

# Site LINES

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## Letter from the Editor

This issue of *Site/Lines* continues the reassessment of the career of Robert Moses initiated earlier this year with *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, the tripartite exhibition curated by Hilary Ballon and its accompanying collection of scholarly essays.

Moses's grasp and retention of power, reinforced by his autocratic nature, enabled him to be the primary agent reshaping New York in the mid-twentieth century. Anticipating post-World War II growth in automobile ownership and the movement of goods by truck, he stitched the city to its hinterlands with bridges and highways but ignored mass transportation and shipment by rail. A Progressive Era reformer who deplored the city's squalid

tenements, he cleared slums but destroyed neighborhoods. The benefit of his parks has remained essentially unchallenged, although their creation as linear appendages to highways has been criticized.

Inevitably, the forces of political and cultural change and popular reaction served to disempower this proud and arrogant public servant. His authority to dramatically alter the metropolitan landscape was repudiated. Yet his legacy endures because of its continuing practical value. Without its transportation component, the city would cease to function.

It also endures by its very nature. Certain elements of the urban fabric are inherently resistant to change. Arterial systems represent a transgenerational infrastructure that invites repair but seldom alteration. Moses's roads and bridges are embedded in New York's municipal form. Parks, although sometimes encroached upon, are also part of the unchanging metropolitan footprint. In addition, Moses's low- and middle-income residential projects are for the most part immune to the forces of change. Protected by their original legal arrangements

or New York City Housing Authority ownership, the land they occupy is not subject to the market forces that normally drive real estate development. They remain islands set apart from the rest of a city that dynamically rebuilds itself as long as there is a greater return on capital to be had on a given parcel of land.

Moses made the most of a remarkable opportunity to imprint New York with his multiple visions. Unlike present-day New Orleans, a city in near paralysis with regard to its rebuilding plans, New York's circumstances during most of the forty years Moses was in office favored his array of accomplishments. During the Great Depression federal public works programs helped fund his impressive construction agenda as parks commissioner. After the Second World War the nation enjoyed a healthy peacetime economy, the city and region were experiencing population growth, and the Housing Act of 1949 and the Transportation Act of 1956 created large sums of available capital that state legislatures could disperse to cities.



Whitestone Bridge, July 1940.

But these alone were not sufficient to affect the city's transformation. Four other factors were key: the vision to conceive large-scale projects, the ingenuity to devise financing, the leadership capable of directing the political will, and the ability to influence public opinion. Together these things spelled power. Historical circumstances and attributes unique to Moses combined to put New York City in the

vanguard of urban America's progress into the modern age.

For all the far-reaching grandeur of his ambitions and achievements as a master builder, Moses did not pursue a comprehensive planning vision in the conventional sense. He scorned municipal planning boards

in general, and the New York City Planning Commission in particular. He never saw himself as other than a pragmatic enabler of public works, the man who "got things done." Private-sector economic development was not part of his purview. Instead, he built things for which he could obtain public funds: roads, bridges, parks, and subsidized housing.

In this issue of *Site/Lines*, we focus on the ways in which Moses's creation of facilities for public recreation altered the landscape of Central Park and the rest of New York City. Through the eyes of one longtime tenant we look at life in Peter Cooper Village, his first large-scale housing project and the prototype for his transformation of other areas of residential cityscape into superblocks of high-rise housing. His role in the conversion of New York into an automobile-served metropolis is a story we leave to others.

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers  
Editor

### On the Cover:

Robert Moses at the dedication of the Osborn Gates, Central Park, June 15, 1953.

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# The Landscapes of Robert Moses

## Robert Moses and the Transformation of Central Park

*Robert Moses enlarged and altered the New York City parks system with a single goal: the provision of recreation facilities. There was an inevitable landscape design dichotomy when these were inserted into existing historic parks. In this essay, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers discusses the origins and fate of Central Park's Moses heritage from her perspective as the first Central Park administrator and founding president of the Central Park Conservancy*

### Before Moses: 1858–1934

For the past thirty-five years landscape historians have been reviving the reputation of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) and Calvert Vaux (1824–1895), the designers of the Greensward Plan for Central Park and the founders of the landscape architecture profession in America. For the last twenty-five years the park itself has enjoyed a period of restoration and good management through the coordinated efforts of the New York City Department of Parks and the Central Park Conservancy. This is but the latest chapter in the park's checkered 150-year history.

Central Park was conceived as a place where city dwellers could promenade on foot or parade in carriages, enjoying the artfully conceived scenery and social spectacle. However, by the early twentieth century the concept of scenic recreation – movement through a sequence of beautiful lawns, woods, and bodies of water – was no longer considered the park's paramount purpose. Samuel Parsons (1844–1923), who followed Vaux as the Parks Department's head landscape architect from 1898 until 1911, presided over the end of what may be called the park's Greensward era, the period when the park was managed according to the vision of Olmsted and Vaux. Subsequently, social reformers of the Progressive Era believed that people needed more than simple contact with natural beauty, and sports-minded parks commissioners began to view Central Park in a different light – as a place to play games. The profession of recreation leader was born, and a cadre of city employees was hired to organize activities in parks throughout the city in an effort to improve the health of slum children and help them move into the American cultural mainstream.

Following on the heels of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where Daniel Burnham's monumental vision for the fairgrounds fostered a neoclassical style of architecture and landscape design, a new generation of architects launched the City Beautiful movement. Its legacy in Central Park is due in part to two newspaper moguls, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. The antithesis of Vaux's Picturesque architecture, Hearst's grandiose 1913 Maine Monument rises above the southwest entrance of Central Park, and the 1916 Pulitzer Fountain ornaments Grand Army Plaza at the southeast corner.

Central Park, however, changed little in its overall appearance during that time except for the wear and tear it received from hosting an increasing number of celebrations and group activities. The onslaught of automobile traffic by the 1920s transformed its pastoral character more completely. While the park's naturalistic landscape had its defenders, increasingly it came to be seen as a site for monuments and other encroachments. Several bizarre proposals were put forth, including a landing field for aircraft, a track for horse races, a central fire station, a burial ground for war heroes, an opera house, and a series of trenches commemorating the 1916 Battle of Verdun.

These multiple, unrelated proposals were symptomatic of the civic leadership's failure to understand either the park's scenic or recreational purposes. In 1934 this state of affairs came to a decisive halt. Henceforth, one man would conceive, execute, and publicize every alteration of its landscape for the next thirty-two years. That man was Robert Moses.

### The Moses Years: 1934–1960

Robert Moses's (1888–1981) vision of public service grew out of the reform movement of the Progressive Era. When he was appointed by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia (1882–1947) as parks commissioner in 1934, Moses achieved the power to give permanent form to the early-twentieth-century commissioners' efforts to make

Lower East Side playground attendant watching children digging, January 1941. The play equipment seen here – swings, slide, and monkey bars set in sand – became standard in all Moses-era playgrounds throughout the city, including those in Central Park.



Central Park a place for active recreation. However, instead of allowing sports to take place by simply abandoning the old regulations as they had done, he dedicated portions of the park to specific activities: lawns became bowling and croquet greens and meadows were turned into ball fields.

Discontinuing the tradition of skating on the natural ice of Central Park's Pond and Lake, he built a permanent rink.

At the time Moses came to office, the only playground in the park was one created in 1926 near Seventh Avenue and 63rd Street, a gift from the philanthropist August Heckscher. In September 1935 nineteen fenced-off playgrounds with large sandboxes – “places where children can dig” as Moses characterized these then-novel features – were opened near park entrances. In October of the following year, three more playgrounds were added. Enthusiastically adopted by mothers and children, they were touted by Moses as a way to preserve the surrounding scenery. To further discourage romping on the grass, he encircled lawns with pipe rail fencing, posted “Keep off the Grass” signs, and made infractions of this rule punishable by fine.

Overlooking the Concert Ground on the Mall, the Casino designed by Vaux as an eatery for unescorted female visitors had become a restaurant for both sexes. With the addition of a dance floor in the 1920s, it became a popular nightclub patronized by the Tammany Hall mayor, playboy, and songwriter, James W. (Jimmy “Gentleman”) Walker (1881–1946). Moses repudiated both the former administration (Walker had been thrown out of office in 1932 on charges of graft) and the current use of the building as an elite establishment. After tearing down the Casino in 1937, he converted the site into the Mary Harriman Rumsey Playground over the objections of civic groups who felt that, with twenty-two perimeter playgrounds, another in the middle of the park was unnecessary.

Moses's taste in public art soon became apparent. Instead of statues commemorating important figures in literary, cultural, and political history, he commissioned works of a whimsical nature,

most of which were based on children's stories. In 1938 he used Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) funds to erect a granite statue of Mother Goose by Frederick George Richard Roth (1872–1944). With soaring cloak, she sits astride a flying goose at the entrance to the Rumsey Playground. The statue's bas-relief base depicts Little Jack Horner, Humpty Dumpty, and Little Bo Peep. Additionally, near the entrance to the Heckscher Playground, which Moses rebuilt in 1935, he placed a granite drinking fountain decorated with bas-reliefs of characters from *Alice in Wonderland* as a memorial to social worker Sophie Irene Loeb (1876–1929). In 1937 he had a playful pair of life-size bronzes, *Dancing Bear* and *Dancing Goat*, also by Roth, installed at the entrance to the zoo he had built to replace the park's old menagerie.

Tennis courts and a tennis house, built in 1930 according to the design of the park engineer Gustavo Steinacher, encroached on the South Meadow near the 96th Street Transverse Road. Before Moses this was the sole dedicated sports complex in the park. In 1934, during his first year in office, he turned the nearby North Meadow into ball fields and the adjacent stables into a recreation center, and he encircled the crest of the Great Hill with a wide path for rollerskating. Inside this asphalt ring hard sand courts for roque, a version of croquet, were laid out, and wickets for regular croquet were set up on nearby lawns. During that same year, the sheepfold that housed the flock that grazed on Sheep Meadow was converted into the Tavern on the Green, and the following year another restaurant was placed in the Bethesda Terrace Arcade. Vaux's stable fronting the 86th Street Transverse Road became a police station, and the park was subsequently patrolled by officers charged with enforcing Moses's rules and regulations.

The Old Reservoir between the 79th and 86th Street Transverse Roads that predated the park's creation had been filled in during the 1920s when a new water tunnel made it obsolete. The American Society of Landscape Architects had prepared an axial plan in the Beaux-Arts style to turn the area into the Great Lawn, but it was not implemented until 1936, two years after Moses took office. Its principal designer was Gilmore D. Clarke (1892–1982), Moses's chief landscape architect for many years. Not long after its completion Moses decided that Clarke's grass oval should be converted into eight ball fields.

In the north end of the park, Moses tore down the 1899 glasshouses near Fifth Avenue and 104th Street and directed Clarke to transform the surrounding six acres into the Conservatory Garden. As with the Great Lawn, Beaux-Arts symmetry prevailed. The garden has a central lawn bordered by allées of crab apple trees and is terminated by a fountain jet and a semicircle of hedges stepping up in tiers to a terrace crowned with a wisteria-covered, wrought-iron pergola. A large circular garden on the north for seasonal display is balanced by a garden of geometrically arranged perennial beds on the south. In 1936 Bessie Potter Vonnoh's fountain sculpture of Mary and Dickon, the protagonists in Frances Hodgson Burnett's well-loved children's story *The Secret Garden*, was installed in the pool in the south garden. The 1910 Untermyer Fountain by Walter Schott featuring jets of water splashing on bronze dancing maidens, was donated in 1947 to ornament the pool in the north garden.

To make the park more actively family oriented, Moses staged events on the Concert Ground at the Mall where the 1923 Naumburg Bandshell had been built to replace an earlier cast-iron bandstand. Here

Harvest Moon Dance, Naumburg Bandshell, September 10, 1946.



musical performances designed to attract a variety of ethnic groups were held, including German, Gaelic, Polish, and Scottish songfests. There were Victor Herbert recitals as well, and the craze for big band music prompted the introduction of dance contests.

During the 1940s, as federal funds were directed toward the war effort, Moses was unable to lavish recreational facilities on the city as generously as when manpower was supplied by the federal public works programs of the Great Depression. However, within the limits of the city budget, parks department engineers and the regular workforce were able to undertake a number of routine maintenance operations and perform small capital projects: the reseeded of lawns, the addition of asphalt paths and parking lots, and the repair of broken benches and lights. These improvements were intended to enhance security, increase safety, augment automobile access, and signal that management was on the job. During this time, Moses filled in Ladies Pond, the most westerly arm of the Lake, and in 1941, when he had the 65th Street Cross Drive realigned for the convenience of automobile traffic, he buried Marble Arch, the pedestrian underpass leading to and from the Mall. He converted Cherry Hill Concourse, designed

by Olmsted and Vaux as a carriage turnaround with an ornamental central fountain used for watering horses, into a parking lot. He marked the sites of the forts built by militiamen at the onset of the War of 1812 by clearing the woods in the north end of the park and installing flagpoles, pavement, and benches. Nature lovers protested the destruction of the park's naturalistic character, but with no public accountability to restrict his authority, Moses was able to remove trees and pave over areas with impunity.

