

The Insane Asylum Landscapes of Olmsted and Vaux

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Figure 1. "Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane, Manhattan." Image source: Rev. J. F. Richmond, *New York and its Institutions 1609-1872* (New York, NY: E. B. Treat, 1872), 294.

Introduction

From public parks and residential design to civic and institutional landscapes, Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) collaborated on a wide variety of projects over the course of their careers. While most may be familiar with their major design projects, such as Central Park, the Emerald Necklace system in Boston, and the Buffalo parks and parkway system, etc., Olmsted and Vaux also designed and consulted on a number of insane asylum landscapes during the 1860s, 70s, and 80s. At the time, moral treatment was the prevailing method of care in these institutions—a Quaker-inspired psychiatric practice that combined spiritual guidance, behavior modifications, and physical activity to administer patient healing. In this approach, farming, outdoor recreation, pleasure grounds, and exposure to rural landscape views were considered fundamental to patient therapy. This paper highlights key design elements, historic figures, landscape theories, construction methods, and professional challenges that Olmsted and Vaux encountered while working on these and other 19th century landscape typologies. Sites to be discussed include the Hartford Retreat (Connecticut, 1860), Moses Shepard Asylum (Towson, Maryland, 1860s), the Bloomingdale Asylum in Manhattan (1860s), the Hudson River State Hospital (Poughkeepsie, New York, circa 1866-67); Buffalo Asylum for the Insane (Buffalo, New York, 1870s), and the McLean Asylum for the Insane (Belmont, Massachusetts, 1870s), where Olmsted spent the last days before his death in 1903. By more fully examining and contextualizing asylum landscapes within the long-term on-again-off-again collaborative relationship between Olmsted and Vaux, as well as within the larger body of American landscape architectural history, a significant but underacknowledged aspect of the Olmsted and Vaux oeuvre is revealed.

Origins of American Asylum Care

In the late 1700s, people with mental illness had few care options. Unless they had a family or community that was willing to house, care for, and support them, the afflicted would often end up in prisons or charitable institutions and at the mercy of strangers ill-equipped to address their needs. Physical violence and restraints were primary means used to control what was perceived by many as unruly, dangerous, and “animal-like” people who struggled with mental illness. Mental health histories are replete with descriptions and images of the chained “lunatic” that created caricatures of a mentally and physically uncontrolled other in the popular imagination, which for some, helped justify neglect, ostracization, isolation, and abuse.

In 1790, a Quaker widow named Hannah Mills was admitted to the York Lunatic Asylum, a county facility in England built a mere twelve years before. People from the Society of Friends (also known as Quakers) tried to visit the widow at the asylum but were denied entry. A few weeks after Mills was admitted, she died, likely as a result of abuse and neglect from those overseeing the asylum. Outraged by this incident, an influential Quaker, William Tuke (1732-1822), pledged to create a benevolent institution for Quakers with mental illness, and the York Retreat was established. In this modest-sized institution, Tuke advocated for the humane treatment of residents by abolishing physical restraints, serving nourishing food, and encouraging outdoor pursuits that included labor and leisure activities on the Retreat’s manicured grounds. Word about this approach quickly spread and it began to inspire other countries and states to adapt these novel techniques, including the United States.

For example, in New York City, New York Hospital—an institution chartered during the late colonial era—began treating mental health patients in a separate building as early as 1808. The hospital was partially funded by the state Legislature,¹ which passed a law in 1809 “empowering overseers of the poor of any city or town [...] to contract with the governors of the New York Hospital for the maintenance and care of insane persons.”² Thomas Eddy (1758-1827), a prominent Quaker, merchant, penitentiary reformer, and Erie Canal commissioner, served on the New York Hospital Board of Governors and focused his attention on the asylum.³ In his essay “Hints for Introducing an Improved Mode of Treating the Insane in the Asylum” (1815), Eddy implored fellow board members to embrace the ethical treatment methods practiced by Samuel Tuke (1784-1857), who continued to run the Retreat after the death of his grandfather William and his father Henry.⁴ Likewise eschewing corporal punishment, chain restraints, and fear tactics, Eddy encouraged kindness towards patients and appealed to their inner “rational being,” as well as physical labor, amusement, and religion:

every means ought to be taken to seduce the mind from unhappy and favourite musings; [...] patients [...] should freely partake of bodily exercises, walking, riding, conversations, innocent sports, and a variety of other amusements; they should be gratified with birds, deer, rabbits, &c.⁵

