

CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY – LANDSCAPES * OLMSTED PROJECT COVER SHEET

Please submit completed form to: Architectural Survey Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5, Hartford, CT 06103

I D E N T I F I C A T I O N	PROPERTY NAME (Current/Historic) Bushnell Park / City Park		
	COUNTY Hartford	TOWN/CITY Hartford	VILLAGE
	JOB NUMBER Primary: 00801 Related Job Numbers: 00613, 00601		
	Landscape Type <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park, Parkway, Recreation Area. Scenic Reservation <input type="checkbox"/> City/Regional Plan, Improvement Project <input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision, Suburban Community <input type="checkbox"/> College/School Campus <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Residential Institution <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Public Building <input type="checkbox"/> Private Estate / Homestead <input type="checkbox"/> Cemetery / Burial Lot / Memorial / Monument <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Commercial / Industrial Building <input type="checkbox"/> Country Club / Resort, Hotel, Club <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Church <input type="checkbox"/> Arboretum, Garden <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibition, Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Miscellaneous		
	DATE OF ORIGINAL PROJECT: 1870 SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS: 1945; 1976		

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DESIGNER(S) (primary)

- Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
- John Charles Olmsted
- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
- Other firm member(s):
- Other notes:
- Other Designers (prior to or following Olmsted project): Jacob Weidenmann

Repositories consulted with source materials

- Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Olmsted Archives (online albums)
- Library of Congress
- Olmsted Online (OlmstedOnline.org)
- National Archives and Record Administration
- Connecticut State Library
- Hartford History Center
- Other:

Observations regarding features characteristic of Olmsted firm design

Bushnell Park is considered the first municipal park to be established within the United States. It was first laid out in the 1850s. Work on the park continued in 1870 under the direction of Jacob Weidenmann in consultation with Frederick Law Olmsted, who were frequent collaborators. Plans for the park, which occupied a broad sloping open area on the edge of the city of Hartford, evolved when the State Capitol was moved permanently to Hartford. The building was sited atop the hillside overlooking the park. At the time, it was occupied at the time by Trinity College. The college relocated. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. was commissioned to work on site plans for the new State Capitol (job #00613) as well as Trinity College (job #00601). Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects later served as consultants to the City of Hartford for park design. The firm was involved in several changes to Bushnell Park during the mid-twentieth century as part of this role.

As designed in the late nineteenth century, Bushnell Park Trinity Road leading to the college and the Park River were features of the site incorporated into the design, which included a picturesque arrangement of an expansive greensward, winding paths, and tree plantings. Later, fountains, commemorative elements, a carousel, and a performance stage were added. When the Park River was culverted following two

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devastating flood events, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects were engaged to design new entry features and regrade portions of the park. A segment of the river was recalled through the establishment of a small pond edged by stone.

The park was later altered through development of the southwestern portion of the park, and replacement of walks. The setting for the park has also changed through construction of an interstate highway and a dense urban concentration of commercial buildings.

Although several aspects of the site have changed, and the area around the park has become a dense urban commercial center, the park still conveys its historic associations and feeling related to nineteenth century picturesque design. It is likely that Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., advised Jacob Weidenmenn in his design for the park, but the firm was not responsible for the original park layout. Elements that survive related to Olmsted firm design include many of the entrances along the perimeter roads and the pond designed by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. The firm advised on civil engineering issues related to stormwater management and provided designs for other features that appear not to have been implemented.

