

Olmsted and the Washington State Capitol

“...the planting...should, if possible, be of the finest quality...confined to dignified masses...and not in any way be scattered or small in effect. ...the buildings are very large and of a splendid character, and...the planting ought to correspond...”

James F. Dawson
 JAMES FREDERICK DAWSON - APRIL 25, 1927

The Landscape of the Capitol



VIEW OF CAPITOL CAMPUS FROM HERITAGE PARK [N] S OLMSTED

The Washington State Capitol is a master work of the Olmsted Brothers firm. The landscape design celebrates the Pacific Northwest’s natural bounty of forest, the Deschutes River, Puget Sound and stunning mountain views. It also expresses the democratic process with its progression through increasingly formal landscape “rooms” enclosed by trees and understory plantings. While many of the layers of vegetation intended to create gateways and define spaces are missing three-quarters of a century later, these can be reinstated over time. Enough remains of the overall landscape to observe the Olmsted plan’s essential landscape patterns and characteristics across the campus from wild to pastoral to controlled formality.

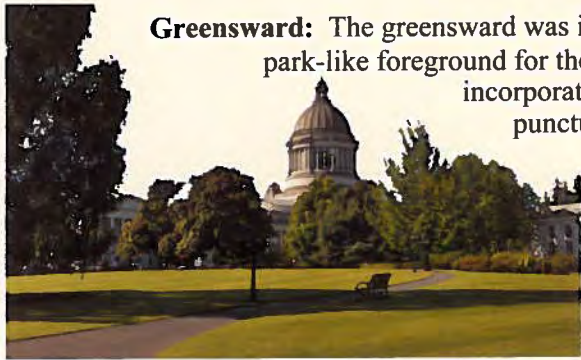
The Olmsted Brothers introduced four general landscape characters to help structure the campus and provide a sequence of visual experiences as one moves through the landscape.

Street Edge: The street edge was intended to connect the Capitol with the surrounding community, welcoming and drawing people into the campus through a rhythm and canopy of street trees. Though the intent of this landscape character is under-realized, some existing street trees continue to illustrate this effect.



HISTORIC VIEW ALONG NORTH DIAGONAL

Greensward: The greensward was intended to provide a semi-open, park-like foreground for the Capitol Group of buildings. It incorporated layered vegetation and lawns punctuated by specimen trees allowed to reach their full height and spread. Much of the layered vegetation was never planted due to a lack of funds during the Great Depression; though some areas within the campus portray this park-like character.



J HERNANDEZ

Formal Landscape: The formal landscape was intended to be the most structured, to complement the formal symmetry of the Capitol Group of buildings and to inspire an air of decorum within the engaged citizenry of a democratic society. Comprised of balanced, symmetrical arrangements of trees, shrubs, flowering perennials and groundcovers, examples are found in tree allées [G], foundation plantings [L] and the Sunken Garden [P].



Native Edge: The native forest along the west, north, and south, provides a natural frame for the Capitol that is uniquely Northwest. The forest, though needing rejuvenation, gives a powerful context to the Capitol setting.



D BALDWIN

VIEW FROM SUNKEN GARDEN

The 2009 Master Plan and Vegetation Management Plan provide a 50-year vision for landscape restoration, coupled with a framework for accomplishing it. The plans will guide efforts to preserve and honor the characteristics and features of the historic Olmsted Brothers design, while addressing contemporary conditions.