To put it mildly, the architects, landscape architects, and engineers working in the parks department's Arsenal headquarters during the Moses years had a different aesthetic from those who had designed the park in the nineteenth century. They reengineered the park's water bodies, rimming their edges with riprap and perimeter paths of asphalt, destroying naturalistic shorelines fringed with emergent vegetation. The Harlem Meer, the placid lake near 110th Street, and the Pond in the southeast corner received this treatment in the early 1940s. Lewis Mumford, the most eminent architectural writer of the day, complained:

H. G. Wells once described Sidney Webb, the trenchant British bureaucrat, as the kind of person who would hack down growing trees and substitute sanitary green glass umbrellas. There is someone in the planning office of our Parks Department whose mind works the same way. Even in a romantic setting, he favors firm, manmade boundaries – iron fences, concrete curbs, heavy wooden barriers, devices that Olmsted and his architect-partner, Calvert Vaux, except in such formal layouts as the Mall, did their best to avoid. As for the borders of the lake, instead of planting them thickly with sedge and iris, the Parks Department designer has tried to combine beauty with ease of maintenance by planting them, too, with slabs of stone. The result is damnably neat, but that is about all, for the wide, asphalted paths and stone embankments completely counteract the natural loveliness of the landscape.

This was done in conjunction with the construction of the Wollman Rink on the northeastern arm of the Pond. To secure funding for this project, Moses found time to take walks in Central Park with Justice Samuel J. Harris, the lawyer for Kate Wollman, principal trustee of the William J. Wollman Foundation, named in honor of the brother whose fortune she had inherited. With the help of his friend the judge, Moses persuaded her to give \$600,000 toward the \$800,000 cost of building the rink.

Throughout the 1950s Moses continued to combine private philanthropy with city appropriations to build other projects in Central Park: new structures for park concessions, public toilets (euphemistically called comfort stations to this day), more playgrounds, a new boathouse on the Lake, a rebuilt Carousel. He adroitly steered prospective donors toward the kind of sculpture and architecture he liked and told artists



and designers exactly what he wanted: playful statues and sound, functional, modern structures conservatively clothed and with touches of whimsy. Aymar Embury II (1880–1966), who had been recruited in 1934 along with Clarke to be a member of the newly formed parks department design and construction department, was the principal author of this architectural idiom of disciplined playfulness. He and his team believed in using traditional materials of the highest quality, often brick and limestone in combination, or rough-hewn fieldstone with limestone trim. Attention to detail was important. A patterned surface composed of alternating

Robert Moses at the dedication of the Great Lawn, July 6, 1934.

bands of brick and limestone masonry, a polygonal rather than rectilinear plan, and a cupola to collect the angles of a hip roof into a peaked topknot characterize many small parks structures of the Moses period. These buildings were built to be as sturdy and vandalproof as the house of the wisest pig in “The Three Little Pigs.”

In 1950 a fire destroyed the Carousel, a longtime favorite park concession. Moses soon located a handsome forty-year-old Coney Island carousel with horses carved of applewood by the noted Brooklyn carousel makers Sol Stein and Harry Goldstein. He had a new motor installed and, with a gift of \$2,000, purchased a Wurlitzer band organ. The parks director of mechanical maintenance oversaw the repainting of the carousel's fifty-seven prancing steeds in what he called “real horsy colors.” Moses obtained a gift from the Michael Friedsam Foundation to erect the brick-and-limestone-striped octagonal building that houses the carousel today.

The same year Moses turned to the financier, presidential advisor, and statesman Bernard Baruch (1870–1965), whose favorite spot for discussing governmental affairs was a park bench in Central Park, for funds to build the Chess and Checkers House on the site previously occupied by the grandest of the park's original rustic summerhouses. In the meantime, the adjacent Dairy, one of Vaux's original buildings, was converted into a storage depot for workers' tools and supplies.

In 1954, when Jeanne Kerbs, who lived in an apartment house overlooking the Conservatory Water near Fifth Avenue at 74th Street, wished to memorialize her parents, Moses solicited her donation for the construction of a boathouse for model yachts. Relatively small in scale, this typical Moses building has brick walls with limestone quoins and a steeply pitched, gently curving hip roof of copper crowned with a tall, thin, ornamental cupola. Also in 1954, in order to replace the twenty-nine-year-old wooden boathouse on the northeast arm of the Lake, Moses successfully sought funds from investment banker Carl M. Loeb, who donated \$250,000, almost the entire amount needed to build the boathouse that is named for him and his wife Adeline. In 1957 Moses demolished another original park structure, the Mineral Springs Pavilion at the northwest corner of Sheep Meadow, replacing it with

the present one built according to his standard design template.

In 1953 Moses accepted \$75,000 raised by the Danish-American Women's Association for a bronze statue by Georg Lober to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth. His conservative taste for storybook sculpture was doubly apparent because of his vociferous opposition that same year to a modern playground designed by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi for a site next to the new United Nations. Such was Moses's influence at this time that the design was withdrawn, even though the playground was not on city parkland. Dedicated in 1956 and placed on the west side of the Conservatory Water opposite the Kerbs Model Yacht Boathouse, the Hans Christian Andersen sculpture depicts "The Ugly Duckling" advancing toward the larger-than-life-size figure of the genial author dressed in a frock coat and seated with an open book on his lap. The storyteller's knees and the invitingly spread pages of his book are now shiny where generations of climbing children have worn away the patina.

The northern end of the Conservatory Water received the last and best loved piece of Moses-era sculpture, José de Crefft's bronze *Alice in Wonderland* given in 1959 by George T. Delacorte (1894–1991), the millionaire founder of the Dell Publishing Company, in memory of his wife Margarita. The March Hare, Mad Hatter, and dormouse crowding around Alice, who is enthroned on a huge mushroom, resemble those in John Tenniel's illustrations for the original edition of Lewis Carroll's famous book. While they are clearly in character, the Mad Hatter possesses Delacorte's features, and Alice is thought to resemble de Crefft's daughter Donna. Although at least one art critic characterized Moses's taste in public art as puerile, the surface gleam of the mushroom and Alice's outstretched arms and fingers testifies to the statue's perennial popularity.

In 1952 a memorial playground honoring William Church Osborn (1862–1951), a former president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was built at Fifth Avenue and 84th Street. Paul



Manship (1885–1966) designed its handsome bronze entrance gates depicting "The Tortoise and Hare" and "The Wolf and the Lamb" along with other animals from Aesop's *Fables*. The gates were removed when the playground was demolished in 1978 to make way for the Metropolitan Museum's addition to house the Temple of Dendur. They have recently been cleaned and repaired by the Central Park Conservancy and readied for installation at the entrance to the Ancient Playground at Fifth Avenue and 85th Street.

In 1957 the Irving and Estelle Levy Foundation provided funds for a small rectangular playground to be built south of the Metropolitan Museum near the 79th Street Transverse Road. Like the Osborn Playground, it was furnished with standard play equipment – swings, slide, see-saws, sandbox – and entered through specially commissioned, animal-ornamented bronze gates. A memorial to Irving Levy, they were designed by sculptor A. Walter Beretta and architect John Wilson. When

Robert Moses at the dedication of *Alice and Wonderland*, May 7, 1959.

the playground was replaced in 1990 by the new Pat Hoffman Friedman Playground situated

closer to Fifth Avenue, the Levy gates were integrated into its design, along with Samuel Friedman's gift of Manship's 1960 *Group of Bears*.

Moses, who had served under several successive New York governors, encouraged Governor Herbert H. Lehman (1878–1963) and his wife to donate the Lehman Children's Zoo, north of the main Central Park Zoo, in honor of the couple's fiftieth anniversary in 1961. Lehman had just been elected governor when Moses built the original zoo in 1934 as an act of friendship toward his political patron, Alfred E. Smith (1873–1944), Lehman's immediate predecessor. Smith took great delight in walking from his apartment across Fifth Avenue to visit the animals almost every day. The enormously popular Lehman Children's Zoo was a juvenile stage set in which live animals were penned and petted. Manship's entrance gates depicting a youth dancing to the music of panpipes are of a much higher artistic quality than was the theme-parklike zoo, which was redesigned in 1996 when it came under the management of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

By the mid-1950s Moses's arrogant sarcasm, political power, and press connections, which had previously withered opponents, were unable to mute the voices of those who could no longer tolerate his autocratic style. In addition, his preference for landscape utility over scenery came under attack from the nascent environmental and historic preservation movements. While civic organizations like the Parks Association had raised objections to projects such as the Rumsey Playground with respectful diffidence in the 1930s, they now called Moses's continuing addition of recreational facilities to Central Park unwanted encroachments.

Things came to a dramatic head in 1955 when the newspapers announced that Moses wished to build an "Oldsters Center" in the Ramble for persons over fifty-five. The project would transform the prevailing character of the twenty-two-acre woodland into a bland expanse of open lawns dotted with chess-and-checkers tables and areas for horseshoe pitching, croquet, and shuffleboard. The center was to be funded with a gift of \$250,000 from the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation in honor of Albert's sister, social worker Florina Lasker. The relandscaping of the Ramble would be accomplished with \$200,000 from the city budget. Moses said that it was neces-

sary to fence the area. Serious bird watchers would be allowed to enter in the early morning hours and “orderly adults” during the rest of the day.

The Ramble was, in fact, in terrible condition, weedy and eroded because of lack of maintenance. To prepare for the changes to come, paths were repaved and lined with London plane trees, standard parks department construction elements such as pipe railings and concrete retaining walls were installed, and a parking lot was built beside the East Drive. Couched as a tactic against “anti-social persons,” the proposal was probably designed to put a stop to gay cruising. But the Ramble is also a major bird-watching area. Located on the Atlantic flyway, it serves as a nesting ground and feeding station where migrant species refuel on their spring and fall journeys. With his dismissive contempt for bird watchers, Moses was surprised when the Linnaean Society assembled enough strength and political backing to successfully oppose his plan to tear out the vegetation that camouflaged activities taking place in the Ramble’s bosky hollows. Its members were further outraged by his plan to build a large recreation center equipped with a food bar and rooms for TV, music, and games on the lovely lawn that some park regulars used

to refer to jokingly as the “Fruited Plain” or “Men’s Meadow.” Perceiving a lack of support from the press and the strength of the political forces against him, Moses dropped the project, and the Lasker gift was withdrawn.

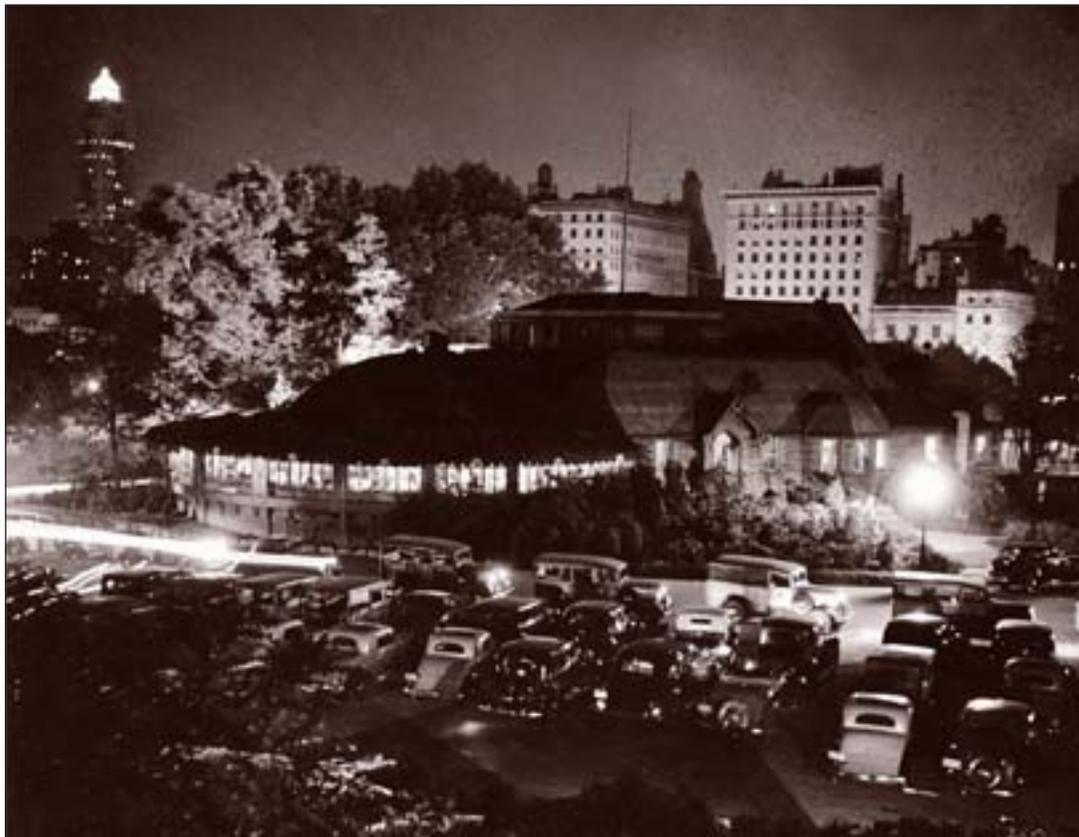
An even more contentious battle arose in 1956 with more lasting damage to Moses’s reputation. Always at pains to increase the convenience of motorists in the park, he wished to supplement the existing parking at the Tavern on the Green with the addition of another eighty spaces. A group of mothers whose children played in the area got wind of his plans. On April 20 they angrily faced down the bulldozer operators beginning to clear the site of vegetation. Two days later they received the backing of the Citizens Union. Undeterred, Moses denied the mothers’ request for a public hearing and, as a sop, offered their children the right to roller skate on the parking lot before 5 p.m. On April 25, when the women arrived to protest, they found thirty workmen and twenty-five policemen with orders to restrain them from entering the area, which had been cordoned off with snow fencing overnight.