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I D E N T I F I C A T I O N	PROPERTY NAME (Current/Historic) Bushnell Park / City Park (Job #00801)													
	COUNTY Hartford	TOWN/CITY Hartford	VILLAGE											
	STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location) 99 Trinity Street													
	OWNER(S) <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUNICIPAL <input type="checkbox"/> STATE <input type="checkbox"/> FEDERAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRIBAL <input type="checkbox"/> EASEMENT City of Hartford Parks and Recreation													
	LAT/LONG COORDINATES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center Point <input type="checkbox"/> Polygon 41.764728, -72.679222													
	PARCEL INFORMATION Acres: 38 PID(s): MBLU(s): 418002001, 418001002, 418001004													
	USE (Present) Public park		(Historic) Public park											
	SURVEY TYPE <input type="checkbox"/> Reconnaissance-Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intensive-Level													
	D E S C R I P T I O N	LANDSCAPE TYPE (Check all that apply) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Designed <input type="checkbox"/> Vernacular <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Ethnographic <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Linear <input type="checkbox"/> System/Multi-Site <input type="checkbox"/> Residential <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime <input type="checkbox"/> Green <input type="checkbox"/> Park- Active Recreation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park-Passive Recreation or Commemorative <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify:												
		DATE OR PERIOD (Include source of date) 1870; 1945; 1976 (Olmsted Research Guide Online; Hartford History Center)												
DESIGNERS (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Jacob Weidenmann; Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects														
DESIGN SCOPE (For designed landscapes, explain what work was commissioned.) Weidenman designed the layout of the park, circulation, plantings, and entry features. Olmsted Brothers later designed new entrances and other features when the Park River was culverted														
LOCATION OF DRAWINGS/IMAGES/SOURCE MATERIAL Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; Library of Congress; <i>Jacob Weidenmann, pioneer landscape architect</i> by Rudy Favretti														
VISUAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY (Check boxes for the qualities that are key features of this landscape. If attaching descriptive narrative, consider these categories.) <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Layout & Spatial Relationships</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Features</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circulation</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Drainage</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Topography</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buildings/Structures/Objects</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plantings/Vegetation</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Recreational Space</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Views & Vistas</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Design Style: Picturesque</td> </tr> </table>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Layout & Spatial Relationships	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Features	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Drainage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Topography	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buildings/Structures/Objects	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plantings/Vegetation	<input type="checkbox"/> Recreational Space	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Views & Vistas	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Design Style: Picturesque
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<input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Design Style: Picturesque													

DESCRIPTION (Visual Assessment Summary)

Layout & Spatial Relationships: Bushnell Park is an irregularly-shaped dedicated open space located east of a rail line and Interstate 84, to the south of Asylum Street, Ford Street, and Jewell Street, to the east by Wells Street and Pulaski Circle, and the south by Elm Street and the State Capitol Grounds, edged by Capitol Avenue. The park is divided into western and eastern sides by Trinity Street. The entrance into the park at Trinity Street and its intersection with Ford Street/Jewell Street, is marked by the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial, a large stone arch. Numerous concrete walks wind through the park, providing connections to several pedestrian entrances marked by stone work from Asylum Street, Ford Street, Jewell Street, Wells Street, and Elm Street, as well as Trinity Street inside the park. Features accessed by the walks include a bandshell, fountain, three statues, a pond, carousel, playground, and a maintenance facility. Much of the park is gently sloping open greensward edged by groves of trees. The State Capitol occupies a high point overlooking the park from a position to its south.

Circulation: Trinity Street, an urban road corridor divides the park along a north-south axis through the center of the park. A service drive leads from Trinity Street toward the carousel, while an access road connects the maintenance facility with Wells Street. A road loops around the State Capitol to its north, west, and south that is edged along much of its length by parking. As noted, concrete walks crisscross the park. Many follow curvilinear alignments. Walks associated with the east and west sections of the park meet at a single location along Trinity Street south of the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial. Walks lead into the park from several entrances at Asylum, Ford, Jewell, Wells, and Elm Streets, Pulaski Circle, and the State Capitol Grounds.

Topography: The park site generally rises from lower-lying terrain to the north to higher terrain to the south, with the State Capitol set atop a high point. The central greensward is generally level to rolling.

Plantings/Vegetation: There are numerous large shade and ornamental trees located throughout the park with species represented including hickories, ash, eastern redcedar, linden, dawn redwood, chamaecyparis, catalpa, locust, sweetgum, oak, chestnut, zelkova, deodar cedar, cherry and maple. There are large expanses of turf throughout the park.

Views & Vistas: Expansive views are afforded across the open greensward of the park, and to and from the State Capitol building. The arch along Trinity Street is both a focal point, and a structure that directs views into and out of the park.

Water Features: The stone Corning Fountain is in the northern part of the western half of the park. There is a pond that edges Jewell Street in the eastern half of the park. The Little or Park River formerly extended through the park. It was culverted and placed underground in the 1940s. The pond recalls the former river.

Buildings/Structures/Objects: Buildings include the carousel building that accommodates concessions and contains restrooms, and the building that currently accommodates maintenance facilities. Structures include the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Arch, a bandshell/performance structure and a large fountain, as well as stone walls and piers at several entrances and around the pond, and a wall with built-in bench along Trinity Street. There are benches located in various places around the park and lighting elements. Three sculptural elements are sited within the park—one along a walk extending west from Trinity Street, another near the pond, and the third near the entrance into the park from Elm Street.