The Architecture of the Capitol

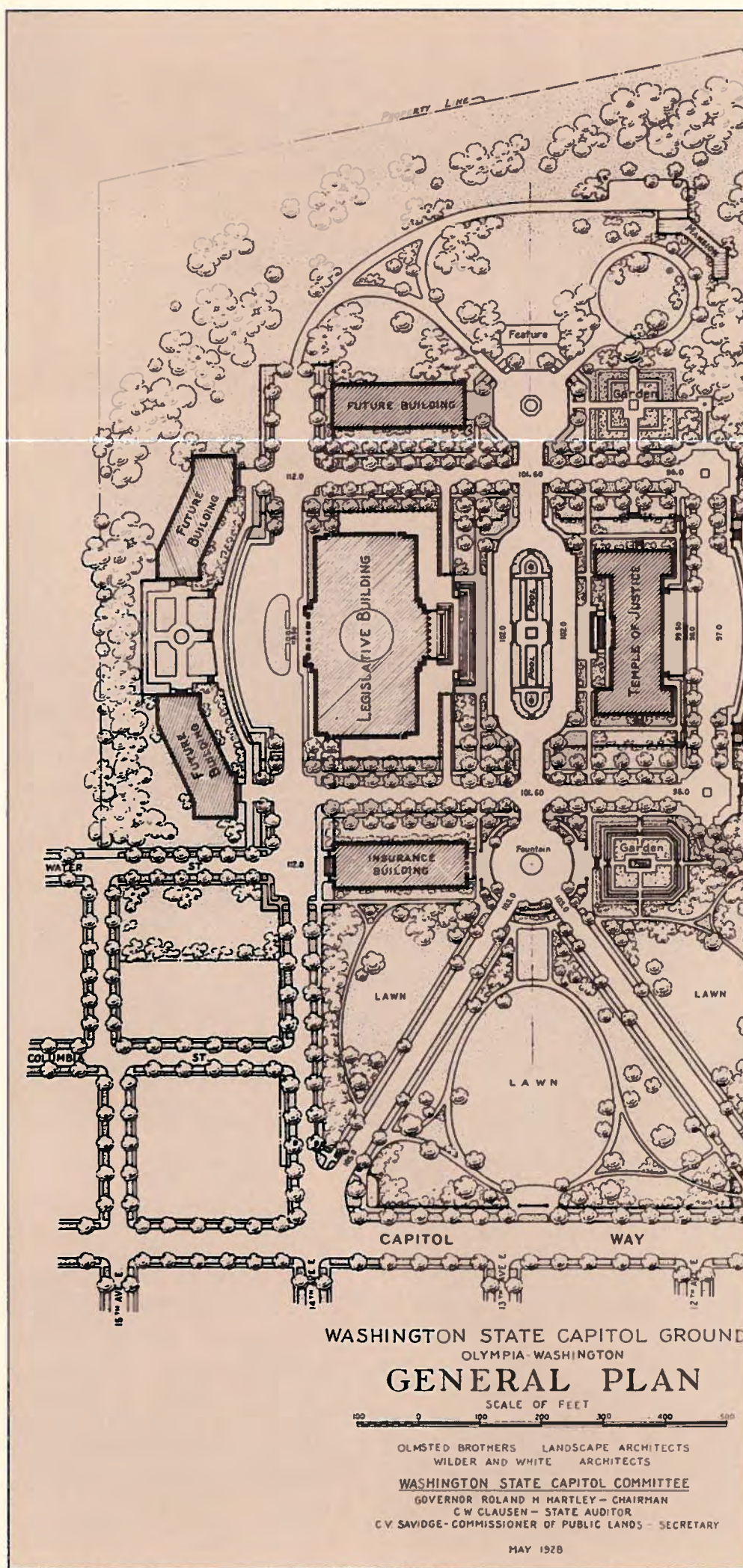
“The location...on its elevated point above Puget Sound is most unique and this distinction will be quite lost unless advantage is taken of the location.”

WILDER AND WHITE, ARCHITECTS
 JANUARY 25, 1921



WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL DOME TOWERS OVER THE CAMPUS AT 287 FEET. JUST ONE FOOT SHORTER THAN THE U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING.

The State of Washington decided to use a group of buildings for its Capitol instead of one large building. The selected architects, Wilder and White, took the challenge and worked to group the buildings so that “their design so related to each other that from any point without they appear to be a single structure,” and thus exhibit “greater magnificence than in a single building.”



WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL GROUND
 OLYMPIA - WASHINGTON
GENERAL PLAN

SCALE OF FEET

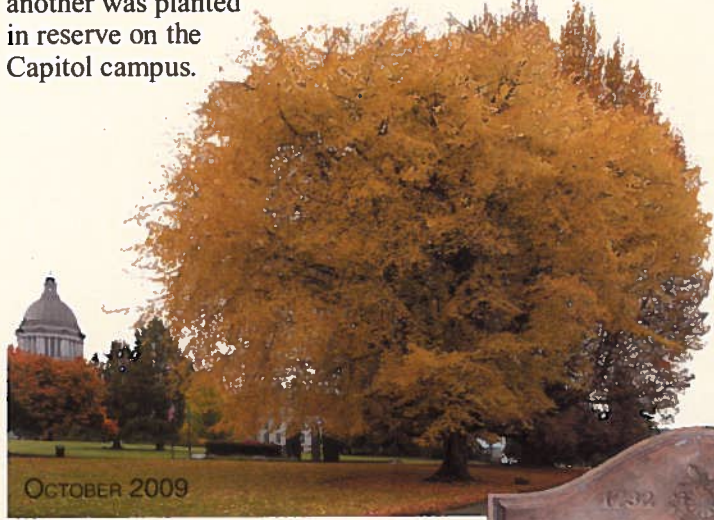
OLMSTED BROTHERS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
 WILDER AND WHITE ARCHITECTS
 WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL COMMITTEE
 GOVERNOR ROLAND H. HARTLEY - CHAIRMAN
 C. W. CLAUSEN - STATE AUDITOR
 C. V. SAVIDGE - COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS - SECRETARY

MAY 1928

Trees: The George Washington Elm

The grand American elm has become a symbol of patriotism. In 1932, the Sacajawea Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution planted a memorial American elm [T] at the northeast corner of the West Campus of the Capitol, to honor the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington. A second generation scion from the original George Washington Elm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, it honors the Olmsted intent to include elms in the landscape.