The press, which for years had been in thrall to Moses’s powerful public relations machinery, now saw the mothers up against the bulldozers as more than good copy: this was a story that showed that the parks hero they had lauded, the man who had been idolized by the public for so long, had feet of clay. The April 26 *New York Times* revealed that “Commissioner Moses, though he did not personally supervise operations, commanded one bulldozer, one power shovel, two dump trucks, pneumatic drills, charges of dynamite, gasoline chain saws, pickaxes, shovels, axes, hatchets, and ropes.” One mother was forcibly restrained by a policeman as a workman finished hacking down a

tree, other women wept, and photographers took pictures of the scene. While Moses brushed off the controversy as an inconsequential flap over a mere half-acre and a few trees, his publicity went from bad to worse. Better connected than the poor whose neighborhoods he displaced by slum clearance projects elsewhere, the mothers had lawyer friends to help them obtain an injunction halting work pending a judicial hearing.

While Moses was on vacation, the opposition swelled. More reasons were found to oppose his heretofore unassailable authority over all parkland – authority he had helped write into the city charter. Recalling one of his motives for tearing down the Casino in 1934, opponents argued that Tavern on the Green was a pricey restaurant that average park visitors could not afford to patronize. Moreover, parking spaces that benefited a private concessionaire were a questionable use of public parkland. A taxpayers’ suit was filed. When Moses returned, he learned that the city’s corporation counsel, Peter Campbell Brown, had worked out an arrangement with the mothers’ attorney, Louis N. Field, to delay the case until the furor had subsided and Moses could announce that he was building a playground instead of a parking lot on the site. On July 18 the *Times* ran a story under the galling headline “Moses Yields to Mothers after Litigation,” quoting Field’s winner’s compliment: “Bob Moses has gone overboard and is going all out to do the right thing.” This was a public relations blow from which Moses’s image as a great park builder never recovered.

Two other humiliating defeats lay ahead. In 1954 Moses allowed Joseph Papp (1921–1991), the founder of the New York Shakespeare Festival, to hold performances in the park, but after agreeing to support the construction of a permanent summer theater, Moses subsequently backed away. Stuart Constable, the man whom he had appointed as the executive director of the parks department, started a smear campaign based on Papp’s suspected communism (Papp had earlier refused to testify at a hearing by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives). Moses felt



Central Park Casino, September 1935. Moses tore down the Casino two years later and replaced it with the Mary Harriman Rumsey Playground. At the same time he converted the sheepfold adjacent to the Sheep Meadow into Tavern on the Green.

compelled to support Constable, and he now tried to block the project through a series of bureaucratic and budgetary maneuvers designed to make the theater, which he had originally been willing to fund with city money, unaffordable for Papp's shoe-string organization. Papp, a child of the slums, was a skilled street fighter with a passionately democratic vision: free Shakespeare. He was able to garner extraordinarily favorable press, and like the playground mothers, he took Moses to court. Philanthropist George Delacorte decided to come to the rescue, and once more litigation was averted. On January 25, 1961, Newbold Morris (1902–1966), Moses's successor as parks commissioner, accepted the philanthropist's unsolicited gift of \$150,000, the balance needed to supplement the \$225,000 appropriation approved by the Board of Estimate. On June 18, 1962, the new 2,500-seat outdoor Delacorte Theater, situated beside the Belvedere Lake (today called Turtle Pond), opened with a benefit production of "The Merchant of Venice." The funds collected would support the summer's free performances. Papp declared the event a people's victory, and Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. (1910–1991) praised Papp's persistence.

In 1960 Moses made his last stand in Central Park in defense of a proposed gift from Huntington Hartford (b. 1911), the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) heir. Hartford wanted to build a café in the southeast corner of the park, and Moses agreed to accept architect Edward Durrell Stone's design, "a flat-topped double-decker of concrete, with sliding glass doors that can be opened on the park side and along the 59th Street sidewalk." Intended to serve five hundred diners, it was 240 feet long by 40 feet wide. Four civic organizations protested, but Moses reminded them that the city charter gave the parks commissioner the authority to accept gifts without the approval of any other city official. Nevertheless, Walter Hoving, the chairman of Tiffany & Co., and a group of fellow merchants filed a law suit protesting the park incursion. Giving voice to the growing notion of Moses as an autocrat, Hoving declared: "Some officials in office a long time seem to get a sovereignty complex. . . . Not only do they feel they know better than the rest of us taxpayers, but they ride roughshod sometimes, notably Robert Moses, whose fine work for many years I have applauded, but whose habitual arrogance, particularly in this situation, I decry."

By this time Moses was on the verge of retiring as parks commissioner in order to serve as coordinator of the

1964 World's Fair in Flushing Meadow Park. Morris and his successors were therefore left to deal with the café fight and the building of the park's last large-scale Moses-era recreation facility, the Lasker Rink and Pool. With regard to the café, the Court of Appeals, which had long upheld the authority over all parks-related matters given to the parks commissioner by the City Charter, did not do so now. On April 27, 1962, it handed down an affirmative verdict for the prosecution that marked the beginning of citizen protection of the park as a scenic landscape.

Hartford, however, did not give up his dream of bringing a Parisian-style sidewalk café to New York. He directed Stone to modify the design in the hope that the project might still go forward, but the election of John V. Lindsay (1921–2000) as mayor in 1965 sealed its doom. A month after Lindsay took office, his brash parks commissioner, Thomas Pearsall Field Hoving (b. 1931), son of Walter Hoving, declared, "We just have to be resolute about some things. One, two, three – bang!" Hartford complained, "Moses suggested the location, and he is a very great man. . . . He knew a hell of a lot better than anyone else." Hoving tried to persuade Hartford to redirect his \$800,000-dollar gift to his own pet project, the building of twenty vest-pocket parks, but Hartford declined, and on March 4, 1966, Hoving asked the city comptroller to return the money.

By contrast, at the opposite end of the park, the \$2.6 million combined rink and pool proposed as a memorial to Albert and Florina Lasker's sister Loula, for which the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation had provided \$600,000, went forward. It was poorly sited in at the mouth of the Loch, the stream that empties into the Meer after flowing from the Pool through the scenic ravine traversing the northern end of the park. Although it would prove as popular in the summer as the other big, well-managed swimming pools Moses had lavished on the city and in the winter give skaters a less crowded alternative to the Wollman Rink, this intrusion presented a dire contrast to the area's sylvan scenery. This time, however, the protests of park preservationists were ineffectual. When the rink was dedicated on December 21, 1966, Mayor Lindsay and Thomas Hoving, the self-declared enemy of park encroachments, took a whirl on the ice.

### After Moses: 1965–1978

As Lindsay's first parks commissioner, Hoving, who had gained his appointment by writing a white paper on parks during the mayoral campaign, trumpeted the dawn of a new day, saying that his administration would make "an all-out attack on a kind of repetitive, conservative design associated with the parks department since the Depression days of the W.P.A. that critics have alternately called naïve or Neanderthal." Moses, who was more used to being insulting than insulted, was incensed when Hoving told him to his face, "Your design is absolutely appalling and you never gave a damn for the community." The former curator of medieval art and soon-to-be director of the Metropolitan Museum, proclaimed: "We've got to get back to the concept that a park is a work of art." To further this perspective he appointed an architectural historian, Henry Hope Reed (b. 1916), as curator of Central Park, an unsalaried advisory position. "Moses men" not protected by their civil service status were dismissed, and in their place Hoving assembled a staff whose ages ranged from twenty-four to thirty-four, his own age. "We're boiling up a creative pot, an indication of a new era," he exclaimed.

While previously the only women in the Arsenal were secretaries, Mary Perot Nichols, an editor of the *Village Voice*, was hired to manage press relations. Hoving also hired Henry Stern, a thirty-year-old lawyer who would one day become parks commissioner, to serve as executive director and counsel with the mandate "to bring back the opportunity for imagination, taste, and creative design that existed in the nineteenth century." Hoving persuaded Delacorte's Make New York Beautiful Foundation to underwrite a contract for new signage with Milton Glaser's Push Pin Studios. He invited Pratt, Columbia, and other schools of architecture and landscape architecture to engage students in studio projects involving innovations in park design. Hoving also met with community leaders in East Harlem to say that from now on there would be town hall meetings to hear what kind of parks people wanted.

Lindsay's and Hoving's most significant contribution to Central Park was to initiate a ban on automobiles during certain hours of the day. Announced as an experiment on March 1, 1966, this set off a protracted fight with the traffic commissioner, Henry A. Barnes. In April Barnes agreed to compromise by permitting traffic closings for the sole purpose of bike races. This concession, which was enthusiastically supported in newspaper editorials, drove the traffic agency, the Automobile Club of New York, and the Taxi and Limousine

Commission repeatedly back to the Parks Department conference table. The environmentalists' goal to relieve the vegetation of heavy doses of carbon monoxide gained increased support. Over the years the park was progressively closed to automobile traffic for longer hours until the current policy was achieved: weekends year-round and weekdays in warm weather, except during the morning and late-afternoon rush hours.

Hoving's happenings, as they were called, were another matter. Thanks to Nichols's frequent press releases and Hoving's flair for colorful statements, these events became topics of the moment. During the same period the *Times* was supporting the traffic closings, it carried the headline:

OLD CENTRAL PARK WILL ROCK 'N' ROLL  
*Go-Go Concerts and Dancing to Discotheque Combos  
Planned for Summer*  
*Hoving Thinks Attractions Will Draw Teen-Agers  
and Make Park Areas Safer*

Always ready to direct a jab at Moses, Hoving said, "We're going to open it up and have a little bit of – how shall we call it – Central Park à Go Go. . . . No longer are we going to restrict ourselves to square dancing and ballroom dancing." He began meeting with professional pop concert booking agents and soon announced that Central Park would host "the largest outdoor music festival in the world."

During the summer of 1966 and in subsequent years, Wollman Rink operated as the venue for rock 'n' roll, jazz, folk, pop, and ethnic music concerts sponsored by Rheingold Breweries. Overlooking the objections of his Central Park curator, Hoving played on the public's now justifiable

fear that the park had become unsafe at night: "It's my responsibility to make it so exciting that people will come there in droves, and that also is protection." He did not foresee the extent to which his "attractions to draw teen-agers" would stimulate the consumption of alcohol and the sale of drugs in the park nor the effect this would have on the park's landscape and safety.

Happenings could be artistic as well as musical. On May 16, 1966, the *Times* reported a Hoving Happening featuring a 105-yard-long canvas set up below the Metropolitan Museum of Art for a "cartoon performance." As he doodled a caricature of himself over the slogan "Three Cheers for Fred L. Olmsted," Hoving cried, "It's marvelous. It lets people come in and smash away." At such high-profile occasions it did not seem to matter that vandals were smashing away in more destructive ways elsewhere in the park. Without Moses's control over the park police, rules were no longer enforced and muggings and other more serious crimes were on the rise. Hoving's cartoon performance anticipated the avant garde's appreciation of graffiti as a form of public art.

At the West 67th Street Playground, site of the victory of the mothers to save their corner of the park, Hoving was able to abolish the conventional slides, swings, and seesaws of the standard Moses playground. A gift from the Estée and Joseph

Lauder Foundation allowed him to hire the architect Richard Dattner to design an "adventure playground." With characteristic anti-Moses disdain, he pronounced it "a radical departure from the junk we've had all these years."

Like Moses, Hoving learned during his fourteen months in office that big dreams for transforming Central Park can go down in defeat. He had resigned as parks commissioner to become the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art by the time his proposal to build a \$6.4 million stable with a three-hundred-seat

arena on the Great Lawn and a thousand-seat below-ground arena was aborted. The task of championing the stable fell to his successor, August Heckscher (1913–1997), a former consultant to President Kennedy on the arts. After Heckscher took office in 1967, he declared that the project would "capture the ceremonial significance of equestrian sports." Defenders of the park fought against turning the area over to polo players. Heckscher continued to promote the below-ground arena designated for training police horses, but by 1970, with dwindling city funds for capital projects, the proposal was dropped, and opponents were able to celebrate another victory in the fight to stem encroachments on Central Park's landscape.

Heckscher continued to pursue the course set by Hoving, and the park remained the venue of choice for mass events. Nor was he opposed to happenings. One of his first initiatives in office was to discuss the possibility of an archaeological "occurrence" with the Israeli government. "The idea," he said, "is to erect a mound and fill it with several thousand shards of ancient pottery, statuary, and glass, which the Israeli government is contributing, and then let kids dig for it." This never took place, but many other events did. Ron Delsner, the impresario of the Rheingold Central Park Music Festival, staged over sixty programs during the summer of 1967. With overflow audiences on the slopes around the Wollman Rink five nights a week, erosion took its toll, leaving only bare dirt patterned by runnels from the rain.

Yet the concerts continued. Heckscher disapproved of flag burning by anti-Vietnam War protestors in the park but was in favor of other kinds of events: an Easter "yippee" event; a kite-flying event; a Ringling Brothers parade to announce the circus coming to town; "be-ins," mass rallies, concerts, and other large-scale events on the Sheep Meadow; and a contingent of the Poor People's March on Washington. A 1969 New Year's Eve party for 2,000 offered fireworks, rock music by the Mighty Mellotones, and dancing at the Bethesda Fountain. There was even a mass vigil on July 20, 1969, the eve of the moon landing. "I'm asking everybody to come dressed in white," Heckscher announced, "and we're working with the broadcasting companies to have live TV or huge screens, so great crowds can participate in this wonderful moment."

