

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) Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Company		
	COUNTY New Haven	TOWN/CITY Beacon Falls	VILLAGE
	JOB NUMBER Primary: 06222 Related Job Numbers: 06371		
	Landscape Type <input type="checkbox"/> Park, Parkway, Recreation Area. Scenic Reservation <input type="checkbox"/> City/Regional Plan, Improvement Project <input checked="" 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: 1915 SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS: 1918		

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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):

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

This residential village for the nearby Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe company is designed with curving streets typical of Olmstedian subdivision planning. Triangular intersections, sometimes including planted islands, are reflective of this design vocabulary. A central open space is provided, which illustrates principles of providing community space as a way to build social cohesion for factory workers. Space for a school was also provided along one edge of the community. Although a modestly-scaled development, this community illustrates many features of this kind of industrial housing planning.

Surviving features resulting from the Olmsted firm's design work include:

- Street alignments
- Park site

DESCRIPTION (Visual Assessment Summary)

Layout & Spatial Relationships: Curving streets extend from older rectangular blocks to form a neighborhood on the hill behind the adjacent factory. A park is sited in the middle of the community opposite the factory owner's home.

Circulation: Streets are asphalt, with sidewalks primarily of concrete throughout much of the community.

Topography: The site is gently rolling on an upland above the main commercial areas of Beacon Falls. The park area is sited on a slight rise.

Plantings/Vegetation: There are occasional street trees. The park area is turf with scattered trees. Individual homeowners manage their own landscapes.

Views & Vistas: Curving streets facilitate shifting views of adjacent houses. The park is generally aligned with the Lewis House across the street.

Water Features: Park plans called for a wading pool, but this was never constructed.

Drainage: A stream flows across the eastern edge of the neighborhood.

Buildings/Structures/Objects: Houses, churches, and a school are the primary buildings in the neighborhood. A small gazebo is located in the park area.

Recreational Space: An open green space is available for informal recreation.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Tracy Samuel Lewis graduated from Yale's Sheffield Scientific School in 1894. In 1898, Lewis and his father, George, moved their boot-making business from Naugatuck to Beacon Falls and opened the Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Company. Tracy Lewis became the company's president after his father's death in 1914. In its early years, the company produced rubber boots, shoes, and overshoes. By the 1910s, the company began to produce shoes for activities including basketball, tennis, and yachting, promoting the shoe's versatility for track-and-field events and dancing.

Prior to World War I, the "Hill" of Beacon Falls was a loosely settled collection of farmhouses and modest homes centered around the southern portions of Wolfe Avenue and Maple Avenue. A schoolhouse (now Town Hall), a few tennis courts, and a baseball diamond constituted the other major landmarks in the neighborhood. The roads were crudely made, traveled paths with narrow widths and steep grades.

In its heyday, demand for the company's "Top Notch" boots experienced significant growth, from just 150 pairs in 1899 to over 5.5 million pairs by 1920. The town's population more than doubled from 623 to 1,600 over a similar timeframe. More than half of the factory's workers were recently arrived European immigrants. The father and son anticipated that the unimproved neighborhood atop the hill could best serve their needs for the factory's growing workforce due to its proximity.¹

In July of 1915, the Olmsted Brothers received a letter asking the firm to "send a man down here to go into the proposition of laying out our town," noting "We have not the slightest idea of what such a thing will cost but we are interested sufficiently to have the place looked over with a view to finding out."

¹ *Olmsted Legacy Trail*, available at olmstedonline.org, accessed December 19, 2021.

CONTINUATION SHEET Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Company (#06222) / Beacon Falls

After a response from the Olmsted Brothers clarifying that there would be a charge, James Frederick Dawson visited Beacon Falls later that month. At the time, only one-third of the company's 1,200 employees lived in the town, and the company wanted to encourage more employees to live there. Dawson reported the company's idea "to build houses of attractive styles and sell them to their employees on easy payments, perhaps covering a period of ten to twenty years."

In January of 1916, the Olmsted Brothers provided drawings and detailed recommendations for development followed by cost estimates for property purchase, roads, playgrounds, landscaping, sewer lines, and other infrastructure. By March, they sent sketches for houses of different sizes, noting that "in general, we think the type of house should be New England colonial, varied somewhat in type...."

Selections for trellises, foundations, accent plantings, and chimneys offered opportunities to connect the built environment with the natural one.²

Lewis envisioned a village-like feel with amenities such as a park, ballfields, tennis courts, playgrounds, a running track, movie theater and assembly hall with a bowling alley). The distinct separation between the commercial and industrial areas along lower Main Street and the civic and residential community on the hill reflects an early example of land planning principles.