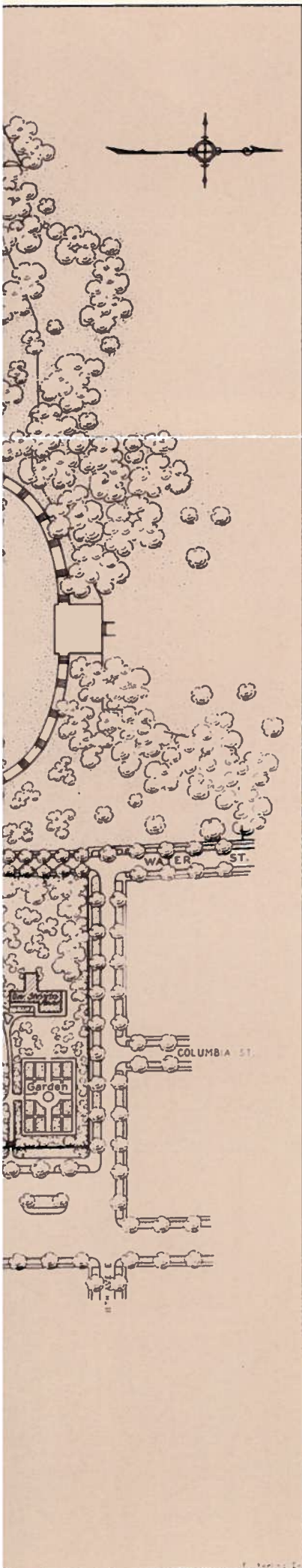
The first generation scion of the Cambridge elm was planted by 1902 at the University of Washington by Edmond Meany. That tree also provided a scion to replace the original elm in Cambridge when it died. Subsequently, offspring replaced the University of Washington elm and another was planted in reserve on the Capitol campus.



THE GEORGE WASHINGTON ELM [T] IS A SCION (DESCENDANT) OF THE AMERICAN ELM IN CAMBRIDGE, MA, UNDER WHICH, LEGEND SAYS, FOUNDING FATHER, GEORGE WASHINGTON, TOOK COMMAND OF HIS TROOPS ON JULY 3, 1775, DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

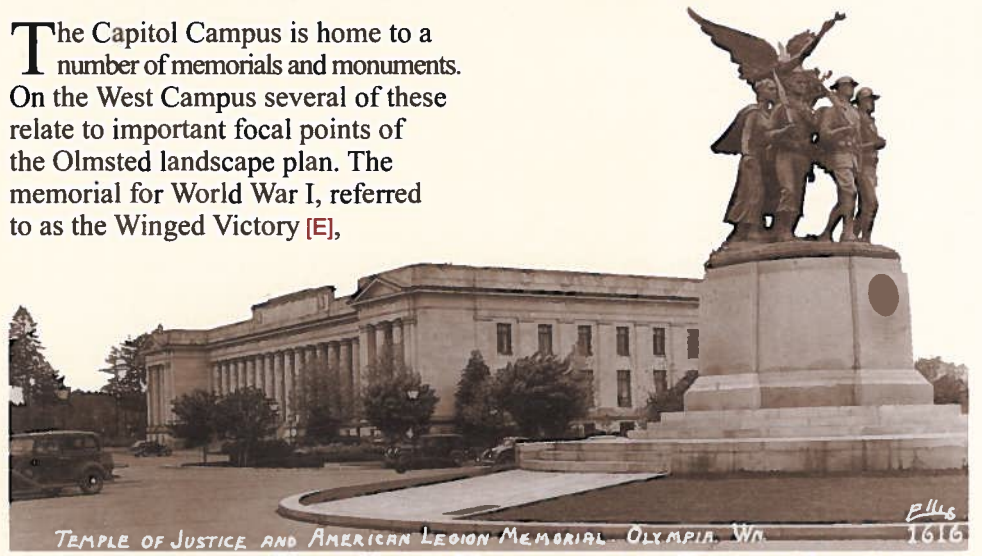


Other significant trees growing on the Capitol grounds include a champion English oak [S], the largest in the country. Five large Tulip trees frame Flag Circle [H], Kwanzan cherries line Cherry Lane [G], and Yoshino cherries frame the south face of the Legislative Building [I]. Treasured by the Olmsted Brothers, Douglas firs provide a powerful native backdrop. Over time aging trees will need replacement to maintain the important framework of the campus landscape.



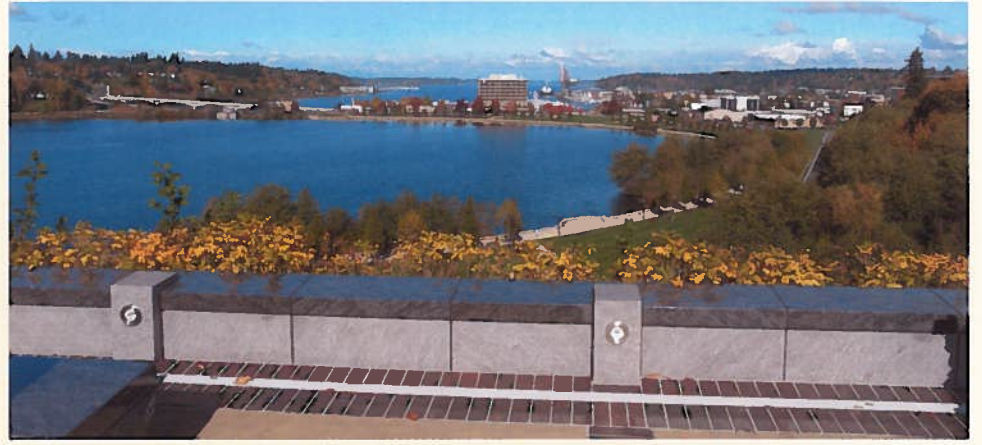
Monuments and Memorials

The Capitol Campus is home to a number of memorials and monuments. On the West Campus several of these relate to important focal points of the Olmsted landscape plan. The memorial for World War I, referred to as the Winged Victory [E],