Because of mass events and unregulated sports use, by this time the Sheep Meadow was a dust bowl. In 1966 Restaurant



Vietnam War protester,  
Central Park, August 9, 1969.



By the mid-1970s, Central Park's meadows and lawns were bare, compacted dirt, with standing water because of the collapsed drainage system.

fast-eroding surrounding slopes caused it to cease operation. The Terrace came to resemble a bazaar, populated by illegal vendors hawking a variety of merchandise. Its balustrade finials were knocked off, and the intricately carved stairway side panels were vandalized and slathered with graffiti. The boathouse on the Harlem Meer that Moses had built in the mid-1940s became a restaurant in 1973, but shaky finances forced it to close the following year, leaving the building prey to vandals. It soon became a charred ruin.

Without Moses's indomitable ability to face down the heads of other city agencies, Heckscher allowed a permit to be granted to the Department of Environmental Protection in 1970 to dig a shaft and construct a valve chamber for New York City's Water Tunnel No. 3 on 1.2 acres of Cedar Hill, a favorite

Associates was given a concession permit to turn the Bethesda Terrace into an al fresco café, which continued operation until 1974 when rampant drug dealing on the

benches, lights, and play equipment; trees left unpruned with roots exposed by erosion; compacted soil incapable of supporting anything other than the hardiest weeds; ubiquitous graffiti – all were the results of the park's go-go years. Nor would things get better during the mayoralty of Abraham Beame as the city approached bankruptcy and entered a protracted state of fiscal crisis.

With increasing cuts in the parks budget as the heavy spending of the Lindsay years was curtailed, prestige drained from the office of commissioner, and the job was handed over to a series of career civil-service employees. The administration was staffed through patronage appointments dictated by city hall, and the playground attendants disappeared, as did the trained gardeners. The Central Park police precinct abandoned its policy of enforcing park rules and regulations, and officers in squad cars patrolled only the drives. Interviewed in 1975, Richard M. Clurman, the former chief of correspondents of the Time-Life News Service who had served as commissioner during the last year of the Lindsay administration, summed up the situation, "You've got to start managing people and equipment much more. Park workers have no goals. They have no targets. There is simply no management of routine work."

sledding slope near Fifth Avenue and 78th Street. Hemlocks were planted to partially screen the wooden fence that protected the work site, but this did not alter that fact that the north side of the hill remained off-limits to the public for more than twenty years as construction slowly progressed. In the early 1980s the park was further penetrated below ground at 63rd Street and Fifth Avenue with the boring of a new fifteen-hundred-foot subway tunnel.

Budget cuts exacerbated the park's woes at this time, and the Lindsay administration began to use funds from the city's capital budget to cover the operating costs of the parks. The workforce diminished through attrition as employees retired and their positions were left vacant. Management was virtually suspended as the plethora of events and the lack of a policy for rules enforcement demoralized the remaining workers. Broken

### Restoring the Olmsted and Moses Park: 1979–Today

The election of Edward I. Koch (b. 1924) in 1978 as mayor signaled hope for the Central Park's rescue. Koch's first parks commissioner, Gordon J. Davis (b. 1941), believed the park to be a great work of landscape art and called it "one of the greatest achievements of American civilization, clearly in the same category as 'Moby Dick' or the invention of jazz," adding that its real glory lay in its role as the city's most democratic public space. To put the park in the forefront of his administration's agenda, the commissioner decided to place Central Park's operations under a single individual rather than the department's chain of command. Because I was one of the principal advocates of the park's restoration, he appointed me to the newly created position of Central Park administrator in 1979. The mayor and commissioner subsequently endorsed my idea of a citizen-led not-for-profit organization acting as a day-to-day management participant with city government, and in 1980 the Central Park Conservancy was formed.

The initial mission of the conservancy was "to make Central Park clean, safe, and beautiful," and one of its first acts was to undertake a comprehensive management and restoration plan. The plan prepared by the conservancy's landscape designers and consultants between 1982 and 1985 analyzed, inventoried, and recorded in words and graphics the condition of trees, lawns, meadows, architecture, soil, bodies of water, bridle trails, paths, and drives. By looking at the park as a unitary work of landscape design and at the activities and patterns of use by its visitors, we were able to chart the repairs needed to restore its extensive infrastructure of roadways, paths, cast iron bridges, stone arches, drains, and conduits. We also analyzed the park as an interrelated series of scenic experiences and mapped its vistas and view lines. Its landscape had not been seen in this holistic way since Olmsted and Vaux's preparation of the Greensward Plan in 1857. We learned from our user study that most visitors come to the park simply to walk and relax. While we did not propose removing any of Moses's

recreational facilities, the days of parceling the park into discrete areas dedicated to specific recreational uses was over.



Harlem Meer Boathouse, 1980s. Notice the heavily engineered Moses shoreline bordered by silt and debris. Parts of the copper roof have been removed by vandals, and the interior has been gutted by fire.

Like Olmsted and Vaux, we saw commitment to ongoing management as essential. Strategies for erosion control; the creation of horticultural crews for pruning, planting, and turf care; and the assignment of section supervisors and zone gardeners accountable for the maintenance of specific areas – all of these management innovations needed to proceed in conjunction with individual restoration projects. The plan also called for renewing standards of cleanliness throughout the park, including those for comfort stations, which often stank of urine, were hardly ever supplied with toilet paper, and were frequently used for illicit sex. A special graffiti removal crew was established to eliminate 50,000 square yards of accumulated graffiti and erase fresh tags as fast as they appeared. The cleaning and repatinating of bronze sculpture and the repair of broken fountains were additional means of signaling of a new level of park care.

It was clear from the beginning of our efforts that the management and restoration plan had a historic preservationist bias. Yet many Moses facilities were still immensely popular and heavily used. Robert Moses's park was now a permanent layer on top of the original scenic park, and the plan necessarily respected both. Returning ball fields to Olmstedian meadows or removing any of the park's perimeter playgrounds would have met with vehement opposition from their constituencies. The challenge for the restoration planners was to synthesize two opposing philosophies and aesthetics of park design into a reasonably harmonious whole.

Whereas Hoving and Heckscher, like Moses, treated playgrounds as independent elements within the overall park landscape, we attempted to meld them into the rest of the park by lowering their tall, cage-like fences. The resodding of the Sheep Meadow signaled a renewed appreciation of the Greensward Plan. Henceforth it was used for sunbathing, kite flying, Frisbee throwing, and other forms of passive recreation instead of active sports and mass events. The Great Lawn's ball fields were not removed in order to reinstate Gilmore Clarke's original design, but their resodded outfields were merged into a single sheet of grass. Surrounding the Chess and Checkers House with a pergola and commissioning the artist Richard Haas to paint a trompe l'oeil mural on the exterior of the Mineral Springs Pavilion were further attempts to harmonize Moses's architecture with the park's scenery.

Endorsing citizen opposition to Moses's high-handed approach to city planning, the Lindsay administration had created local community planning boards, five of which have boundaries contiguous to Central Park. All park projects are therefore subject to community board review. In addition, because Central Park was granted landmark status in 1974,

projects must be submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for design review.

The preservationist spirit of the times helped further the attention now being given to the park's long-neglected original architecture. In 1982 Vaux's Dairy was reopened as a visitor center after its loggia and high-ceilinged interior were restored. In 1984 private donors helped fund the \$3.8 million renovation of the ornamental stonework at the Bethesda Terrace and the resodding and replanting of its badly eroded surrounding slopes. The circular carriage turnaround at Cherry Hill, which Moses had converted to a parking lot, was turned back into parkland. Both the Bethesda Fountain and the Cherry Hill Fountain were repaired and made to flow once more. The abandoned Belvedere, once occupied by U.S. Weather Service meteorologists, was rescued from near destruction by vandals. Its Victorian Gothic roof and terrace loggias were rebuilt, and its interior was made into an environmental education center. A small concession building, designed as a contemporary interpretation of Vaux's style, was constructed on the foundation of the Ballplayers House, an original park building demolished in 1969 after a fire. The conservancy's restoration crew built two rustic shelters like the ones that once crowned the park's large outcrops of Manhattan schist. The Moses-era elements in the north end that were restored or replaced include the Conservatory Garden, the park's first endowed landscape, and the Dana Discovery Center for nature education near the site of the vandal-destroyed Moses boathouse beside the Harlem Meer. In addition, the conservancy oversaw the renovation of all twenty-two of Moses's perimeter playgrounds and the transformation of the Heckscher, Great Lawn, and North Meadow ball fields from compacted bare dirt to well-drained, well-maintained clay infields and grass outfields.

Many of these projects were realized during the administration of Henry J. Stern (b. 1935), who served for seven years under Koch and eight years under Rudolph W. Giuliani (b. 1934), longer than any other New York City parks commissioner except Moses. On January 19, 1984, the fiftieth anniversary of Moses's appointment to that position, Stern inaugurated Parks Day, an annual celebration at the agency's headquarters in the Arsenal. Although he admired Moses as the author of the pools and other public recreation facilities he had enjoyed since boyhood, he understood the need for a parks ethos more in tune with the environmental concerns of the times.

In 1984 Stern created the Natural Resources Group to oversee the protection of wetlands and other ecologically important areas. He promoted the reintroduction of native plants and wildlife and initiated an environmental pledge of allegiance, which he had audiences recite at dedications and other park ceremonies. He also sought to further limit destructive mass events while

Looking south across the Great Lawn today.



staging numerous modest, playfully themed celebrations such as Dinosaur Day, which, combined with his aptitude for aphoristic quips, brought widespread publicity to his administration. To satisfy his penchant for naming, he bestowed monikers that usually bore a relation to parks and nature on staff members and friends. This made them citizens of the realm he liked to call the Emerald Empire, with Central Park being the crown jewel. A master of branding, Stern ordered new signs with the department's maple-leaf logo to be placed at several sites in the park as well as elsewhere in parks throughout the city. In addition, he installed yard arms on flagpoles in order to fly the green parks department flag and the orange and blue flag bearing the seal of New York City beneath the Star-Spangled Banner.

Stern's most important contribution to Central Park was to facilitate negotiations between the city's corporation counsel and the Central Park Conservancy's board of trustees to award full management responsibility to the conservancy. Under the terms of the contract, the conservancy raises the bulk of the funds for the park's ongoing restoration and maintenance from private sources and is given an annual appropriation

based on a percentage of the park's concession revenues received by the city's general fund. Since the park is publicly owned, final authority over policy rests with the mayor and the parks commissioner.

The career of the current parks commissioner, Adrian Benepe (b. 1957), appointed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg (b. 1942), has taken place almost entirely within the department. His administration advances the goals of the Central Park Conservancy, blending the Moses legacy with previous eras of park design.

But recently this respect for the spirit if not the letter of past intentions has come under attack by some historic preservationists who seek an exact restoration of prior buildings and landscapes rather than a fusion of the park's different layers into a unified whole. Commissioner Benepe and Douglas Blonsky, the present Central Park administrator and president of the conservancy, maintain that this freeze-frame approach is unrealistic and ignores the responsibility of park managers to accommodate a variety of contemporary and future recreational uses in a manner compatible with the park's enduring landscape.

Perhaps the firmest declaration of this "perspective mindful of Central Park's design and rich history, its precarious past and our hopes for its future" was articulated in 1981 by Commissioner Davis in a report denying Christo's application for a permit to build *The Gates*, a conceptual art work of saffron-colored banners hung from pairs of stanchions along twenty-three miles of park pathways, on the grounds that the park itself is a work of art that was for too long exploited by the organizers of mass events. In 2005, nearly twenty-five years later, Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioners Davis, Stern, and Benepe, along with supporters of the Central Park Conservancy and seven million visitors greeted the installation of *The Gates* as a welcome celebration of Central Park's rebirth.

In summary, Moses saw all parkland simply as available public open space on which to inscribe his own programmatic intentions. He demonstrated this amply by altering parts of Central Park's historic landscape in order to fulfill his single agenda of providing recreation facilities. There appears to be little danger of additional park encroachment now. Nor is it likely that any of Moses's additions to the Olmstedian landscape will be removed. We are left today, therefore, with a park that is both Greensward and Moses. As such, it is much loved and deserving of continuing responsible stewardship. – EBR

### From Playground Tot to Parks Commissioner: My Life with Robert Moses

**O**n October 12, 1937, New York City and federal officials gathered in the rotunda in Riverside Park at 79th Street overlooking a new marina, with roadway entrances and exits to the new Henry Hudson Parkway running above them. Standing at a podium in front of a fountain with jets of water streaming from the mouths of twelve bronze turtles, Robert Moses and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia officially dedicated the new Riverside Park and contiguous Henry Hudson Parkway.

The park, an extension of the original designed in the 1880s by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, was created through a massive act of civil engineering. Moses's chief consulting landscape architect, Gilmore D. Clarke, with Clinton Lloyd and Michael Rapuano, covered the New York Central Railroad tracks running along the bank of the Hudson River with millions of cubic yards of fill to create the parkway, a series of sports fields and playgrounds, and a four-mile long waterfront promenade.

Not constrained by the cost-cutting palette of WPA-approved construction materials, the Moses men, as the cadre of professionals who carried out the parks commissioner's orders were known, created a landscape where pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists could enjoy tree-lined paths, granite and bluestone staircases, and other elegant architectural features similar to those found in the European parks and gardens originally built by kings and nobles.