The steep grades of the hill, deterrents to prior development, became strong design elements. The road layout undulates and curves to follow more natural contours of the land. This effect is noticeable in the straightline roads of Wolfe Avenue, Maple Avenue, and Highland Avenue which preceded the subdivision. Curves in the road also work to frame views and suggest dominant paths for travel. In locations where topography is excessively steep, the landscape architects called for natural fieldstone walls to hold up the grade. As these walls follow the roads, their height varies, and they gradually recede into the landscape as the viewer reaches the top or bottom of the hill. The choice of gray color, Portland cement mortar keeps joints subtle and less intrusive than a bright lime mortar.

REFERENCES

Olmsted Legacy Trail, available at olmstedonline.org, accessed December 19, 2021.

² Project Correspondence, Library of Congress.

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GRAPHICS

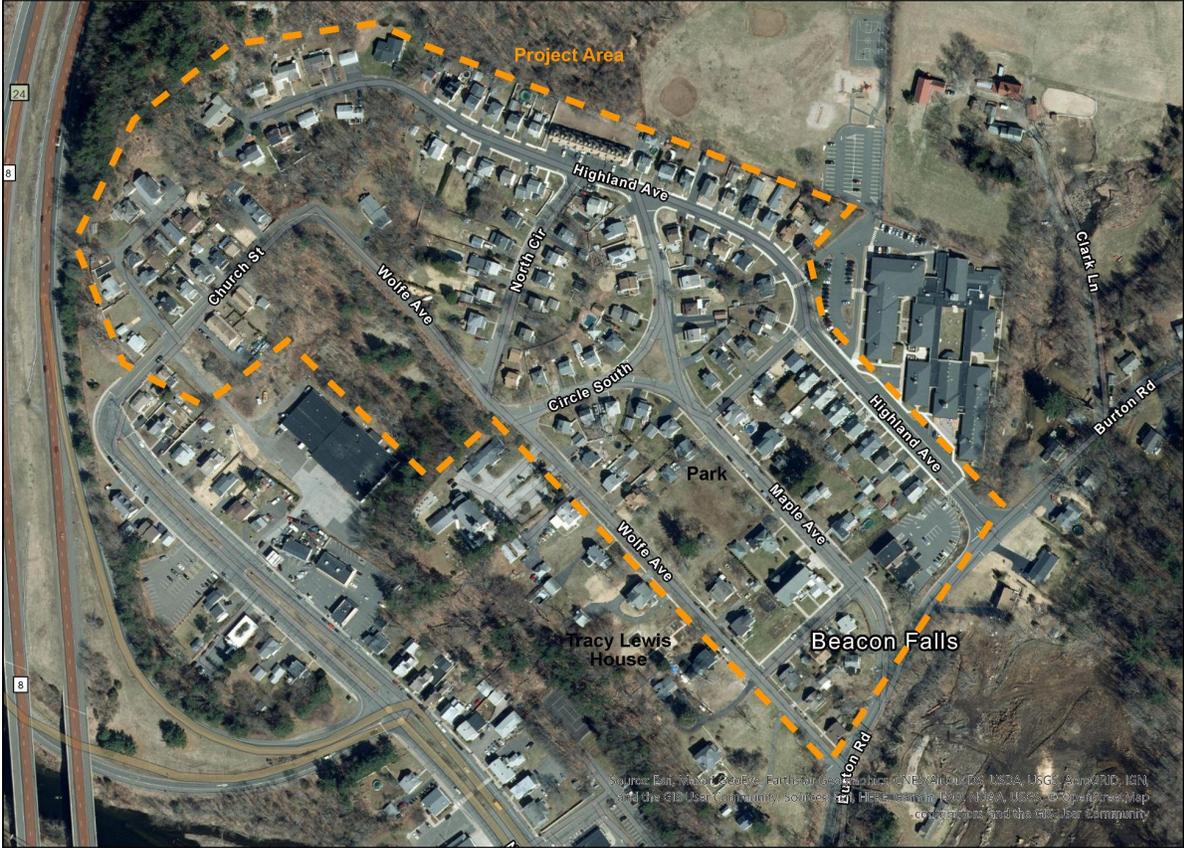


JOB: 06222 LOCATION: Hartford

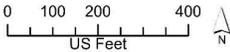


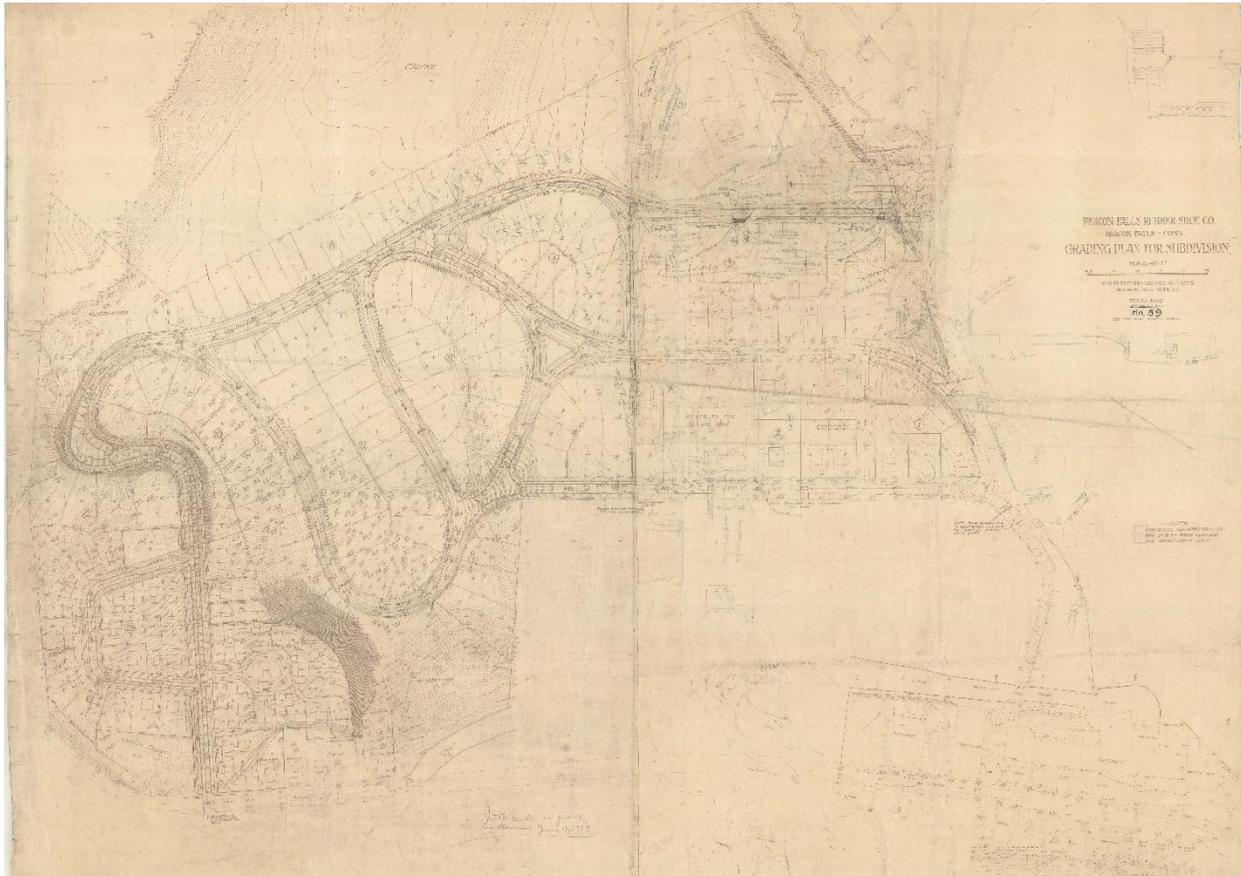
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JOB: 06222 LOCATION: Beacon Falls PROJECT: Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Subdivision





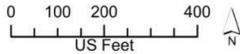
Grading plan for Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Company Subdivision, Olmsted firm. (Source: courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)

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Aerial photograph overlaid with Olmsted firm plan. (Source: Kevan Klosterwill)



View south into park area from Maple Avenue. (All photographs taken by authors in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View southwest to Tracy Lewis House from park.



View west along Wolfe Avenue from intersection at Burton Road.



View north to intersection of Circle South and Maple Avenue.



View west to intersection of Circle South and Maple Avenue.



View southeast along Wolfe Avenue.



View north along North Circle.



View from Wolfe Avenue.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Company (#06222) / Beacon Falls



View east along Highland Avenue.



View north along North Circle.