WINGED VICTORY MONUMENT WITH THE TEMPLE OF JUSTICE BEYOND

is the focal point of the two diagonal entry drives into campus. To the south of the Legislative Building, the Territorial Sundial [J], which depicts the early history of the region, occupies a gathering point intended to provide a dramatic vantage point toward the south face of the Legislative Building with its Capitol dome.



WASHINGTON STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT MEMORIAL VIEWPOINT

The Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial [M], north of the Temple of Justice [L], is a terrace viewpoint which takes "advantage of the splendid view" Dawson described in 1927. It was a gift to the people of Washington in 2006. The serenity of the view across the lake and the sound to the mountains beyond is an integral component of this memorial.

These and other memorials [R] [C] [D] found on the West Campus, as well as tones on the East Campus, recognize the ultimate sacrifices made over the years to restore peace in the world and keep the citizens of Washington safe.

Legacy for the Citizens of Washington

Washington State's seat of government is ideally situated at the threshold between the community and the natural environment. The early designers took advantage of the majesty of the surrounding landscape by drawing it into the campus and making it a part of the experience. They used the native landscape and vistas of water and mountains to firmly root the Capitol campus within its magnificent setting and to inspire a constant commitment to the public good and participation of ordinary citizens in a healthy democracy.

The state Capitol Campus demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive approach in integrating the grounds within the larger setting. The Olmsted Brothers firm understood the importance of the surrounding landscape - the forest, water, and mountains - to the state's most significant civic space. One of the most evident ways that both the Olmsted firm and Wilder and White responded to the campus setting was through a north/south axial relationship. The Olmsted firm then developed the elegant landscape plan to connect this to the community to the east and provide a dramatic welcome to all the citizens of the state and its many visitors.

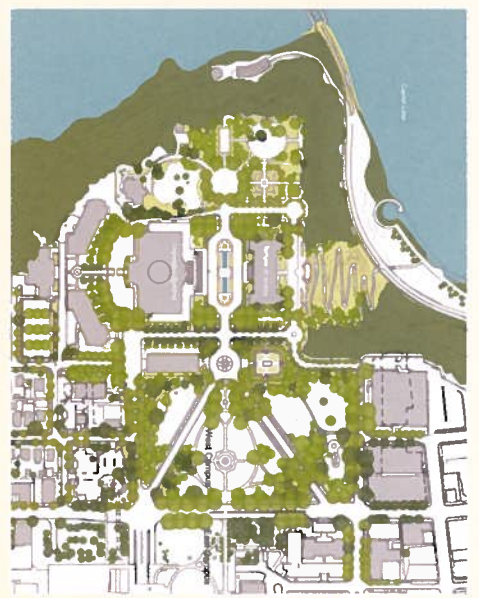
Many of the character-defining features of the Olmsteds' brilliant design still exist. However, incremental changes to the campus can obscure the historic vision. The number of existing trees is one-third of those originally intended for the campus, leaving much of the Olmsted design unrealized. Future planting will provide an opportunity for alignment with historic intent. The Olmsted vision of a richly layered prelude to entering the state's center of governance then can be fully realized and citizens can proudly enjoy the dual legacy of an architectural heritage of democracy, drawn from ancient Greece, artfully embraced in a landscape setting that showcases Washington State and its extraordinary resources.



FUTURE VIEWS ACROSS THE FLAG CIRCLE (ABOVE) AND THE GREENSWARD FROM CAPITOL WAY (BELOW)

"In a republic like the United States, the richest citizens must not be allowed to monopolize the most beautiful areas for their own enjoyment. Such areas must be reserved for the public..."

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED, SR.
AUGUST 1865



2009 WEST CAPITOL CAMPUS LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN



SUSAN OLMSTED, 2009 60

SHOWN WITH HISTORICALLY-INTENDED LAYERS OF VEGETATION, THE GREENSWARD HAS A BALANCED ARRANGEMENT OF ELM TREES LEADING THE EYE TO THE CENTRAL CORE OF THE CAPITOL GROUP ALONG THE MAJOR EAST/WEST AXIS. THIS IS REINFORCED BY THE 1953 REPLICA OF THE TIVOLI FOUNTAIN [B]. WALKWAYS INVITE PEDESTRIANS TO MEANDER THROUGH OTHER LANDSCAPE 'ROOMS'. LAYERS OF GROUND COVERS, LOW SHRUBS, AND UNDERSTORY AND CANOPY TREES DEFINE THE EDGES, WHILE ACCOMMODATING A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES.

Suggestions for visitors...

The state Capitol Visitors Services Program offers tours of the Capitol. Special tours of the grounds may be available. Check www.ga.wa.gov for details.

For More Information...