This was the Riverside Park that I first encountered in the early 1960s when my family moved to the Upper West Side. I played in the lower level of the two-tiered playground at 97th Street where there were see-saws, slides, swings, sandboxes, and a huge oval spray shower basin – standard equipment in the six hundred playgrounds Moses installed throughout the city. On hot summer days, cold water from upstate reservoirs brought relief and delight. Large London plane trees grown in parks department nurseries shaded the playground with their canopies of gently rustling leaves. To ensure we did not

destroy the place or each other, the playground attendants who managed the handsome stone-clad buildings that doubled as storage areas and comfort stations brought out knock-hockey boards and other game equipment. It was still an era when parents let their children go to playgrounds alone; my mother, Jagna, would send my sister and me across the street to play after school, then lean out the window and holler for us when it was time to come home.

All across the city in that era, the Moses legacy of a well-cared-for municipal park system was still evident, although it was beginning to be apparent that the maintenance staff was becoming depleted and demoralized. My father, Barry, an architect and city planner, took us on long walks through Central Park. He would point out the ornamental cast-iron bridges and explain the genius of the park's design, while lamenting the eroding landscape and broken park benches, many of which were mere concrete skeletons missing their wood slats. The huge swimming pools built by Moses had not yet been closed, as many would be in the following years. As a white child from the Upper West Side, I was only a minor curiosity when I went swimming with black and Puerto Rican kids in the nearby pools of Harlem. The public beaches Moses had created at Coney Island, Rockaway, Pelham Bay, and on Long Island were accessible by mass transit or crowded family car. I remember their wide, flower-edged paths thronged with people of all ages, huge stone-clad buildings with ornamental cupolas, and majestic breezeways leading to campus-like open-air changing areas. Even a young

boy could not help but be stirred by the monumental architecture – a blend of the Beaux-Arts and modernist styles. Moses must have wanted you to imagine yourself entering an equivalent of one of the great public baths of ancient Rome.



Commissioner Adrian Benepe, age 9, in Central Park, 1966. Notice the broken pavement, bare eroded ground plane and standing water due to the collapsed drainage system.

By the time I was in high school, the decline of the city, particularly of its public realm, had intensified. Riding the subways to the Bronx every day, I first noticed “Taki 183,” the tag of the omnipresent vandal who initiated the graffiti plague that spread like a virus through the entire transit system. The parks were now in dire trouble. Even Central Park, the flagship of the system and once the model for other cities, had descended to the level of a late-night television punch line. Its lawns were dust bowls, its Victorian-Gothic structures deteriorated beyond repair, its walls and monuments smeared with graffiti. Muggers and drug dealers ruled its pathways. Elsewhere, neighborhood playgrounds had lost their attendants. All signs of routine maintenance were completely gone.

In the summer of 1973, I got a job as a seasonal park helper assigned to East River Park. Reporting to work, I encountered my supervisor, a man who personified the near collapse in morale of the once-proud parks department staff. He told me about all the established practices for shirking work: arriving late, taking a long lunch hour, and leaving early. He gave me a sodden, reeking, canvas garbage-collection bag and a stabber and sent me out to pick up what appeared to be a mountain of



litter. Then he went back to sleep in the recesses of the park house and told me to warn him if I saw the foreman coming. I spent Monday to Thursday sweeping up the thousands of beer cans left by weekend softball players and, as instructed by the supervisor, dumped them into the sinkholes on the East River Promenade, where they floated out with the tide, part of the flotsam of a decaying city.

When I returned to New York City from college in 1979, I took a paying job at the Port Authority bus station and an unpaid internship at a local weekly newspaper. One day my editor sent me on assignment, saying there was a new administration in the parks department that was up to something interesting. I met with Mayor Edward I. Koch’s recently appointed commissioner, Gordon Davis, and was then introduced to Betsy Barlow, a park advocate and landscape historian for whom Davis had created the new position of Central Park administrator. They laid out for me a vision of a restored Central Park. Given the state things were in, their dream seemed like a hallucination. But I was hooked. At Betsy’s suggestion I signed up as a park ranger, a corps of young men and women serving as information officers and environmental educators. I did not realize it at the time, but we represented Commissioner Davis’s effort to establish an alternative workforce to the one tainted by past practices. Today, in addition to me, the senior management of the parks department includes at least a dozen former park rangers.

Back then we saw ourselves as acolytes of Frederick Law Olmsted, apostles of a historic preservationist philosophy. We learned to give tours of Central and Prospect Parks, highlighting their Olmstedian remains while deploring Moses’s ballfields, skating rinks, and solid brick boathouses as encroachments on the picturesque greensward. Our attitude could be summed up with this mantra: “Moses = Concrete = Permanent Recreation Facilities = Bad; Olmsted = Pastoral = Flexible Use = Good.”

But sometimes bad and good are hard to separate. What about my childhood haunt, Riverside Park, with its sweeping



staircases, graceful stone walls, and allées of London plane trees? What about the perennially popular playground where I had happily spent so much time as a child? What about the parkland covering the railroad track, making it possible for me to walk along the river’s edge? These things were clearly not “Bad Moses.”

As I stayed on at the parks department and rotated through a series of positions, I gained a much more nuanced picture of the Moses legacy. When Henry J. Stern was appointed commissioner in 1983, he put me in charge of press relations. Stern, a career public servant, was fortunate to be in office when New York was enjoying an improved economy and Mayor Koch was leading municipal government out of its mid-1970s fiscal crisis. It was now possible to designate funds

Riverside Park and the Henry Hudson Parkway, September 1937.

within the capital budget to park restoration projects.

Like Moses, Stern enjoys swimming and has a particularly high regard for the parks department's public swimming pools and bath houses, most of which had fallen into such severe disrepair that they were either closed or in danger of being closed when he became commissioner. Working with Mayor Koch and cultivating the good will of other elected officials, he was able to secure capital funds to restore all of the great Moses-era pools. As I accompanied him to groundbreakings and ribbon-cuttings, I began to develop an appreciation for their scale, architectural inventiveness, and playful design touches.

One day in 1983 while visiting my stepgrandmother, I discovered by chance a cabinet full of photo albums of the many works, especially the public works, of her first husband, Aymar Embury II, Moses's chief consulting architect for thirty years. Excitedly, I turned page after page of glossy black-and-white photographs of soaring bridges, sweeping parkways, majestic pools, and golf houses that looked like neo-Georgian mansions. Delighted with this find, I worked with my parks department colleagues to organize an exhibition, "The Art and Architecture of the Moses Era," in the gallery of the Arsenal.

The photographs and dramatic pencil renderings we placed on the walls drew many old Moses men back to the Arsenal for an opening night reception on January 19, 1984, the 50th anniversary of Moses's appointment as parks commissioner. They came with stories of the days when they had worked



Orchard Beach, July 1937.

around the clock during the 1930s, an unparalleled period of park creation and expansion. Among them was a Moses woman, Marguerite Haynes Embury, Aymar's daughter-in-law, wife of his architect son Edward Coe Embury, and, with Betty Sprout, one of a small handful of female landscape designers commissioned by Moses to create gardens in public parks. For that one night, Moses was almost forgiven the destruction of East Tremont with the Cross-Bronx Expressway and his insensitive indifference to the deterioration of the Olmsted-Vaux legacy.

In the five years since I was appointed commissioner by Michael R. Bloomberg, a mayor who appreciates the value of parks to communities and to a healthy economy, the agency

has begun its largest expansion and rebuilding program since the Moses era. Almost \$3 billion has been allocated for parks in the city's capital budget as part of Mayor Bloomberg's plan for the sustainable growth of New York City to accommodate one million additional residents by 2030. We are working on three fronts: the ongoing preservation and restoration of historic parks, the continued rebuilding of Moses's recreational facilities, and the creation of new parks. In addition, we have begun planting one million new street trees.

The park system has gained approximately 3,000 acres during the Bloomberg administration. This includes 2,000 that were added with the closing of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island. The new park envisioned there by Field Operations's winning entry in a design competition is slated to be built over the next thirty years. Another winning design-competition entry, also by Field Operations in association with the architectural firm of Diller Scofidio + Renfro, is guiding the conversion of the High Line, an elevated rail track once used to carry goods from Hudson River piers to warehouses in Lower Manhattan, into a linear park. My staff and I are working with the Empire State Development Corporation to realize Brooklyn Bridge Park, designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates, and we have participated in the efforts to create a new park on Governor's Island since its decommissioning as a Coast Guard base. First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris, who oversees the mayor's design excellence program, has encouraged us to hire the most talented architects and landscape architects practicing today, and Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff has made the creation of new parks the cornerstone of neighborhood development. Moreover, the city's own enormously able design and construction staff is building scores of new parks.

Riverside Park is still my family's neighborhood park. When I go there today, I realize that this great Moses-era creation was a harbinger of the current transformation of the entire Hudson River edge of Manhattan into a series of highway-related waterfront parks. It is a great satisfaction to see that the same kind of careful planning and attention to design details that Moses lavished on Riverside Park is being devoted to them today. When I reflect on these things, I am aware of what a privilege it is to be a public servant responsible for the protection, maintenance, and development of the finest park system in the world. – Adrian Benepe

**View from a Tower in the Park:  
At Home in Peter Cooper Village**

*After New York State's 1942 Redevelopment Companies Law, which expanded the powers of eminent domain to cover what was then referred to as slum clearance, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia put Robert Moses in charge of developing two adjacent middle-income housing complexes called Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company became the developer and long-term owner of the project.*

*Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village may be considered forerunners of what are known as Title I slum clearance projects, middle-income housing financed by a combination of private investment and government tax incentives. They and the slightly later New York City Housing Authority projects for poorer residents are variants of the urban planning paradigm associated with the influential modernist architect Le Corbusier. High-rise buildings, sometimes cruciform in plan, are set apart in parklike superblocs. They serve many residents on limited acreage, while admitting health-giving light and air and providing open space for recreation.*

*In her famous 1961 book, The Life and Death of Great American Cities, Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) castigated Robert Moses for this type of housing, initiating a reaction to what many people began to see as wholesale destruction of an older, more tightly woven neighborhood fabric that had social virtues unappreciated by modernists. The burgeoning historic preservation movement soon advocated landmark designation for entire neighborhoods as well as important individual buildings. At the same time, the waiting lists for Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town remained long. People who were able to afford apartments elsewhere in the city or homes in the suburbs still sought admittance. Modest rents controlled by law accounted for the continuing popularity of these pioneering housing projects. But there were other reasons too.*

*What was it like to live in a Moses-style, middle-income tower in the park? Carol Herselle Krinsky, professor of art and architectural history at New York University, describes her experience as a resident of Peter Cooper Village since 1963 and the changes taking place since Met Life sold Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town to Tishman-Speyer, a real estate development and investment firm.*

**N**ot all towers in a park are the same. Certainly, many towers in the park have too much tower and too little park, owing to financial considerations. Stingy maintenance budgets result in poor upkeep. In low-income premises that may be illegally overcrowded, imperfectly maintained, inadequately guarded, and home to many tenants under financial and personal stress, the high-rise solution has proven comparatively cheap to build on tight budgets, but costly to operate in both fiscal and human terms. By contrast, Stuyvesant Town and adjacent Peter Cooper Village, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's partially subsidized 1947 planned middle-income residential developments, are havens of safety, greenery, and good construction. Nevertheless, Lewis Mumford, one of America's greatest writers on city planning, was disappointed that they were a group of towers in a park. Of course, he did not foresee the beauty of their now mature trees nor compare their amenities with available alternatives. Mumford's garden city ideal could be only partially realized at a time when low rents were essential to meet the urgent demand for veterans' housing and providers sought an almost-guaranteed return on investment.

Built on the site of New York's Gashouse District (so-named because of the large gas tanks that once occupied the area), Stuyvesant Town, the larger project, occupies eighty acres from 14th to 20th Streets, while immediately to the north, Peter Cooper Village lies between 20th and 23rd Streets. The traffic-free superblocs comprising both projects contain 110 buildings, 11,200 apartments, and a population of over 25,000. Richmond Shreve and Irwin Clavan, architects, and Gilmore D. Clarke, landscape architect, planned them in 1943 as a slum clearance project financed through private investment aided by tax benefits. Unfortunately, Met Life explicitly excluded African-Americans until 1950 despite opposition by residents who demonstrated for equal access. In most other respects Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village have worked well for sixty years.

In 1963 my husband and I felt fortunate to be accepted as Peter Cooper tenants from a long waiting list. The population of 25,000

then included many of the first residents who moved in from 1947 to 1949: civil servants, hospital staff, insurance company employees, teachers, optometrists, United Nations personnel, and people in other middle-class positions. We found life in Stuyvesant Town or Peter Cooper Village to be as convenient and pleasant as anyone could expect for a moderate rent. It has been, in fact, far better than that.

Design has been an important factor. Living in apartment houses that do not conform to the alignment of the surrounding streets frees people psychologically, and the separation of pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the parklike superblocs relieves them from the traffic hazards and noise experienced in the rest of the Manhattan grid. Sound construction and high maintenance standards make a difference as well. There are kitchens with windows, well-maintained laundry rooms, no floods from faulty appliances upstairs, only a rare cockroach, mouse, or rat – and this in New York City where vermin flourish. A squad of private patrolmen deters criminals; the crime rate remains low. There are green lawns, flowering trees, shrubs, beds of daffodils, and curving paths between the tall buildings. Children enjoy the playgrounds that dot the property, and in fine weather, people stroll, parade their newborns, relax on benches, and greet their friends. In the seven months when New York City's trees have leaves, there is a pleasing contrast between the green or russet foliage and the red brick

Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town.



apartment houses that mitigates the monotonous simplicity of the structures.