¹ William L. Russell, M.D., “Bloomingdale Hospital,” in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, 133-135. See also Pliny Earle, *History Description and Statistics of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane* (New York, NY: Egbert, Hovey & King, 1848), 9, and *Charter of the Society of the New York Hospital* (New York, NY: Daniel Fanshaw, 1856), 16-17.

² Elliott, “The Care of the Insane in New York,” 112. This passage is Elliott summarizing the 1809 law, not a quote from that statute.

³ Earle, *History Description and Statistics of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane*, 1-2.

⁴ Thomas Eddy. *Hints for Introducing an Improved Mode of Treating the Insane in the Asylum: Read before the Governors of the New-York Hospital ...* (New York, NY: n.p., 1815), accessed 6 July 2015, <http://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog.nlm.nlmuid-2553007R-bk>. Earle mentions Eddy’s ardent appeal in *History Description and Statistics*, 10. For a more complete history of the Retreat, see Anne Digby, *Madness, Morality, and Medicine: A Study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁵ Eddy, *Hints for Introducing an Improved Mode of Treating the Insane*, 8-9.

To implement “moral management,” Eddy proposed locating the New York Hospital asylum on a new site; the hospital eventually purchased land along Bloomingdale Road in a then rural part of northern Manhattan to establish the new Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane, which opened to patients in 1821.⁶ In his history of the Bloomingdale Asylum (1848), physician Pliny Earle noted that a little more than 110 patients on average were in residence at any given time between 1821 and 1844.

In his historical account, Earle quoted the asylum physician James Macdonald’s (1803-1849) laudatory description of the Bloomingdale grounds, noting the pleasing approach to the main building, with “various avenues gracefully winding through so large a lawn”, the tasteful placement of trees, shrubs, and flowers, and the landscape’s ability to “relieve the melancholy mind from its sad musings”⁷. (See Figure 1). Macdonald also declared it “one of the most successful and useful instances of landscape gardening.”⁸ The improved grounds no doubt helped make the asylum and its moral treatment regimen more appealing because, as Earle emphasized in his essay, patients benefited from “manual labor, various [...] amusements, a good library, and horses and carriage for riding,” as well as religious services on Sundays for both patients and staff.⁹

Asylum-based care continued to evolve as governments and private entities began to construct larger facilities for housing the ever-growing numbers of people designated mentally ill by court order, family committal, and/or medical decree.