The 2009 West Capitol Campus Landscape Master Plan is available at: www.ga.wa.gov/MasterPlan/LandscapeMasterPlan.pdf

The Olmsted legacy in the Pacific Northwest is nationally significant. Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks was formed in 1983 in response to this growing recognition, in order to promote awareness, enjoyment and care of our Olmsted parks and landscapes, both public and private. *A Guide to Seattle's Olmsted Interpretive Exhibit at the Volunteer Park Water Tower* provides an introduction to Seattle's park and boulevard system as well as the Olmsted national legacy. *Guide to the Olmsted Legacy at the University of Washington* celebrates the legacy from the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909. For more information visit SeattleOlmsted.org.

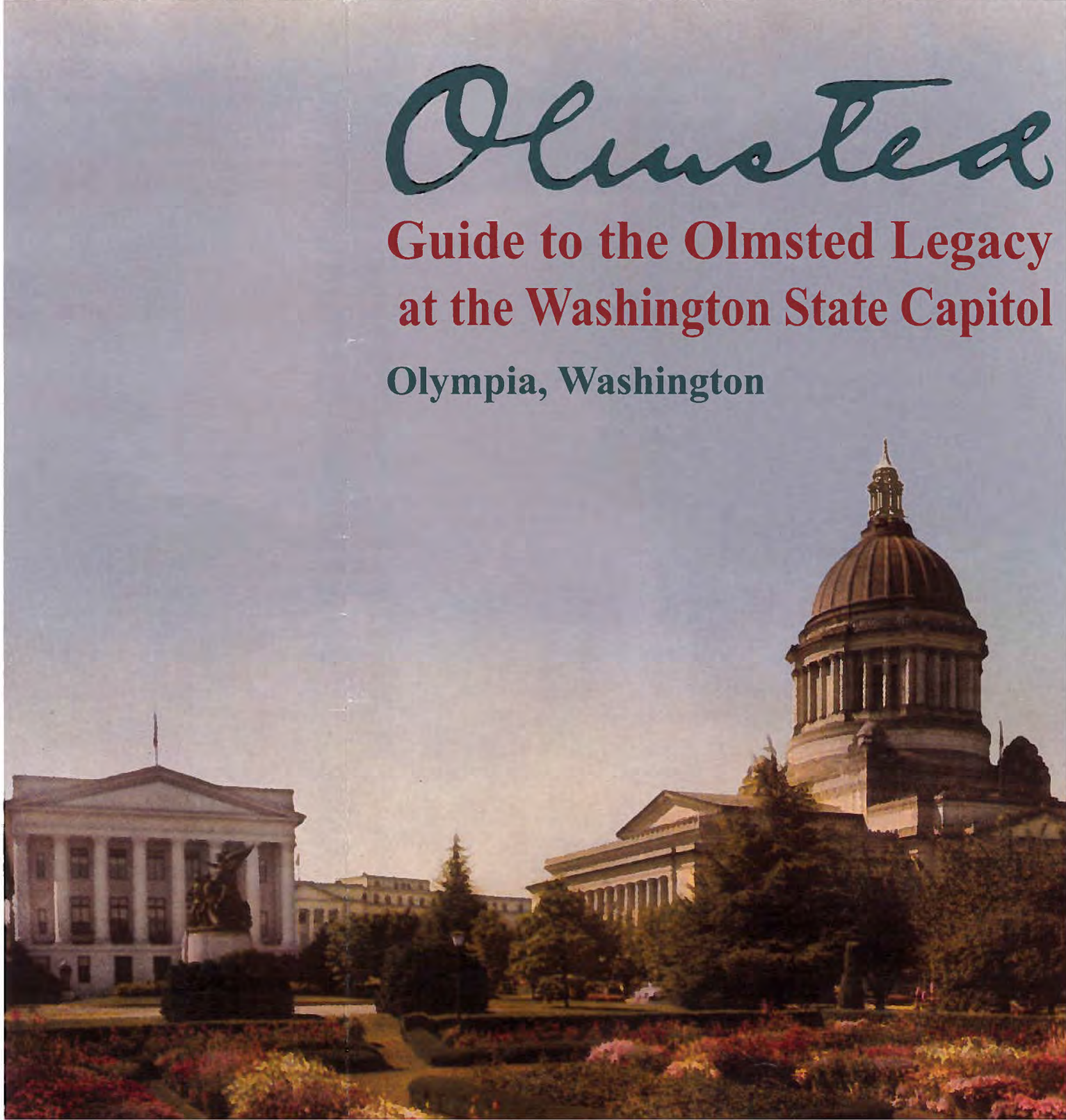
The National Association for Olmsted Parks has developed a brochure for the National Capitol grounds in Washington, D.C., which Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., designed in 1874. The brochure is available for download at Olmsted.org.