Good security is another important reason why people enjoy living in Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town. Until Met Life's recent sale of the properties to Tishman-Speyer, a global real estate investor, there was a large staff, first to vet prospective tenants before they were allowed to rent, then to process requests for repairs and to maintain the buildings and grounds. The process was similar to that used by the New York City Housing Authority to select the original public housing tenants, and it favored intact families. The owner checked references, inspected applicants' previous apartments to ascertain their housekeeping skills, and made sure that a prospective tenant had no police record.

Much of the amenity in these projects has depended upon the character and good will of the tenants who have been willing to sign away some freedom of behavior in exchange for well-built, well-kept, rent-regulated housing near public transportation. Leases under Met Life's management specified a number of rules: No washing machines or dishwashers in apartments, no entry to the basement laundry room after 11:00 p.m., carpets or rugs required (in consideration of downstairs neighbors), no walking on the grass (a low chain barrier around all lawns made this clear), no picnics outdoors, small children allowed in playgrounds only when supervised, teenagers forbidden to climb over locked playground fences, no pets (silent ones evaded notice), and no air conditioners (later, residents of Peter Cooper Village were allowed to install them). It is small wonder that tenants often referred to their landlord as Mother Met!

From the start, since many of the tenants were intact families of war veterans with similar incomes, there was considerable camaraderie. Mothers sent eight-year-olds to the playground, knowing there were college-age "playground teachers" who coached basketball and kept kids safe. From the earliest years, residents enjoyed potluck suppers, bridge games, and group walks for exercise. There were holiday celebrations, toddler playgroups, events sponsored by the PTAs of the neighborhood public and parochial schools, sing-alongs, art displays, blood drives, and patriotic commemorations staged with the owner's encouragement. There were paddle-tennis tournaments and Little League events. A bird-watching group perambulated the property. An annual flea market allowed tenants to dispose of outgrown children's books and baby clothes, spare dishes, and, once, a book containing Manet's etched

portrait of Baudelaire. Lifelong friendships were formed in the playgrounds among mothers as well as their children. We chatted about the best Chinese restaurant delivery service or where the children's resale shop had moved. This sounds like small town America, an anomaly in a metropolis where many people are crowded together and consequently maintain a respectful anonymity. Yet here we found that neighborliness and urban individuality could live side by side.

By the mid-1990s, however, Met Life's outsourcing of management had altered the character and appearance of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village. Further changes caused by their recent sale to Tishman-Speyer, which is now advertising them as "two iconic properties," are underway. Lobbies have new marble revetments, but their floors are no longer washed daily. The new management pounces upon vacated apartments, changing their kitchens and bathrooms (more marble there), making these major capital improvements to free the units from rent regulation. Electronic front-door mechanisms requiring identification cards have been installed, provoking widespread tenant protests. A small stone monument has disappeared from the grounds; its plaque had praised Frederick Ecker, president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company when these projects were conceived. His words vanished along with his portrait, and no wonder, because they quoted his belief that middle-class people ought to have somewhere decent to live in Manhattan. Outside my window maples were cut down, and though they may have been ailing, I find the shrubs that have replaced them unsightly. Contemporary playground equipment has been substituted for tired old swings, seesaws, and monkey bars, but most startling to tenants who had dutifully kept off the lawns, the new regime has taken away the low chain barriers. Now there are young families with babies crawling on the grass, sunbathers, and people tromping on a landscape Met Life formerly kept pristine.

With a huge commercial sign on the side of a building advertising "luxury" housing in what we knew as middle-class units, we longtime residents wonder about the future character of our community. It is unlikely that former standards for tenant selection are being maintained when the scent of marijuana wafts through a corridor from a market-rate apartment. We puzzle over other social changes reflected in the alterations to our familiar environment and worry whether the city will allow the new owners to build market-rate housing on the lawns. Or will they become stewards of these desirable towers in a park? What can we tell from their website, clearly meant to attract and inform luxury-level tenants? At least its address is [aparkrunsthroughit.com](http://aparkrunsthroughit.com). – Carol Herselle Krinsky

## Robert Caro and Robert Moses Redux

*For forty years the mayors of New York City and the governors of New York State were beholden to Robert Moses because he was uniquely capable of delivering a plethora of politically popular recreation facilities; a network of parkways, bridges, and highways; a host of middle-income housing projects; Lincoln Center; and two world's fairs. And, for the past thirty-three years, Robert Caro's magisterial, Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (1974), which tells the story of how Moses achieved this remarkable urban transformation, has been the definitive text on the subject, assigned in more than two hundred colleges and universities and with annual sales of over 10,000 copies. A recent exhibition *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York and its companion volume of scholarly essays, have helped bring Moses's extraordinary achievements to the attention of a new generation of urbanists and architectural historians. What has been the effect of these two portrayals of Robert Moses's career on one another and our perception of the Moses legacy? Based on attendance at a conference organized by curator Hilary Ballon, professor of architectural history at Columbia University, and a subsequent interview with Caro, the editor of Site/Lines attempts to find an answer.**

Like his multi-volume biography of Lyndon B. Johnson, Robert Caro's *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* is a study of the arrogation of power by a single individual and its effect on society. By contrast Robert Moses's *Public Works: A Dangerous Trade*, a compendium of speeches, editorials, official letters, newspaper clippings, and reminiscences published four years before, can only be found in libraries or in second-hand bookstores. It remains, nevertheless, an invaluable record of historical events and personal accomplishments, and its author's inimitably pungent and pugnacious prose provides an unequivocal testament of how he wanted to be perceived by posterity. Moses's visionary influence and iron-willed personality were such

Robert Caro.



overlapping state and city appointments that forty years after he was forced out of office by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, we feel compelled to reevaluate his role in radically reshaping New York City's built environment. That task has been undertaken by a team of scholars headed by the architectural historian and Columbia professor Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, Columbia's Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences. In mounting *Robert Moses and the Modern City* and editing the companion book of essays Ballon and Jackson have realized their stated goal: to look at the modern city as a historical phenomenon. Their work adds an important visual component to Caro's biography, although they challenge some of his facts and views.

In his introduction Kenneth Jackson takes issue with the subtitle of Caro's book, *The Fall of New York*, which he sees as inaccurate in light of New York's present economic and cultural vigor. Jackson believes that "had [Moses] not lived . . . Gotham would have lacked the wherewithal to adjust to the demands of the modern world. Had the city not undertaken a massive program of public works between 1924 and 1970, had it not built an arterial highway system, and had it not relocated 200,000 people from old-law tenements to new public housing projects, New York would not have been able to claim in the 1990s that it was the capital of the twentieth century, the capital of capitalism, and the capital of the world."

Caro agrees with Jackson that Moses was not directly responsible for the city's dark years of fiscal crisis, escalating crime, and spiraling physical and environmental deterioration. Economic and demographic shifts – the loss of manufacturing jobs and suburban flight – destroyed the fabric of many northeastern cities beginning in the late 1950s. But Caro's notion of New York's fallen greatness in the wake of Moses's career is not amiss. Indeed, for a time the city seemed to be in a state of free fall. Its decline lasted a full generation, and its subsequent recovery and second rise to preeminence could not have been foreseen.

Jackson's jabs at Caro, however, are merely glancing blows. In the end his assessment of Moses is much the same as Caro's: Moses was a gravely flawed but extraordinary human being who, by the circumstances of his time and the forcefulness of his will, achieved many great things. Their difference lies in the degree of leniency each is willing to grant Moses

in judging the moral and social consequences of his means. Moses was sarcastically unwavering on this point: "If the end doesn't justify the means, what does?" The hubris with which he pursued his career as a power broker, putting the public, for him an idealized abstraction, above the people, whom he disregarded if their desires clashed with his will, damaged thousands of lives – many irreparably. His inability to recognize the limit to the tolerance of his stubborn, self-righteous arrogance because he was the one who "could get things done" was his undoing.

Writing a biography and mounting, cataloging, and contextualizing an exhibition are quite different enterprises. Both demand scrupulous research but from different sources. The biographer interviews the subject or persons who remember him or her and pores over correspondence and newspaper files. The architectural historian unearths material evidence from archives: sketches, renderings, three-dimensional models, blueprints, photographs, official documents, and brochures. This is not to say that each confines himself strictly to these respective parameters, only that their motives have



Robert Moses on a beach tour, August 1934.

different ends, necessitating different means. Yet, while the tasks of the biographer and the architectural historian differ, taken together, each can augment the other. The good biographer makes you feel what it was like to be in a certain place at a certain time, while the good architectural historian provides descriptions, context, images, and analyses of buildings and designed landscapes.

Robert Caro is a master at setting the scenes in which the actions of his subjects take place. Read the first hundred pages of *The Path to Power*, the first volume of his magisterial biography of Lyndon Johnson, and you know what it was to grow up in the beautiful but drought-prone Texas Hill Country during the early years of the

twentieth century. Read the introduction to the third volume, *Master of the Senate*, where Caro provides the key to the entire book when he paints the picture of Johnson standing with his chief aide one evening shortly after his election to the Senate on the empty floor of the chamber. After surveying the room's dimensions and the configuration of its space, Johnson reflectively made the telling assertion, "It's just the right size." To encapsulate character and evoke time and place in this manner and to interview the people he needed to talk with to hear recollections such as this, Caro took up residence in Texas for several months at a stretch and once stood on the empty

senate floor after the day's business was over in order to see it as Johnson must have that evening.

Similarly, Caro's writing of *The Power Broker* necessitated being in the places where Moses had lived and worked, and if possible, talking with his subject in his own milieu. He felt it particularly important to experience Jones Beach, the masterpiece of Moses's tenure as Commissioner of Long Island State Parks, and to interview him in that location. Driving on the beautifully landscaped Meadowbrook and Wantagh parkways that Moses built to carry people from the city to Jones Beach by automobile, Caro crossed the causeway leading to the sandy barrier beach separating the ocean and the Great South Bay, then drove east to Gilgo, the tiny dune community where that Moses had bought and remodeled a house. There he saw that two walls had been converted into picture windows. Looking north you could see the Robert Moses Causeway connecting to Robert Moses State Park on Fire Island, and when you turned, your eye swept across the dunes to the campanile-like landmark that marks the entrance to Jones Beach. Moses recounted how he had spent days in a small motorboat exploring the inlets of the bay and how he had first dreamed of creating a great public beach on the empty pristine shore of Long Island where he and Caro now sat. Later, Caro would visit Jones Beach alone in the winter to feel what Moses must have felt when he first envisioned how he would transform that vacant landscape. His vivid description of the place has an unforgettable immediacy.

Although the premises of the exhibition and book *Robert Moses and the Modern City* may have been posited in a somewhat revisionist spirit, they support Caro with valuable visual documentation and scholarship that give substance to the



pictures he painted in words. Now we can see images of the bathhouses, outdoor cafés, and other recreational facilities that made Jones Beach and the subsequent great public beaches Moses built along the same lines as attractive as any exclusive beach club. Orchard Beach in the Bronx, Coney Island in Brooklyn, South Beach on Staten Island, and the extensive boardwalk and Jacob Riis Park on the Rockaway Peninsula are presented in all their monumental grandeur through plans, period photographs, and perspectival renderings. This physical evidence, when combined with Caro's prose, makes one realize how exciting these beaches were when they opened and what a boon they remain to the citizens of New York.

But beaches are only part of Moses's tremendous legacy. Two years after taking office, he opened ten pools in a single summer. Scattered across the city's five boroughs in mostly working-class neighborhoods, the pools could accommodate nearly 50,000 bathers in a day. They boasted state-of-the-art equipment, high maintenance standards, and strict management protocols to ensure public health and safety. Playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts, community centers, ballfields, and sports stadiums are also part of that legacy. Furthermore, recreation represented only one of the public works realms over which Moses reigned. The story of Moses as parkway, highway, and bridge builder; Moses the czar of public housing; and Moses the developer of world's fairs has been brought into focus by Ballon, Jackson, and their colleagues. The sheer magnitude of his accomplishments on these several fronts necessitated the exhibition's division into three museum venues.

The great public works legacy of Robert Moses and the cautionary tale of Robert Caro still color the way we live and how we think about New York City. The challenge now is not to find another Robert Moses, as some caught in the time-consuming process of city-agency bureaucracy and community-review politics are prone to suggest, but to achieve the political consensus to create a twenty-first-century vision for a continuously rebuilding city, one that will enrich the public realm with some of the same kinds of benefits Moses conferred while protecting the lives of the city's people with a compassion he lacked. — EBR

Colonial Park Pool, August 16, 1937.