Recreational Space: The park affords opportunities for strolling and other passive recreational activities. There is also a playground and the carousel that support recreational use.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Bushnell Park is part of the Hartford park system. A plan proposed by Rev. Horace Bushnell, pastor of Hartford's North Congregational Church, to establish a park in Hartford in 1853 was approved by a vote of city residents in 1854. Hartford City Council soon appropriated funds for acquisition of 40 acres to establish the park. With Bushnell's plan moving forward, Hartford would become the first city in America to spend funds to build a public park.¹ Bushnell identified a site for the park located at the margin of downtown Hartford that was at the time composed of swampy ground and dense lower income housing and mills and other industrial developments along with the rail line of the New Haven and Hartford Railroad. The area was also heavily polluted due to the industry and nearby pig farms that were impacting the adjacent Little River. Bushnell's desire to clean up the river was one of his motivations for park site selection. The park is also known for being the first park built on and acquired by eminent domain; more than 200 people, most Irish and African American laborers and servants, were displaced to build the park. Although land acquisition took several years, by 1857, the proposed land had been acquired and a Park Committee appointed to guide implementation of what was then referred to as City Park.

A design competition led to the hiring of Gervaise Wheeler, a British-born designer in 1857. His plan, however, did not take shape right away and was not to the liking of the Park Board, and they instead decided to reconsider the choice of designer for the park. Although Bushnell contacted his former Hartford neighbor, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. to help prepare plans for the park, Olmsted was involved in many projects elsewhere and turned the project over to collaborator Jacob Weidenmann.

Weidenmann was a Swiss-born architect and self-trained landscape designer who often collaborated with the Olmsted firm. In 1861, Weidenmann prepared plans for the park which were picturesque in style. Weidenmann specified plantings that included 157 varieties of trees and shrubs. As part of the commission, Weidenmann was also named superintendent of the park. In his capacity as superintendent, Weidenmann addressed grading and drainage needs, sculpting the land and adding gently winding paths and clumps of trees in a manner consistent with English landscape gardeners during the nineteenth century. The design featured a carriage course as well as a stone terrace in the western section. From the terrace, visitors could observe the rail line and passing trains as well as Asylum Street. The Little (later Park) River coursed through the park and served as the threshold between the city and the park land with bridges serving as the gateways into the open space. A formal mall edged Elm Street. The plans featured curving walks and drives, undulating topography, footbridges across the river, a dam and cascade associated with the river opposite High Street, small entry plazas, and green spaces edged by tree plantings. A fountain pool and statue of Reverend Bushnell were planned as focal points. Park improvements based on his plans were implemented between 1861 and 1870. Statues of dentist Horace Wells, the first person to use nitrous oxide in dental work as a sedative, and Israel Putnam, were added to the park early on.

The park was divided into two sections by Trinity Street, which led to the college sited on the hill during the 1820s through much of the 1870s until replaced by the state capitol building. The Olmsted firm was engaged to prepare plans for the State Capitol grounds during the 1870s. The Soldiers and Sailors Monument was later added at the entrance into the park along Trinity Street in 1886 after the college had relocated, while the Corning Fountain was added in 1899. The Spirit of Victory monument was dedicated in 1927 to commemorate the valor and patriotism of Hartford men who served in the Spanish American War of 1898. Additional planting beds were added over the years so that the park came to convey a highly Victorian appearance with intricate flower beds along the walks and the river.

The firm was also engaged in the twentieth century to help redesign areas of the park when the Park River was culverted and moved underground following disastrous flooding in the 1930s. Bushnell Park was often

¹ Bushnell Park Foundation, "Horace Bushnell," Available at <http://www.bushnellpark.org/about-2/history-2/horace-bushnell>.

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impacted by flooding, located as it was along the Park River. When the Connecticut River filled as a result of spring rains, it would often overflow its banks and push water into the Park River. The lower lying lands along the river would subsequently flood, including much of Bushnell Park. A devastating flood in 1936 caused extensive damage in the city. This was followed by flooding associated with a hurricane in 1938. Among the solutions sought by the city was installation of a pump house within the park in 1946 (present-day maintenance building). As flooding continued, the city moved the river to a concrete culvert underground, a project that was initially completed in 1949, although work continued on the larger project until the 1980s. With the river playing an important role in the design of park entrances, these were redesigned in the 1940s. The Olmsted firm was involved in grading and civil engineering efforts related to the river project as well as the design of several entrance plazas and walks. The firm also designed a pond along Jewell Street in 1943 to recall the former river and its serpentine path. Proposals for extending the proposed new interstate highways through a portion of the park in the 1960s were adjusted following a public outcry, particularly regarding the fate of the plantings. A performance pavilion was added to the park in 1995.