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WASHINGTON STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Olmsted

Guide to the Olmsted Legacy at the Washington State Capitol Olympia, Washington



Olympia: The Most Stunning Setting



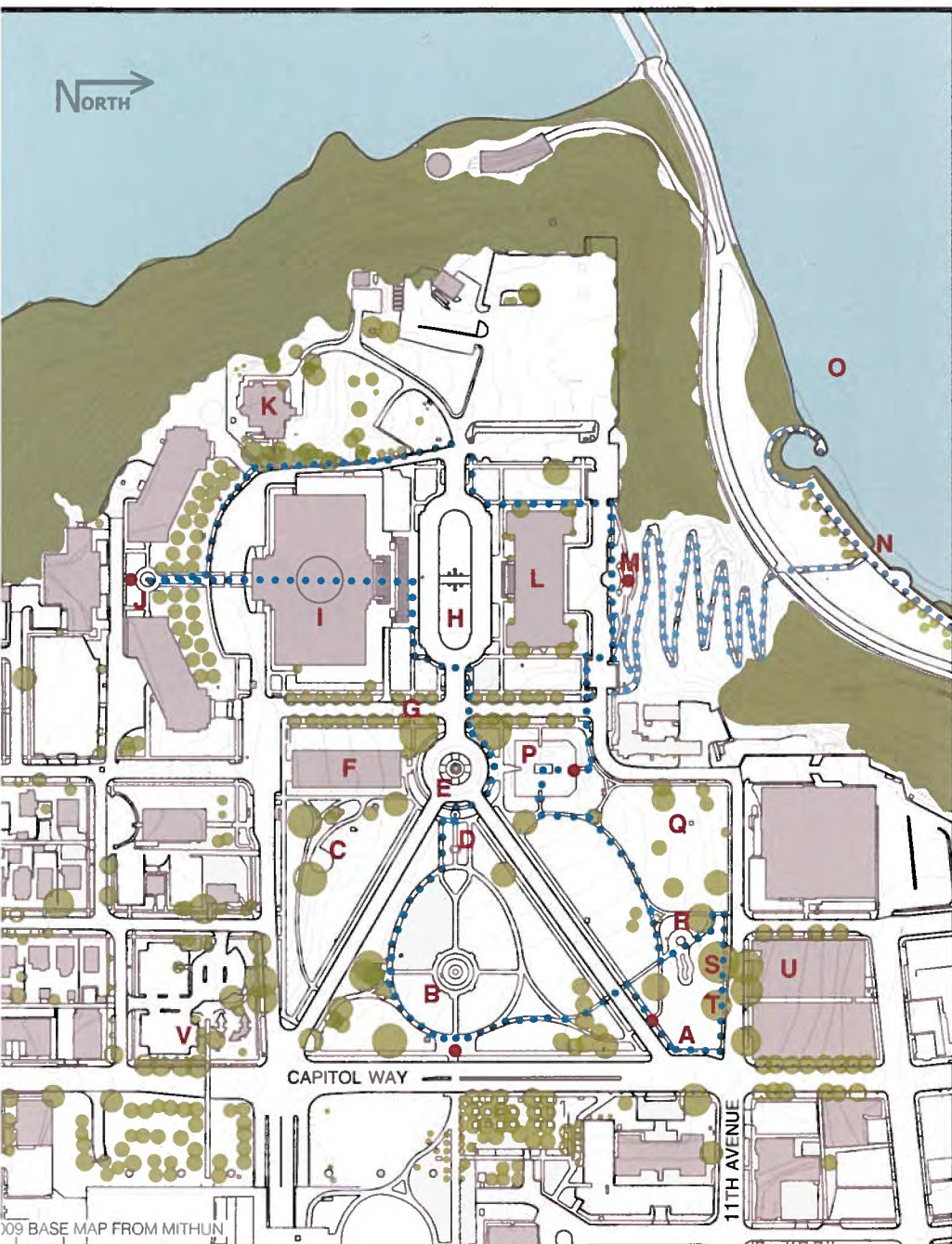
"...people...will want to take advantage of the splendid view ...we think that it is worth while in order to uphold the dignity and scale of the design around such important buildings..."

J. F. DAWSON TO C. V. SAVIDGE - NOVEMBER 17, 1927

The Olmsted Brothers design for the Capitol Campus grew out of a reverence for the setting and an appreciation of its unique, defining qualities. The design takes full advantage of the quintessentially Northwest character of the site. Here one experiences the drama of sheltering lowland forest giving way to views of surrounding hills, water, and open sky, with the mountains of two national parks in the distance: Mount Rainier and the Olympic Mountains.

Few capitol grounds command equal advantages of setting. Rather than designing the capitol grounds apart from its surroundings, the Olmsteds expressed the inherent genius of place. They worked to incorporate the site's natural setting and undulating bluff-top topography into their design and they used the natural advantages of existing richly layered native vegetation along with new plantings to frame the seasonally changing views to and from the campus.

Both the Olmsteds and Wilder and White understood the dual advantage of a site elevated above Puget Sound. The wooded bluff would provide a place of prospect and refuge with restorative natural vistas, framed and protected by the lowland forest. Seen from the Sound, surrounding hills and the city below, this landscape would provide the setting for powerful and inspiring views of the state's magnificent classical Capitol buildings.