## Books

***Pilgrimage to Vallombrosa: From Vermont to Italy in the Footsteps of George Perkins Marsh***  
By John Elder

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006

When times of transition prompt us to question life's narrative, pilgrimages beckon. Such was the situation of John and Rita Elder after their youngest son departed for college. John, a professor of English and environmental

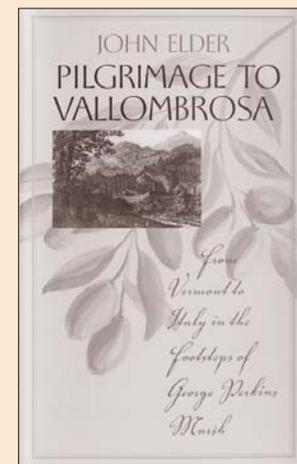
studies at Vermont's Middlebury College, and Rita, a special educator in the local public schools, together sought the opportunity to reflect on their future. A sabbatical journey to Italy offered Rita the occasion to reconnect with her relatives in Tuscany and John the chance to deepen his understanding of pioneer conservationist George Perkins Marsh, whose 1864

classic *Man and Nature* was penned in Tuscany when he was serving as Abraham Lincoln's minister plenipotentiary to the newly established Kingdom of Italy.

This sabbatical was more than the typical academic respite from teaching that yields pleasant travel and a fresh publication. It was a pilgrimage, which Elder

reminds us is "a purposeful journey, undertaken to reconnect with the sources of life's meaning and strength." Such an undertaking involves ambiguity, discovery, "indirection," and above all, transformation or renewal. The Mecca of the

couple's pilgrimage was Vallombrosa, the beautiful, ancient, and culturally renowned forest in eastern Tuscany that served as a model of the environmental stewardship Marsh envisioned in his brilliant book. The journey described in *Pilgrimage to Vallombrosa*



renewed the couple's commitment to their own vocations and to their rural Vermont community. The latter allegiance is expressed through participation in local agricultural traditions of maple syrup production and sustainable forestry.

Elder is one of America's most distinguished environmental writers, with a host of significant publications to his credit, including *Imagining the Earth, Poetry and the Vision of Nature*; *Reading the Mountains of Home*; and *The Frog Run, Words and Wildness in the Vermont Woods*. Like Aldo Leopold and John Muir, he grounds his discourse in narratives of personal experience of place. Among the most delightful and captivating of these stories in his latest book are vivid accounts of harvesting olives in Tuscany, exploring Paleolithic caves in France, experiencing the wonders of Vallombrosa, and exploring the mountains near his home in Bristol, Vermont. These stories in turn serve as points of departure for perceptive meditations on many of the major environmental issues of our time.

In our day of sound bites, one-page summaries, and flashing television images bouncing off the retina like

hailstones, this work demands close reading and patient reflection. It is a slow, mindful walk or Thoreau-like saunter, not a freeway rush yielding a glib list of to-dos. It rewards with many subtle, challenging, and wise thoughts on a host of environmental concerns, including the relationship between wilderness preservation and resource conservation, the future of Vermont's recovering forests, and the nature of environmental stewardship. Elder exchanges the simplicity of linear discourse for a discursive approach that circles back to the roots of its argument many times and moves forward again with nuanced insight, weaving autobiography with analysis. His dialogue with Marsh's ideas becomes a leitmotif that resonates throughout the book. This dialogue is clearly a work in progress, just as our engagement with environmental problems is by nature a continuing process demanding constant reassessment.

Elder's rather cinematic account of their pilgrimage, with its rich amalgam of flashbacks, establishing shots, slow disclosures, and

close-ups, moves through three interconnected landscapes. The first is John and Rita's personal path through settings associated with Marsh. In these surroundings, he, like Marsh before him, observes humanity's degradation of the environment and offers a sobering vision of the stewardship necessary to prevent future disasters. The second landscape is a literary one, a backdrop of environmental writing that stretches across the centuries, from Basho's seventeenth-century haiku to the odes of the nineteenth-century romantics, from Rachel Carson to Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, Terry Tempest Williams, and a host of other contemporary authors. This portion of the book reads more like a symposium than a pilgrimage – not the usual stern gathering of academic worthies we usually associate with that term, but one in the ancient Greek manner of a joyful dinner party spiced with lively discourse and critical thought. Elder's close reading of this rich material argues that we are heirs of a wise, affecting, and powerful tradition of environmental writing that can inspire and guide. The third landscape is present-day Vermont, whose

environmental issues are discussed in terms of the notion of stewardship developed in earlier chapters. Thus the Elders' pilgrimage returns to its point of departure, their beloved village of Bristol and its rural surroundings. Wisdom gained is brought to bear on the landscape of home viewed in a global perspective.

Elder's sensitive, elegant prose is a delight, and his personal stories are moving and captivating. His interpretation of Marsh is insightful, as is his dialogue with his peers and "ancestors" in environmental literature. Another strength is Elder's profound and comprehensive articulation of environmental stewardship. He rightly observes that *stewardship* suffers from a karma of negative connotations – hubris, rigid master plans, arrogant control of nature, misguided anthropocentrism, and complacent technological fixes. This need not be. The word stems, as he notes, from the Old Norse *Sti-varðr*, keeper of the house. However, stewardship is much more than the practice of a single indi-

vidual. Rather it is "the mutual and intimate relationship, extending across generations, between a human community and its place on earth." And like the dynamics of a family, it "grows from error, misapprehension, repentance, forgiveness and hope and cannot simply be the implementation of a policy or master plan." It is a "chastened" yet "hopeful" endeavor that is sustained and nurtured by the spiritual recognition of humanity's oneness with the world of nature. It is a "pledge to love the world in a covenant of loss." It requires "creative grieving" for the mistakes of the past and present in order to honestly assess "painful realities" that open the way "to a vital future." Among its most powerful wellsprings are our "joyful awareness of wild beauty" and our commitment to the cultural and ecological health of our individual communities. Its four hallmarks are "faithful service" to the human and nonhuman world of nature, "effectiveness" based on rigorous historical and scientific knowledge, awareness of and participation in the "stories" of one's place, and the ability "to take risks" to meet new challenges. In essence, "stewardship is a way to affirm the flow of the uni-

verse and to make ourselves at home."

Elder's profound grasp of the all-encompassing nature of stewardship stands out in bold relief from Al Gore's recent Academy-award-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, completed after the publication of Elder's work. With due respect to its consciousness-raising power, wide audience, convincing animated graphics, and rigorous documentation, Gore's film and accompanying book remain within the limited purview of apocalyptic environmentalism – identification of a looming disaster and the technological response necessary to prevent it. One is grateful for Gore's effort, of course, given the abysmal record of our present administration on environmental matters. But, while timely, his call to action does not address the root of our problems. Elder's more comprehensive and demanding view of stewardship, requiring firm commitment to place, risk, and a multigenerational consciousness of loss and recovery, is more profound, for it goes to the depths of the environmental

crisis, which resides ultimately in our way of being in the world. This simply must change, and Elder has pointed the way to that transformation, one that requires we be coworkers with nature. As he reminds us, we can build our ark but should not forget we are the flood as well.

Elder does not preach; he invites dialogue with his ideas. These are grounded in personal experience and a sure grasp of the environmental literature. It is unfortunate that the book is entirely without illustrations. Elder's gift for landscape description, with its subtle blend of the poetic and the analytical, is deeply engaging. However, his characterizations of such places as Bristol, the Green Mountains, Vallombrosa, and the pilgrimage church at Conques, which feature so heavily in his narrative, merit the complementary vividness of imagery. He employed original drawings and maps to great effect in his *Reading the Mountains of Home*.

Also, one wants to hear more about his understanding of stewardship in cities and his view of the role of cities in the continuum of wilderness, managed land, and the urban realm.

A detailed discussion would require an entire book, but, given the importance of cities, one expects Elder to direct the beam of his subtle discourse a bit more towards the urban skyline. Instead, he limits himself to such brief remarks as the need for parks near urban areas and the teaching role of parks personnel in inner-city classrooms. Although he writes from his base in rural Vermont, Elder knows cities, too, having grown up in the environs of San Francisco and lived in New Haven and, above all, in Florence during his recent pilgrimage. Burlington, Vermont, is just up the road.

Early in the book, Elder notes that a fresh vision of stewardship "can flower in new ways within the democratic, feminist, and ecological discourse of our day." He has cultivated the seeds of that flowering to our great benefit in the quest for an enlightened environmental ethic. This is a work that instructs, awakens, and challenges without self-righteous bombast or simplistic cure-alls. It is a pilgrimage to be joined. – Reuben M. Rainey

**Daybooks of Discovery:  
Nature Diaries in Britain  
1770–1870**

By **Mary Ellen Bellanca**  
Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

**Nature's Engraver:  
A Life of Thomas Bewick**

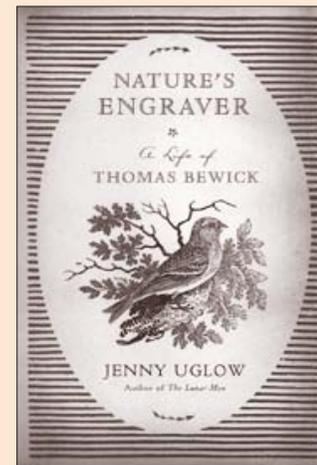
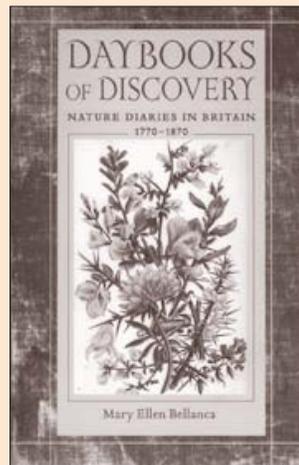
By **Jenny Uglow**  
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

During the course of the nineteenth century, a burgeoning community of biologists, botanists, and geologists laid the foundations for natural science as a professional endeavor. Most notably, the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *Origin*

of *Species* altered the view of creation as a unitary divine act and fostered the comprehension of time as a continuum of unimaginably vast eons. Although, after Darwin, some people were troubled in their attempts to reconcile religious belief and secular science, others saw the ever-multiplying array of newly recorded species as evidence of the Creator's mighty accomplishment.

The insights that led Darwin toward his revolu-

tionary theory depended on close observation and systematic recording of data. But he and other Victorian scientists were not alone in collecting facts and keeping records. Their work was supported and even anticipated by numerous amateurs who saw themselves as part of a confederation of observers, each adding to the growing store of knowledge about



nature. They studied local phenomena with unprecedented attention and interest and were eager to examine the specimens being brought back from voyages of exploration or shipped home from foreign colonies. Subscriptions from wealthy patrons funded the production of lavish albums of cop-

perplate engravings such as Audubon's *Birds of America*. Letterpress books containing woodblock illustrations with accompanying descriptions reached a broader audience.

Two engaging new books tell this story: *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain 1770–1870* by Mary Ellen Bellanca and *Nature's Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick* by Jenny Uglow.

The first deals with the lives of five remarkable diarists – the clergyman-naturalist Gilbert White (1720–1793); Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855), sister of the poet and a literary figure in her own right;

Emily Shore (1819–1839), a precocious girl whose early death cut short her career as a nature writer; the novelist George Eliot (1819–1880); and the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889).

The second is a biography of the Northumberland artist Thomas Bewick (1753–1828), a master of woodblock carving whose engravings of animals and birds and vignettes of rural scenes are considered works of art today.

For most British naturalists who kept journals, a limited rural sphere provided ample means for observing the appearance, structure, and behavior of numerous animals, insects, trees, and flowers. Their studies include the effects of seasonal change and varieties of weather. When abroad, like other travelers, they make comparisons with the climate, topography, and landscape of home. Not surprisingly, their observations are more trenchant than those of ordinary tourists. Their prose, sometimes written or revised with an eye toward publication, is firmly tied to time and place. Even when colored by anthropomorphic touches and rhapsodic passages, the topical, factual, almanac-like character inspires the reader's trust in its reliability and authenticity.

Thomas Bewick's enthusiasm for nature's wondrous variety is akin to theirs. Like the Northamptonshire poet John Clare (1793–1864), Bewick's career grew in the soil of rural life. His roots were in the village of Cherryburn near Eltringham in Northumberland beside the River Tyne. When not doing farm chores or work-

ing in his father's colliery, Bewick spent his boyhood roaming, fishing, and sketching the scenes and creatures of field, stream, wood, and barnyard. As a man, Bewick continued these pursuits with the same passion as that of his contemporaries who were classifying and recording natural phenomena in rural parishes all over England. What they described in words, he depicted in drawings, and this talent led to an apprenticeship with an engraver beginning in 1767. Bewick quickly found his niche carving blocks of boxwood into small vignettes that served as tailpieces of book chapters. Thus he entered the world of letterpress printing.

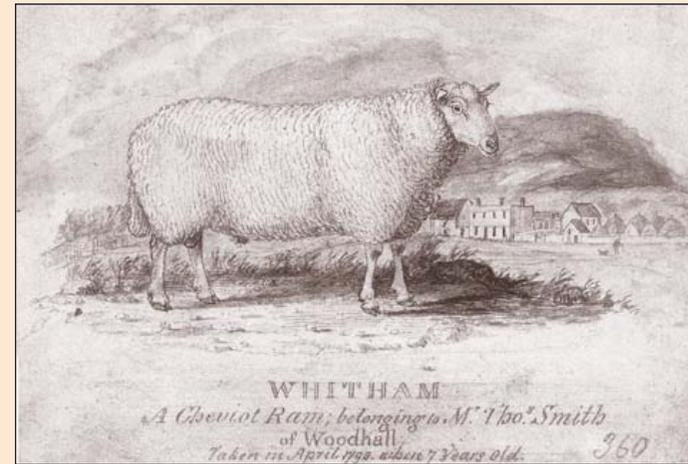
Uglow admirably describes the “inky, bustling, competitive milieu” of booksellers, printers, and engravers. She details the apprenticeship system and the economic risks involved in setting up a workshop. The market in children's books was growing rapidly during Bewick's apprentice years, and he was put to work carving woodblock illustrations for such popular titles as *Goody Two Shoes*, *Goody Goose Cap*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Robin Goodfellow*, *Cinderella*, *Primrose Pretty Face*, and various didactic tales modeled on the ever-popular *Aesop's Fables*. An alphabet book, *The New Lottery Book of Birds and*

*Beasts*, gave him an opportunity to depict various animals and birds – Ass, Bull, Cat, etc. – with lively fidelity. After he had entered partnership with his former master, he made woodcuts of many different subjects, some being commissions from owners wishing to commemorate their racehorses. This led Bewick to conceive the notion of independently publishing a comprehensive descriptive catalog of four-legged creatures. Drawing farm animals was no problem, but to capture images of exotic beasts he depended on touring menageries and engravings in previously published books. In 1790 after several years of work interrupted by the demands of regular business, he brought out *A General History of Quadrupeds*. Its success led him to embark on a similar project dealing with birds. This involved drawing familiar species from nature and collecting specimens – both stuffed and recently shot – from numerous sources. His eagerly awaited *Land Birds*, published in 1797, was received with acclaim.