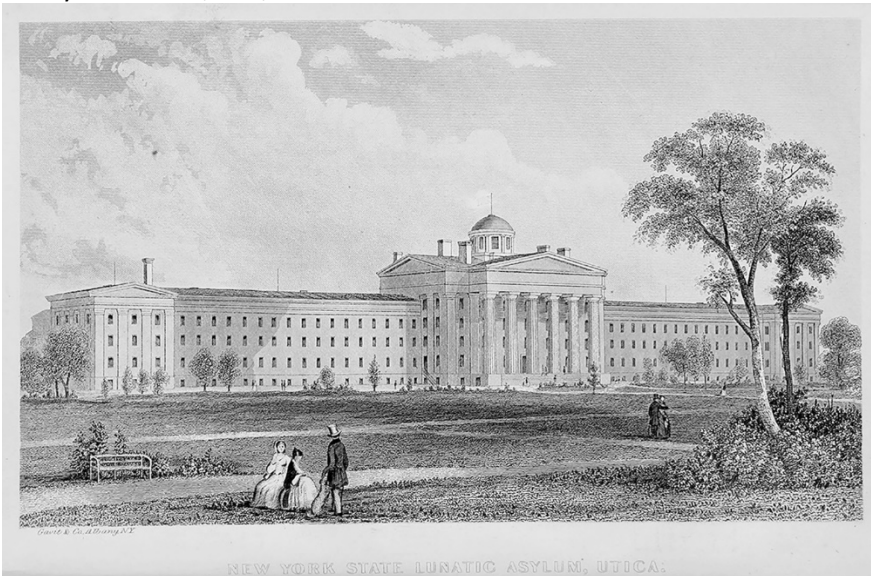


Figure 2. "New York State Lunatic Asylum, Utica." Image source: *Frontispiece to the Twenty-First Annual Report of the Managers of the State Lunatic Asylum, 1863* (Albany, NY: Comstock & Cassidy Printers, 1864).

Because landscape was considered such an essential component to patient well-being, some American asylum superintendents began to consult with landscape designers in the early 1840s. Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), the well-known landscape theorist, designer, and horticulturalist had become a national figure by the 1840s, through his extensive writings and design work. He was chosen to design the grounds of New York State’s first insane asylum in Utica in 1843. For the asylum managers,

⁶ Russell, “Bloomingdale Hospital,” 137; Earle, *History Description and Statistics of the Bloomingdale Asylum*, 10. Columbia University now occupies the majority of the former asylum site.

⁷ Pliny Earle, “Historical and Descriptive Account of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane,” *American Journal of Insanity*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (July 1845): 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9. For more details regarding Earle’s perception of moral treatment at Bloomingdale, see “Section II: Moral Treatment” in *History [...] of the Bloomingdale Asylum [...]* (1848), 26-38.

Downing produced two plans, both of which are presumed lost: “one curvilinear, and the other [...] axial with grand elms lining the driveway.”¹⁰

The managers chose the latter after contemplating both approaches drawn by Downing on “slips” of paper that could be superimposed on a general illustration of the grounds.¹¹ These “slips” are likely a reference to Humphry Repton’s (1752-1818) renowned “Red Books,” the illustrated estate albums Repton produced to show clients before-and-after images of proposed landscape transformations.¹² For the Utica asylum grounds, Downing emphasized his preference for the curvilinear plan, although, he added, “the straight avenue will have the most imposing and magnificent effect when the Elms are partially grown, say 18 years hence.”¹³ The elms and entrance gate framing the entrance path would become a signature view for the facility in years to come.



Figure 3. “New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum, Trenton. Drawn and Engraved by J. J. Pease from a daguerreotype by J. X. Mason.” Image source: *Frontispiece to the Annual Report of the Officers of the New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum at Trenton, for the year MDCCCLVIII* (Trenton, NJ: Phillips & Boswell, 1849).

Five years later, Downing was also asked to design the grounds for the New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum in Trenton, which accompanied the building design by the Scottish-born architect John Notman (1801-1865) with whom Downing occasionally corresponded. Not much is known about how Notman and Downing collaborated on this project, given that they lived in different cities, but it is evident that the two had a certain professional affinity; both designers were associated with skillful execution of the picturesque, preferring to incorporate irregular forms and rural characteristics into their designs. Notman’s first commission was Philadelphia’s rural cemetery at Laurel Hill (1836-1839), which received critical accolades and became a popular destination for the general public.

By the summer of 1850, a select number of American designers were travelling abroad: Frederick Law Olmsted and his brother John were traveling with their friend Charles Loring Brace (1826-

¹⁰ Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 43. In notes 70 and 71, Yanni cites both David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 78-80, and George B. Tatum, *Prophet with Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing*, edited by George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougall (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 69-70.

¹¹ Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste*, 79; Tatum, *Prophet with Honor*, 70. See also Kenneth Hawkins, “The Therapeutic Landscape: Nature, Architecture, and Mind in Nineteenth-Century America” (Ph.D. dissertation., University of Rochester, 1991): 127-128.