Bushnell Park is now referred to as an arboretum and “an outdoor museum of both rare and common trees.”² Sandra Sharr, president of the Bushnell Park Association has noted that many of the species are little represented elsewhere in Connecticut, such as the Chinese mahogany (*Toona sinensis*), Chinese pagoda (*Styphnolobium japonicum*), Katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), and Eucommia (*Eucommia* sp.) tree. There is also a scion of the Charter oak tree.

REFERENCES

Bushnell Park Foundation. Website available at <http://www.bushnellpark.org/>.

Favretti, Rudy J. *Jacob Weidenmann, pioneer landscape architect*. Hartford, Connecticut: Cedar Hill Cemetery Foundation, Incorporated in cooperation with Wesleyan University Press, 2007.

Luyster, Constance. National Register of Historic Places nomination: “Bushnell Park.” Listing #70000692. September 2, 1970.

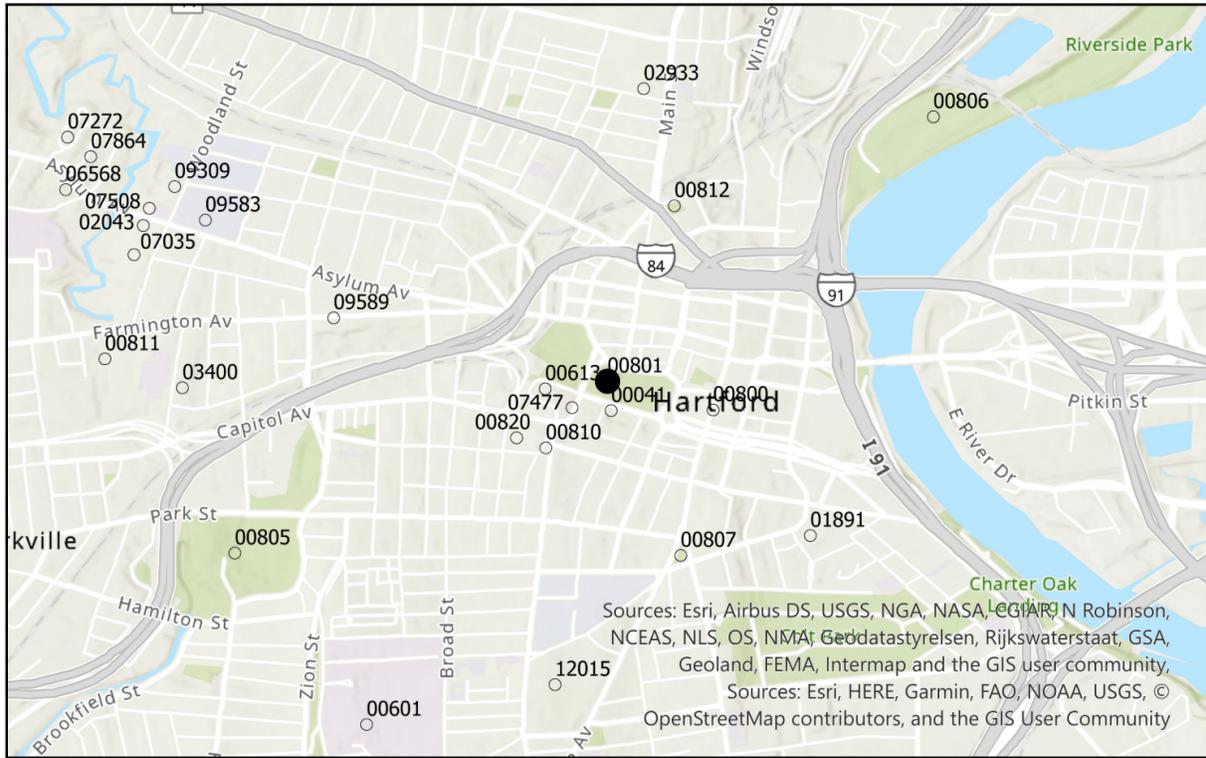
Sharr, Sandra A. “Park Plantings Should be Planned.” *The Hartford Courant*. 1 May 1990.