One year before Bewick's *Quadrupeds*, the book that Bellanca rightly considers the fountainhead of nature

writing was published: Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selborne*. From 1768 until his death in 1793, White, a country parson, chronicled the demographics and behavior of various species on a daily basis. In his specially formatted *Naturalist's Journal* he amassed records of the migratory patterns of birds; the budding, blooming, and fruiting dates of numerous wild and cultivated plants; the sowing and harvesting times of crops; and the ecological effects of wasps, gnats, earthworms, and other insects. His work was collaborative in spirit, and he corresponded diligently with other amateur naturalists.

White embraced Carl Linnaeus's (1707–1778) recently introduced system of binomial nomenclature and made a practice of identifying and referring to species both by their common and Latin names. Indeed, for White and his Victorian heirs, taxonomy was a critical part of the pursuit of natural history, one that gave amateurs the status of scientists. Bellanca remarks, “With the power to name also came the scientific naturalist's license to turn animals into specimens by shooting, collecting, and dissecting them.” Today's animal rights activists may cringe, but lacking our high-powered binoculars and



“Whitham, A Cheviot Ram belonging to Mr. Thos. Smith of Woodhall,” woodblock engraving by Thomas Bewick from *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1790).

long-lens cameras as well as the accumulated scientific knowledge of the past two centuries, naturalists of an earlier age could not have studied, differentiated, and depicted species without these crueler forms of field biology.

As the forerunner of and model for subsequent nature writing, *A Natural History of Selborne* was widely read in the nineteenth century and has never gone out of print. For this reason Bellanca devotes an entire chapter to “The Nineteenth-Century Cult of Gilbert White.”

Though their works differ in tone and style, the other diarists she treats were familiar with White's pioneering work. They also knew Bewick's *Quadrupeds* and *Land Birds* and read such publications as *Penny Magazine*, published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; *Naturalist's Magazine*, which circulated the information collected by amateur observers; and *Magazine of Natural History*. In this way they felt connected to a larger enterprise of discovery and categorization, for natural science had not yet become so professionalized as to make their work seem superfluous.

The ability to identify and name species was the hallmark of an amateur naturalist's seriousness, but it also served a literary purpose. William Wordsworth's poems relied on descriptive

specificity as much as Romantic feeling, and his sister Dorothy's *Alfoxden and Grasmere Journals* furnished him with a knowledge of flora and fauna he could put to poetical use. For Dorothy *Alfoxden* was a record of the sights and life of the Somerset landscape she was about to leave, while the *Grasmere Journals* were a means of understanding and appreciating those of her new home in the Lake District. Her diary entries describe her frequent walks as well as her gardening and other household activities.

Revelation – a “never-before-seen” occurrence – was a special joy for Dorothy Wordsworth. Like White, she often notes a happy surprise, such as “the whitest Hawthorne I have seen this year.” Like him, she found sustained intimate contact with a particular locale gave sufficient scope to an ever-expanding understanding of nature. The expertise she gained from the natural history books in the library of Dove Cottage, the home she shared with William, gave her the power to write with authority, and William saw her as his chief resource on botanical nomenclature.

But she was more than her brother's amanuensis. Her literary gifts were not confined to naming plants and animals and describing the charm and novelty of everyday things. Threaded through her diaries are passages, rich in simile, of intensely felt scenic experiences, and through her Romantic eye we see "the ivy twisting around the oaks like bristled serpents" and "the moonlight [that] lay upon the hills like snow."

The ramble or saunter – a leisurely walk that is its own objective – is the typical way, and still the best means, of studying nature close-up. Extended journeys are necessary, however, to experience nature in its rawer and more exotic form. Bewick was an inveterate local walker, who also traveled long distances by foot, once as far afield as the borderlands of Scotland.

With regard to scenic appreciation as the motive for travel, the mentor of the age was William Gilpin (1724–1804), author of several books on the Picturesque, a category of scenery found most notably in the northern counties of England and in Wales, where craggy precipices, foaming waterfalls, hanging woods, and

other scenes of rough natural grandeur abounded. A clergyman like White, Gilpin recorded his impressions in such books as *Observations on the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* and *Observations . . . on several Parts of Great Britain; particularly the High-Lands of Scotland*, which he illustrated with aquatint prints. More than guidebooks, these promoted a discriminating way of seeing. Like John Ruskin (1819–1900) later in the nineteenth century, Gilpin



A woodblock vignette by Thomas Bewick of a man walking against the wind through wild scenery.

taught armchair travelers as well tourists an aesthetics of nature that was enormously influential in furthering close observation and artistic appreciation.

The journalist and future novelist George Eliot was able to gratify both her Gilpinesque enjoyment of British scenery and her interest in zoology during a two-month stay on the North Devon coast in 1856. "I never

before longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe," she declares in "Recollections of Ilfracombe," the retrospective essay based on her diary. She had read White the year before she went there with her companion George Lewes, and with the purpose of helping him on the marine zoology text he had undertaken, she brought along several recently published guides, such as Mary Roberts's 1851

*Popular*

#### *History of the Mollusca.*

In her magazine article she identifies herself with the numerous tribe of mid-century Victorian women naturalists, who were botanizers and fern collectors for the most part. Adopting a playful voice, she assumes the narrative persona of a neophyte, describing in comic terms her adventures gathering mollusks along the rocky coastline. She does not refrain, however, from iden-

tifying them according to their Latin names.

While in Ilfracombe Eliot did more than scramble among the rocks in search of marine life. She had recently reviewed Ruskin's third volume of *Modern Painters* in which he proselytizes for truth to nature in art. Like Ruskin, she took an aesthetic approach, and "Recollections" describes in vivid detail the scenery she and Lewes saw on their day-long rambles through the countryside. She captures the appearance of water as flux and the notion of nature as an unfolding series of scenes when she describes "a streamlet running between the hills, and winding its way among the trees while the sunlight made its way between the leaves and flashed on the braided ripples. . . . As we came home again the sea stretching beyond the massive hills towards the horizon looked all the finer to us because we had been turning our backs upon it, and contemplating another sort of beauty."

Emily Shore was born in the same year as George Eliot and John Ruskin. One wonders where her passion for nature study might have led had she lived beyond the age of twenty. As it is, *The Journal of Emily Shore*, written between 1831 and 1839, conveys her avid curiosity and eagerness to participate as a

contributor to the collective natural science enterprise of her day. By then books on natural history were numerous and affordable, and woodcut illustrations in magazines had improved substantially in quality. Shore, who had learned several languages and was widely read, was an eager consumer and author of articles on nature. She was especially keen on identifying and describing birds seen and heard on her countryside rambles or observed from her window at home. In deteriorating health at the end of her short life, she was taken to Madeira by her family. There she reveled in the lushness of tropical scenery and the profusion of botanical species. She visited the isle of Jersey during May of her final year, where, after much internal debate and listening, she identified what she guessed was a blue-throated robin and "quite rejoiced at having added this very uncommon bird to those I know."

An even more rhapsodic response to nature's wonders is characteristic of the journals of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit priest and poet. Unlike Shore or White, who kept journals in order to identify and clas-

sify, Hopkins represented nature's sublimity in such things as the vast and mutable sky and described its ingenious beauty in such small phenomena as the structure of a leaf. He was akin to Ruskin in giving natural objects the closest possible scrutiny and complementing words with drawings in order to capture what is verbally inexpressible. His journal is a testament to his passion for "inscape" – intrinsic character, one of his many neologisms – and the intensity of his painterly, imagistic, metaphorical prose and poetry is fraught with anxiety about words' ability to convey the "glorious singularity of things." More than a student of the behavior of species, he watches and describes at length the flux of water and the movement of clouds. The epiphanies he gained in this pursuit underlie many of his poems. For instance, this journal note about a cloud formation, "It changed beautiful changes," finds an amplified parallel in the sprung rhythm of:

Cloud-puffball,  
torn tufts, tossed pillows /  
flaunt forth,  
then chevy on  
air-built thoroughfare:  
heaven-roysterers,  
in gay-gangs /  
they throng;  
they glitter in marches.

Bewick and the diarists considered here were living in times of great social and cultural change, and their intention in observing and capturing nature in image and word may be seen partly as a response to this transformation. The enclosure acts passed by Parliament were altering England's time-honored rural scenery as ancient commons were converted into large landowners' fields divided by hedgerows. Smoke from factories was blackening the crowded cities as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum. Fortunately for Bewick, Eltringham Common still had its hoary oaks and its aged alder, ash, and willow trees growing beside the small streams that ran through it, and cottagers continued to graze sheep, raise geese, tend beehives, and grow vegetables on little plots of illegally fenced land. This was a landscape he loved to draw and a source of inspiration for many of his most charming woodblock engravings. While rail travel allowed nineteenth-century tourists to escape the sooty industrial city and visit

previously remote parts of the country to admire the Romantic scenery or indulge a desire for botanizing and plant collecting, their careless depredations raised environmental concerns, especially when the Victorian fern craze threatened to destroy certain areas.

Today, when excellent natural history museums exist in major cities, guided ecotours are becoming a worldwide enterprise, and a raft of excellent field guides written and illustrated by professional ornithologists, zoologists, botanists, and geologists can be purchased with the click of a computer mouse, we forget our debt to the amateur naturalists of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Nature's Engraver* reminds us how much we owe to Thomas Bewick, whose beautiful books were among the first illustrated field guides. In *Daybooks of Discovery*, we share early naturalists' delight as they observe and record the previously unknown. Foreshadowing technology's present uneasy relation to nature, we see as well the birth of the realization that species should not only be recorded but protected and nature's beauty preserved. Read together, these complementary books give us a valuable view of that bygone time. – EBR

## Calendar

### How Green is My City? New York Today and in 2030

A symposium sponsored by the New-York Historical Society and the Foundation for Landscape Studies  
**Tuesday, January 15, 2008**  
**6:00–8:00 p.m.**

**To register:** Tickets for this program are sold through SmartTix. To order online visit [www.smarttix.com](http://www.smarttix.com). To order by phone please call SmartTix at (212) 868-4444. The SmartTix Call Center is open 9:00–8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10:00–8:00 p.m. Saturday, and 10:00–6:00 p.m. Sunday.

**Location:** New-York Historical Society, Central Park West at 77th Street

**General admission:** \$18  
Students/Educators/  
Seniors: \$12  
N-YHS Members: \$10

Although New York is known for its urban density, it is an unusually green city thanks to the visionary park builders of the nineteenth century and to the extensive recreational facilities Parks Commissioner Robert Moses bestowed on the city between 1934 and 1968. Steps have been taken in the past to improve the city's water and air quality. But is New York as green a city as it can and should be? What needs to happen to make it a role model for other cities confronting deteriorating parks and the environmental crisis?

**Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg** will give an overview of his vision of a greener New York by the year 2030 through initiatives concerning traffic reduction, new energy sources, new parks and housing, and improved water and air quality.

**Daniel L. Doctoroff**, Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding for the City of New York, will explain what steps the city and the private sector must take to realize the New York 2030 Plan.

**Adrian Benepe**, Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks, will discuss the Bloomberg administration's commitment to a renewed and expanded park system and the means necessary to achieve this end.

**Douglas Blonsky**, Central Park Administrator and President, Central Park Conservancy, will speak about best practices in park restoration and management based on the work the conservancy has performed in partnership with the parks department during the past twenty-seven years.

**Jonathan Rose**, President, Jonathan Rose Companies, will discuss what actions planners and developers must take to meet growing public expectations for a culture of community and new standards of environmental and human health.

## Contributors

**Adrian Benepe** is commissioner of the New York City Parks Department. His career in the agency began in 1973 and has included the positions of Urban Parks Ranger, Director of Natural Resources and Horticulture, Director of Art and Antiquities, and Manhattan Parks Commissioner.

**Carol Herselle Krinsky, Ph.D.**, is a leading expert on twentieth-century architectural history and professor of art history at New York University. Her books include *Rockefeller Center* (1978), *Synagogues of Europe* (1985), and *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (1988). She was president of the Society of Architectural Historians from 1984 to 1986.

**Reuben M. Rainey, Ph.D., A.S.L.A.**, is William Stone Weedon Professor Emeritus in the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia. He is a former chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture, co-author of *Modern Public Gardens: Robert Royston and the Suburban Park*, and co-producer of the PBS series *GardenStory*.

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