WEST CAPITOL CAMPUS WALKING TOUR OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

BROCHURE PREPARED BY ANNE KNIGHT & JERRY ARBES WITH TEXT AND GRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LIZA DAVIDSON, MARYGRACE JENNINGS, SUE LEAN, & SUSAN OLMSTED ©2010 FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS

Olmsted Legacy in Washington

The Washington State Capitol Campus has one of the most extensive and intact Olmsted-designed capitol landscapes in the nation. In all there are eleven capitols with Olmsted landscape plans, including Kentucky, Alabama, Connecticut and New York, as well as the United States Capitol.

John Charles Olmsted first came to Washington in 1903 when Seattle Park Commissioners invited the Olmsted Brothers firm to prepare a comprehensive plan for a park system. The extensive Olmsted legacy in the state includes park and boulevard systems for Seattle and Spokane, campus plans for the University of Washington, Whitman College and Northern State Hospital, the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, and numerous public and private landscapes, including thirty residential estates.

SHOWING THE FOREST SETTING OF THE 1855 TERRITORIAL CAPITOL BUILDING, ORIGINALLY LOCATED EAST OF THE LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

The Olmsted Brothers firm began work on the Capitol Campus in 1911. John Charles Olmsted was on his way from San Diego to the University of Washington in Seattle to advise the Regents on future campus plans. He stopped in Olympia to consult on the landscape for the new capitol. After the initial consulting period, James Frederick Dawson, Olmsted's associate partner, returned in 1927 to develop the landscape plan itself, creating one of the most prominent Olmsted Brothers landscapes in Washington.

BRONZE PANEL ON THE DOOR OF THE LEGISLATIVE BUILDING [1]



The Olmsted Brothers Firm

Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (1822-1903), the father of landscape architecture, launched a 100-year legacy when he and Calvert Vaux prepared the "Greensward" plan for New York City's Central Park in 1858. Twenty years later John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) joined his step-father, becoming a full partner in 1884. After Olmsted, Sr. retired in 1895, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (1870-1957) joined the firm. In 1898 he and John Charles formed the Olmsted Brothers, which would continue as the firm's name until 1961.



JOHN CHARLES OLMSTED

In 1903, the Olmsted Brothers firm began work in the Pacific Northwest, preparing plans for park systems in Portland and Seattle. John C. Olmsted, from 1903 until his death in 1920, and James F. Dawson, from 1904 to 1941, were the principal landscape architects who worked on commissions in the Pacific Northwest. They were aided by designers, conceptual artists, draftsmen, and architects at their main office, known as Fairsted, in Brookline, Massachusetts, now a National Historic Site, and at their California office.



JAMES FREDERICK DAWSON

Olmsted's Vision

"The result of this plan will be that all visitors coming to Olympia...will have a fine symmetrical view of the Capitol and its group of buildings. We believe this idea will be worth all it will cost."

John C. Olmsted

OLMSTED TO GOVERNOR HAY - JANUARY 19, 1912

John C. Olmsted stopped in Olympia in April 1911 to meet with the Capitol Commission. They asked him to submit a proposal to prepare a master plan for the then 20-acre Capitol grounds. Meanwhile, the Commission had asked Charles Bebb, Seattle's most prominent architect, to put together a "Program for the Competition for a proposed General Architectural Plan," which included a statement that: *"The best view is looking due north from the center of the proposed Capitol Building, which gives way to Puget Sound."* Olmsted must have agreed, because he argued against placing the Temple of Justice in this view. The architects who won the contract, Wilder and White of New York, held firm on their proposed northern placement of the Temple of Justice [L], much to Olmsted's dismay. Unfortunately, during the early part of 1912 Olmsted fell ill and was unable to return to the Northwest to argue his case. The firm had to wait until after the buildings were constructed to be invited back again to work on the landscape design.

Olmsted had recommended establishing a strong and direct connection between the new capitol grounds and downtown Olympia. Early plans showed a diagonal avenue from the Old Capitol Building in Sylvester Park, providing a view southwest to the new Capitol dome. This avenue was not built, but two diagonal roadways, in the 1928 Olmsted Brothers landscape plan, now provide welcoming views into the campus from Olympia's Capitol Way.



OLD CAPITOL BUILDING IN DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA - CA 1904