² Sandra A. Sharr, “Park Plantings Should be Planned,” *The Hartford Courant*, 1 May 1990.

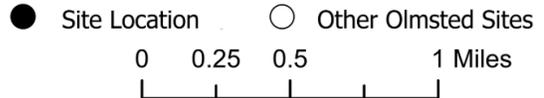
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GRAPHICS



JOB: 00801 LOCATION: Hartford

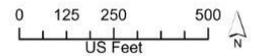


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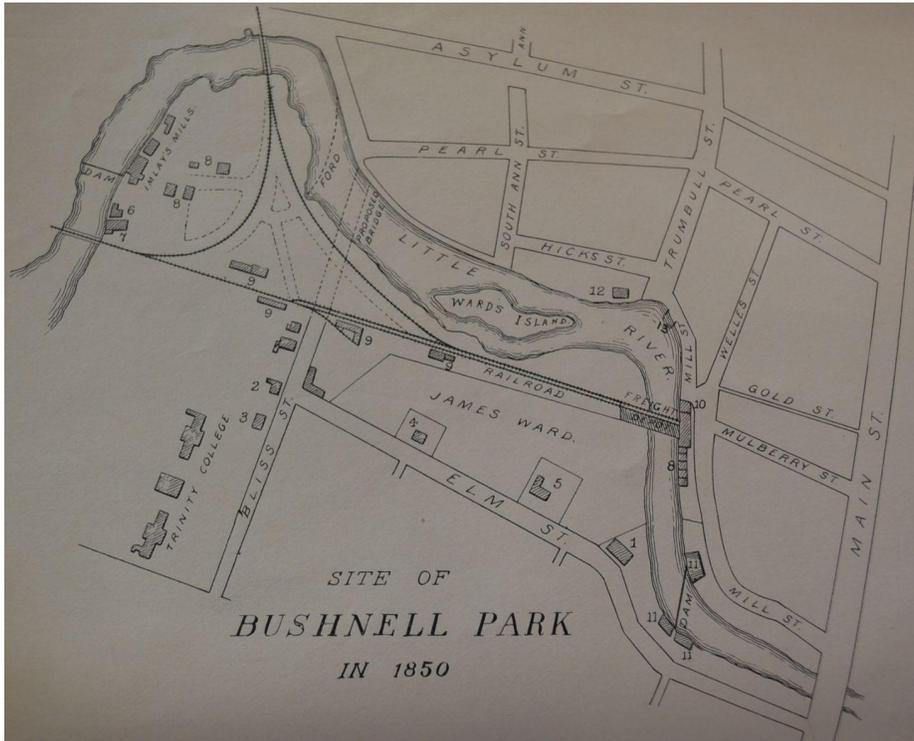
CONTINUATION SHEET Bushnell Park (#00801) / 99 Trinity Street, Hartford



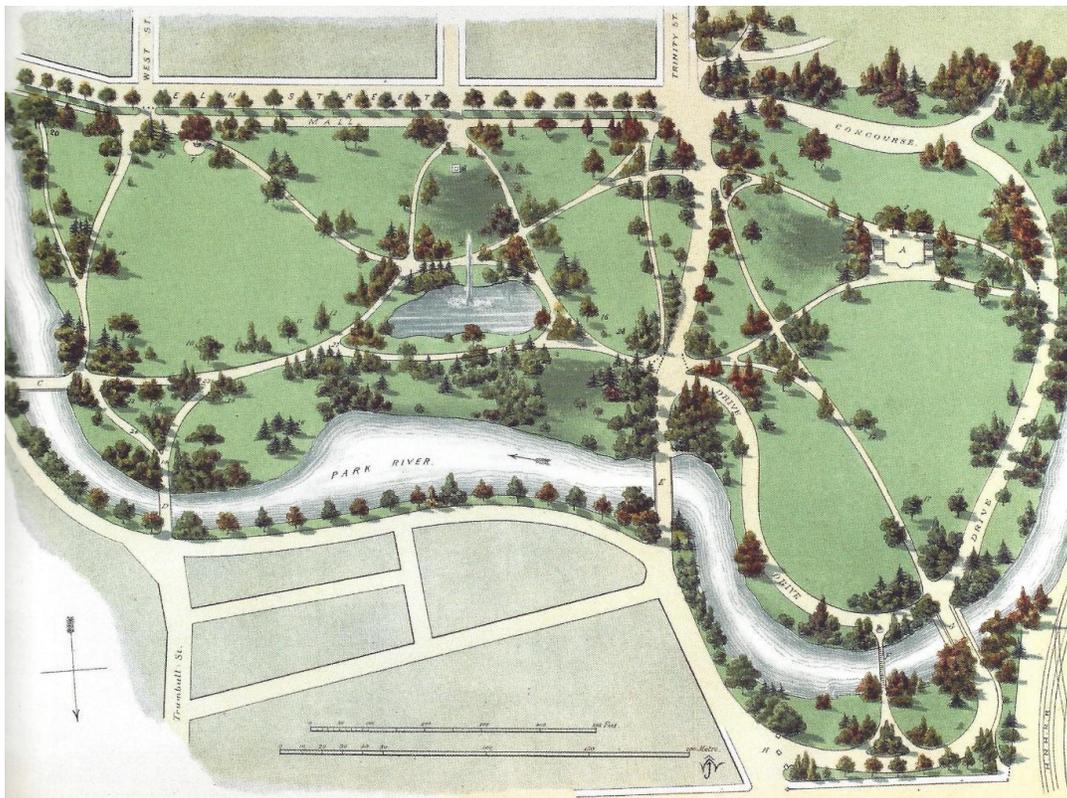
JOB: 00801 LOCATION: Hartford PROJECT: Bushnell Park



