John B. Pine (*The American Architect*, December 2, 1914, Vol. CVI, No. 2032.)

<sup>3</sup> 'Lord Baltimore Growing in Beauty As Well As Size' (*The Baltimore Sun*, August 10, 1912).

<sup>4</sup> Letter (*The Baltimore Sun*, April 23, 1912).

<sup>5</sup> One company advertisement from 1913 reached out to "hard-headed, clear-thinking business and professional men who have made notable successes in their individual callings," while a different advertisement the same year describes Guilford as an "Ideal Place for Families of Modest Means." (*The Baltimore Sun*, December 11, 1913 and *Baltimore News*, October 3, 1913. The latter may be found in the Roland Park Company Scrapbooks, Roland Park Company Records, MS 504, Special Collections, The Johns Hopkins University.)