¹² Tatum, *Prophet with Honor*, 70. For examples of these albums, see “Humphry Repton’s Red Books,” The Morgan Library and Museum, accessed 19 July 2015, <http://www.themorgan.org/collection/Humphry-Reptons-Red-Books>.

¹³ Tatum, *Prophet with Honor*, 70; Hawkins, “The Therapeutic Landscape,” 128.

1890) to Liverpool in late April,¹⁴ and Andrew Jackson Downing departed for England in July, following the finalization of a contract for his newest book, *The Architecture of Country Houses*.¹⁵ The two groups did not intersect while overseas, although Downing did provide Olmsted with a letter of introduction to the “superintendent of the fruit and vegetables department of the Royal Horticulture Society’s Chiswick Gardens, near London.”¹⁶ Olmsted spent much of his time observing British agricultural practices, admiring designed landscapes, and visiting Olmsted Hall in County Essex, his family’s ancestral home.¹⁷ Downing’s travel objectives were twofold: he toured sites of important gardens and notable architecture and was determined to find a new architectural partner. After visiting an architectural exhibition in London, Downing met with Calvert Vaux, a man who was comfortably employed as an architect in England but was so taken by Downing’s design ideas that he returned with him to the United States.¹⁸ Downing died unexpectedly in 1852, so Vaux took over his design firm with another emerging British architect, Frederick Clarke Withers. Interestingly, it was through Downing that Olmsted and Vaux initially met but their collaborative teamwork would not begin in earnest until they started their award-winning Greensward Plan for the Central Park design competition in 1857.

The First Olmsted and Vaux Asylum Landscape Designs

The Hartford Retreat for the Insane, which was a Quaker inspired private institution in Connecticut, began receiving patients in 1824 under the guidance of its first superintendent, Dr. Eli Todd (1769-1833) (Figure 4). Todd regarded Tuke’s York Retreat in England as a fine model for treating the insane, but he also believed it “placed too little reliance upon the efficacy of medicine.”¹⁹ At Hartford, he implemented an institutional regime that embraced moral treatment and medical approaches together. As at other asylums, the Hartford Retreat building—a relatively modest structure meant originally to house only 40 patients—was located on an elevated site outside of the city.²⁰ Being the first asylum in Connecticut, the Retreat initially accommodated a wide variety of patients, including the poor, although it catered predominantly to wealthier people. After Todd died in 1833, Dr. John S. Butler (1803-1890), a man with extensive private practice experience and a three-year tenure as the first superintendent of the Boston Lunatic Hospital (1839-1842), replaced Brigham and remained at the Hartford Retreat until his retirement in 1872.²¹ John Olmsted Sr., Frederick’s father, was a friend of Dr.

¹⁴ Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 66-67.

¹⁵ For a more complete description of Downing’s opinion and impressions about English landscape and design, see George B. Tatum, “Introduction: the Downing Decade,” in *Prophet with Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing*, 36-38.

¹⁶ Olmsted thanked Downing for this letter of introduction; the quote is from note 3, where the editors clarified the identity of “Mr. Thompson of London” who Olmsted referenced in his letter. See Frederick Law Olmsted to Andrew Jackson Downing, 23 November 1850, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume I, The Formative Years, 1822 to 1852*, eds. Charles Capen McLaughlin, and Charles E. Beveridge. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 362-363.

¹⁷ Wood Roper, *FLO*, 68. For more on Olmsted Hall, see the letter Olmsted and his brother John wrote to their father dated 11 August 1850 in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume I*, 350-358.

¹⁸ Tatum, “Introduction: The Downing Decade,” 37.

¹⁹ Lawrence B. Goodheart, *Mad Yankees: The Hartford Retreat for the Insane and Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 25-26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-38. Goodheart, 37, describes the building as “a functional adaptation of a Georgian Manor home, the building in typical asylum style had a main section of three stories and two parallel wings of two stories [...]. Peaked roofs, Roman pediments, and rectilinear dimensions—an integration of Euclidean forms—gave the whole a sense of classic balance and proportion.” An “earliest known” illustration of the Retreat is on page 39.