CONTINUATION SHEET Bushnell Park (#00801) / 99 Trinity Street, Hartford

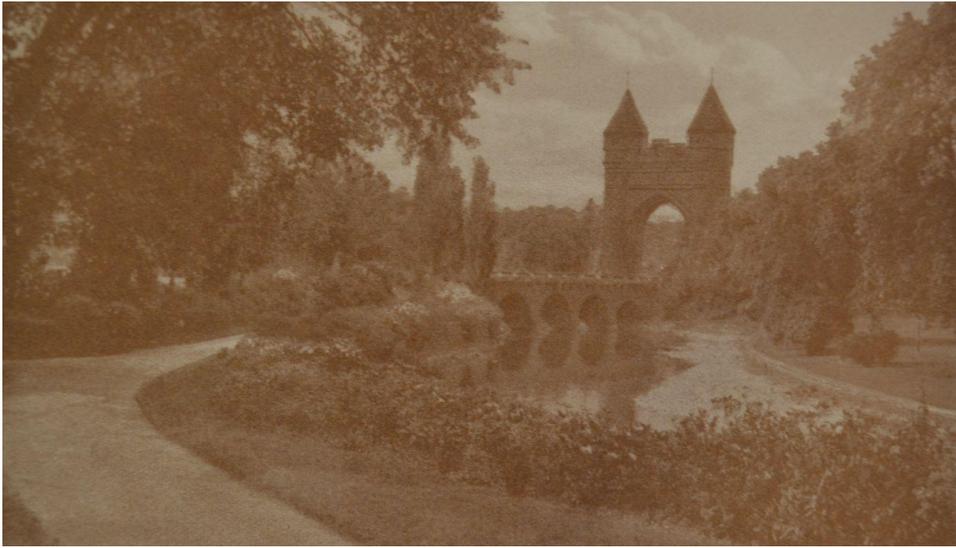


Drawing showing the site of Bushnell Park in 1850, undated, unattributed. (Source: Hartford History Center)



Plan for Bushnell Park prepared by Jacob Weidenman. (Source: *Beautifying Country Homes*)