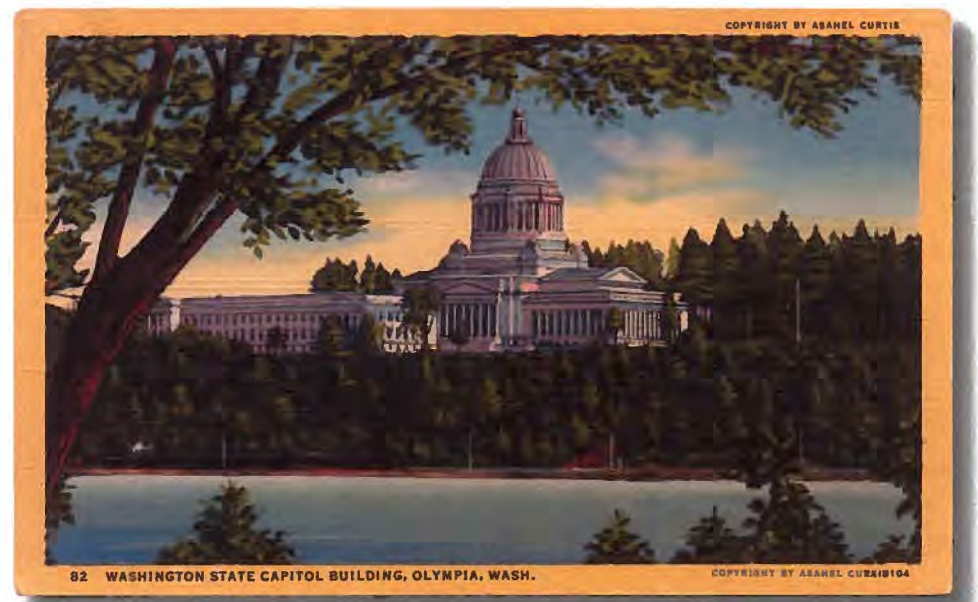
1912 OLMSTED PLAN - FOR LAND AND WATER APPROACHES TO THE CAPITOL

A DIAGONAL AVENUE CONNECTED FROM SYLVESTER PARK IN DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA. PARK LAND BETWEEN THE HARBOR AND A PROPOSED SALT WATER POND (SITE OF CAPITOL LAKE [O] IN 1951 WITH HERITAGE PARK [N] IN 1998) PROVIDED A SYMMETRICAL VISTA OF THE CAPITOL LOOKING SOUTHWARD ALONG THE CAPITOL'S NORTH-SOUTH AXIS.



NPS-FLONHS 5350-16

The Washington State Capitol



82 WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL BUILDING, OLYMPIA, WASH. COPYRIGHT BY ASANEL CURTIS

The Washington State Capitol Campus is shaped by the cultural, natural and economic resources of its setting. The historic West Campus is situated atop a bluff overlooking the city of Olympia, Capitol Lake, and Puget Sound with the Olympic Mountains in the distance. The Capitol grounds provide a critical link of open space within an interconnected network of public trails, rights-of-way, and city and county parks. The site at the south end of Puget Sound was frequented by Native Americans because of its wealth of resources and the area continues to be a nexus for commerce and transportation.

About 50 acres of the historic West Campus, including the historic Capitol Group of buildings, were listed as a National Register Historic District in 1974. The period of historic significance from 1911 to 1931 included design and construction of the Temple of Justice and the

Insurance and Legislative Buildings as well as the landscape. This era encompasses the Olmsted Brothers' consultation (1911-1912) and design and construction (1927-1931) periods, as well as the architectural work of Wilder and White from 1911 to 1927.

The vision established by the Olmsted Brothers during the Capitol's historic period of significance provides an underlying framework for the future care of this nationally significant site. The state now has a *Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan* with a *Vegetation Management Plan* to guide the care of the landscape of the West Campus over time. Developed in 2009, the plan seeks to honor the design intent of the Olmsted Brothers, to recognize the continuum of influences that have shaped the campus over the last one hundred years, and to respond to contemporary needs and constraints.

Planning the Capitol Grounds

"...there is no reason why the Washington State Capitol grounds should not be as fine if not the finest in the United States."

J. F. DAWSON, OLMSTED BROTHERS -1934



AERIAL OF THE CAPITOL CAMPUS - C. 1930-34

WSA-495

James Frederick Dawson, now a full partner in the Olmsted Brothers firm, assumed responsibility for designing the capitol grounds when the firm was again contacted in 1927. In the design, he applied the Olmsted firms' century-long practice of subordinating individual design elements to the composition of a place as a whole.

At the Capitol Campus, the Olmsted Brothers considered the buildings and the grounds as a unified composition, mutually supportive of the overarching objective of making democratic space. They enlisted numerous design tools within a landscape architect's palette—vegetation, pathways and drives, topography, lighting, materials, and the careful siting of structures and features. With these tools they defined spaces, reinforced axes, framed views, demarcated thresholds, and established and knitted edges.

The resulting design reflects the democratic process. Visitors would experience a progression through increasingly formal spaces moving toward the Flag Circle [H], the gathering place at the heart of the campus, located between the Temple of Justice and the Legislative Building. This journey is a metaphor for the process whereby diffuse citizen priorities coalesce into formal laws.

LEGEND

- A CAMPUS MAP
- B TIVOLI FOUNTAIN
- C VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL
- D MEDAL OF HONOR AND POW MIA MEMORIALS
- E WINGED VICTORY MONUMENT
- F INSURANCE BUILDING
- G CHERRY LANE
- H FLAG CIRCLE
- I LEGISLATIVE BUILDING
- J TERRITORIAL SUNDIAL
- K GOVERNOR'S MANSION
- L TEMPLE OF JUSTICE
- M LAW ENFORCEMENT MEMORIAL VIEWPOINT
- N HERITAGE PARK
- O CAPITOL LAKE
- P SUNKEN GARDEN
- Q CHIEF SHELTON STORY POLE
- R WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL
- S CHAMPION ENGLISH OAK
- T GEORGE WASHINGTON ELM
- U PARKING
- V VISITOR CENTER

WALKING TOUR

- ROUTE
- EXTENSION
- VIEWPOINTS ALONG DESIGN AXES