²¹ For more on Butler, see “Dr. John S. Butler,” in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada, Volume 4*, ed. Henry Mills Hurd (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1916), 368-370. When Butler was a young physician, he was mentored by Samuel B. Woodward at the Worcester State Lunatic Hospital in Massachusetts, which significantly influenced his career trajectory. Additionally, when Charles Dickens was touring North America in 1842, he was quite impressed with the Boston Lunatic Hospital and specifically Dr. Butler’s interactions with patients. Dickens describes in some detail an instance during which Dr. Butler humored a female patient’s delusion that she was the “lady of the house.” See Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, (New York, NY: John W. Lovell Company, 1883): 626-629, accessed 10 July 2014, <https://archive.org/details/americannotes00dick> (original in the Library of Congress). See also Goodheart, *Mad Yankees*, 139. Goodheart noted that Butler “was also physician to prisoners and paupers at the nearby House of Correction and House of Industry in South Boston.” Some criticized Butler’s “performance” at the asylum and other institutions, but others defended Butler and recognized that his workload across three facilities was too great for one physician.

Butler's, and may have introduced his son and Vaux to Butler when the doctor was seeking advice about improving the grounds of the Retreat...²²

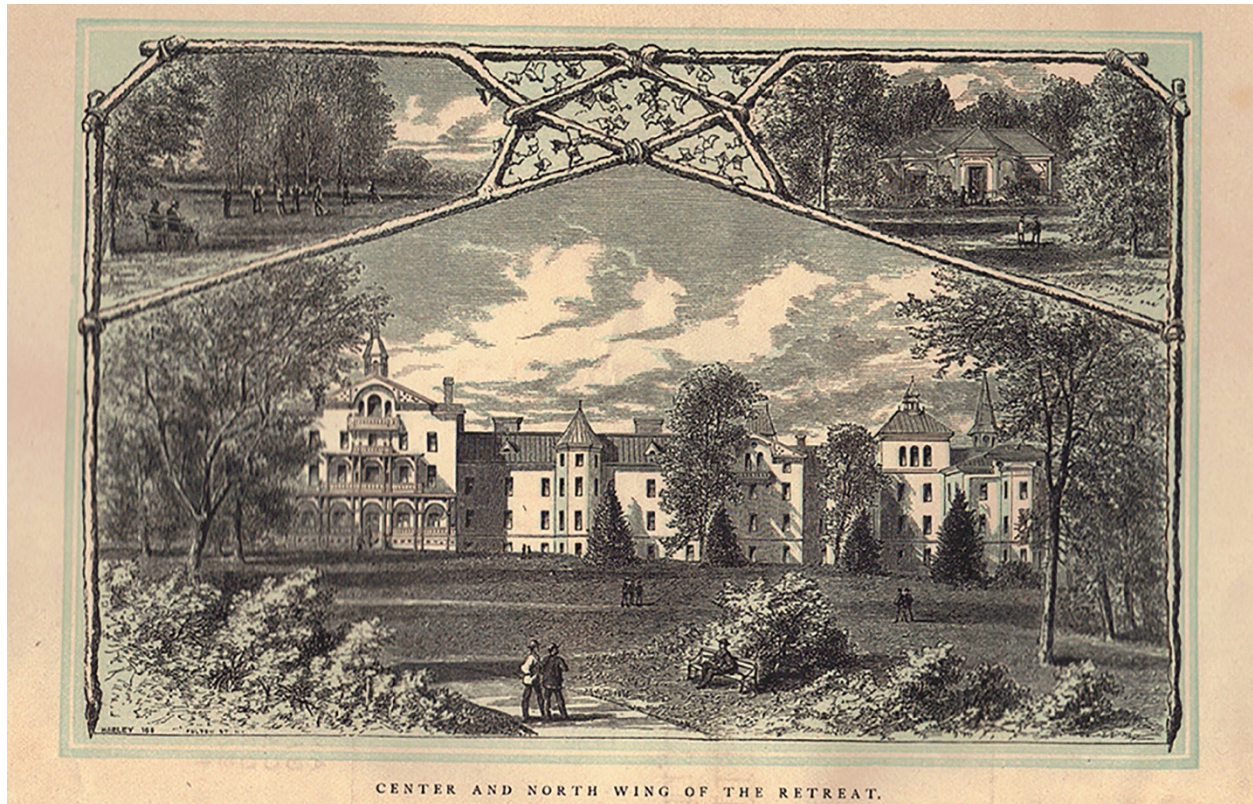


Figure 4. "Center and North Wing of the Retreat." Image source: *Frontispiece to the Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1878* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1879).

Olmsted and Vaux were hired in 1860 to make preliminary landscape plans (now lost). By the following year, work on the Retreat grounds began, overseen by landscape gardener Jacob Weidenmann (1829-1893), who was also in the process of redesigning Hartford's City Park (today's Bushnell Park)...²³ Weidenmann eventually described and published an illustrated plan of the 39 acre "Retreat Park" (Figure 5) in his book *Beautifying Country Homes: A Handbook of Landscape Gardening. Illustrated by Plans of Places already Improved.* (1870)...²⁴

²² Francis R. Kowsky, *Country, Park & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York, NY, and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 152. See also Hawkins, "Therapeutic Landscapes," 265.