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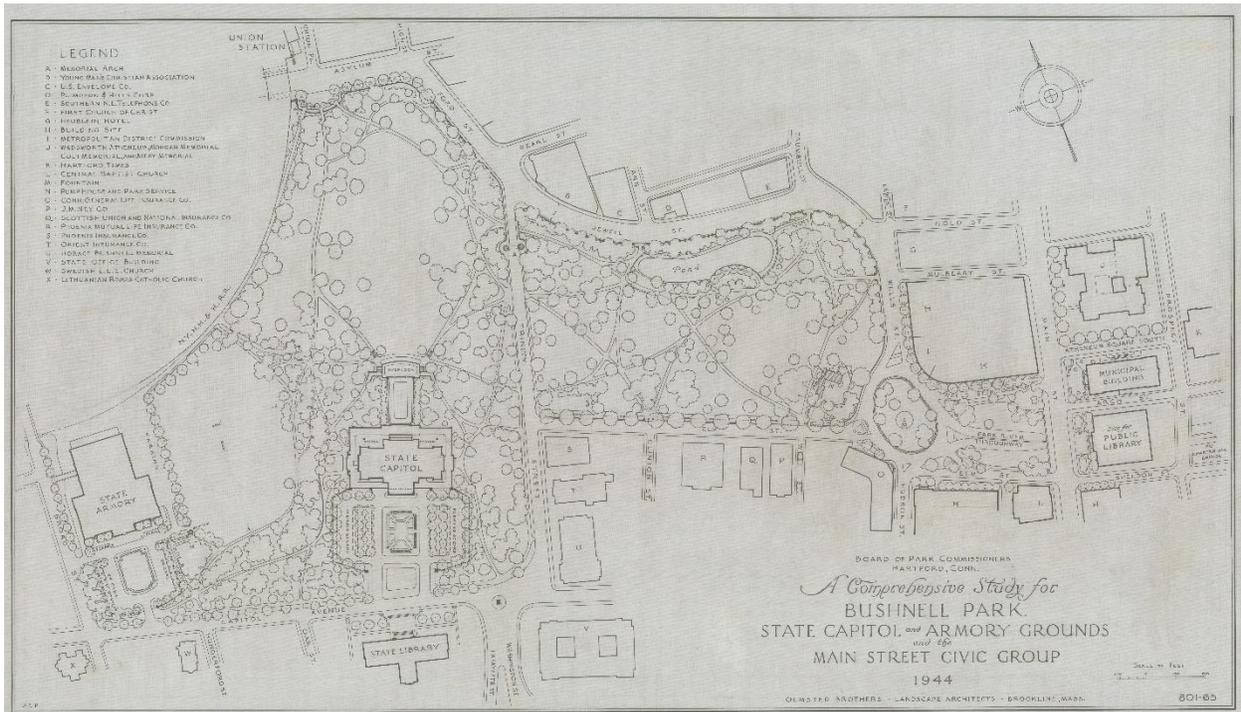
Photograph of late nineteenth century Bushnell Park: (Source: Hartford History Center)



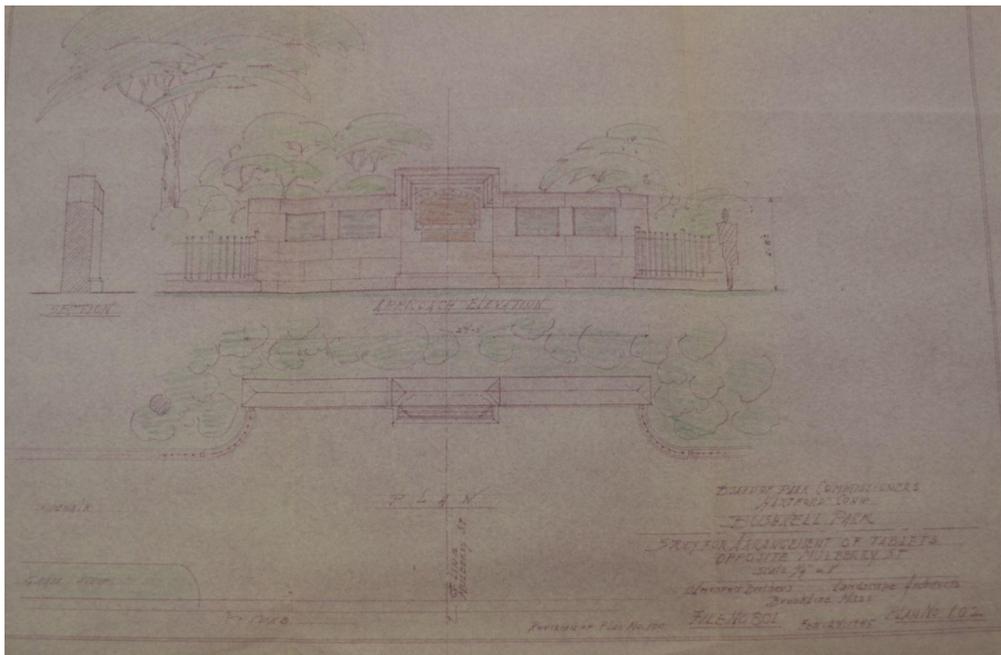
Revision of Preliminary Plan No. 28, Bushnell Park, 1943, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects.
(Source: Town and City Clerk's Office, Hartford Municipal Building)

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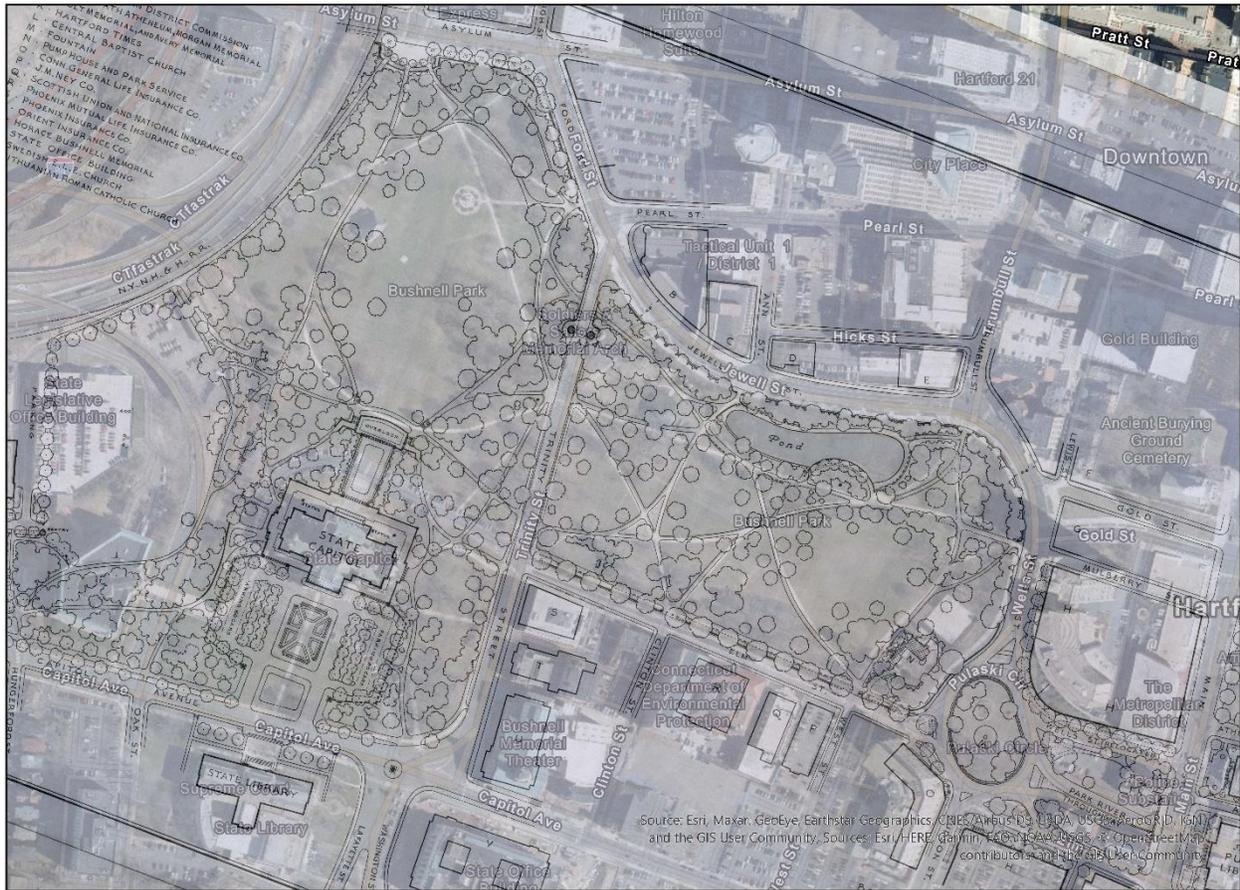
A Comprehensive Study for Bushnell Park, State Capitol and Armory Grounds and the Main Street Civic Group, 1944, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: courtesy of Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)



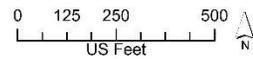
Study for Arrangement of Tablets Opposite Mulberry Street, Bushnell Park, 1945, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: Town and City Clerk's Office, Hartford Municipal Building)

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Aerial photograph of Bushnell Park overlaid with plans prepared by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: Kevan Klosterwill)



View south towards the 1886 Sailors and Soldiers monument along Trinity Street. (All photographs taken by authors in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View south across the western half of the park and the greensward edged by groupings of trees. The Corning Fountain is in the distance.



View south along one of the curving walks in the park.



View south of one of the park entrances.



View east across the pond formed after the Park River was culverted.



View west toward the Israel Putnam statue and a tree grove in the park.



View north of the Corning Fountain with the State Capitol beyond.