²³ Ibid. Kowsky cited a 13 April 1860 letter Butler wrote to Vaux and Olmsted in which he suggested some modifications to the plans. There were apparently two plans; Butler expressed a preference for "one plan [that] is evidently and decidedly better than the other [...]." See Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers: Subject File, 1857-1952: Hospitals, mental, 1860 to 1887, undated*. Manuscript/Mixed Material, Library of Congress, accessed 10 March 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss351210236>.

²⁴ Jacob Weidenmann, "Retreat Park, Hartford, Conn. Designed by Olmsted & Vaux, and executed by J. Weidenmann," Plate XVIII in *Beautifying Country Homes: A Handbook of Landscape Gardening. Illustrated by Plans of Places already Improved* (New York, NY: Orange Judd and Company, 1870), n.p.



Figure 5. "Retreat Park, Hartford, Conn. Designed by Olmsted & Vaux, and executed by J. Weidenmann," Plate XVIII in Jacob Weidenmann, *Beautifying Country Homes: A Handbook of Landscape Gardening. Illustrated by Plans of Places already Improved* (New York, NY: Orange Judd and Company, 1870): n.p.

Weidenmann's plan offers a general overview of the design by Olmsted and Vaux. Only two exterior roads are shown: Maple Avenue to the east and Retreat Avenue to the northwest. Buildings are highlighted in pink, making them distinct from the verdant grounds. The large, main building is in the west portion of the site, and its main façade faces east, maximizing views over lawns framed by trees and giving access to curvilinear paths. A "Business Entrance" defined by an axial lane—the only one on the site—extends west from the center of the main building and provides access to various asylum service areas, boiler house, kitchen, and laundry. A barn and an icehouse stand in the far northwest corner, and drying yards are east of those. An area marked by pink and tan stripes on the plan defines the superintendent's vegetable garden, just north of his residence and barn. In contrast, a "Patient's flower garden and conservatory" on the south side of the site is represented by a circle divided into quadrants.²⁵ A cruciform structure in the center of the site represents the asylum's "Museum," a building Vaux designed in 1861. Like other asylum museums, this building was meant to house a variety of curiosities, reading materials, a billiard table, and art for patients to enjoy.²⁶ Landscape views from this museum would be an important element for the patients as well, with each "window command[ing] a beautiful view, not only of our grounds but of the city or distant hills. It cannot but afford our convalescent patients a most welcome retreat, especially in inclement weather [...]"²⁷

²⁵ Weidenmann, "Retreat Park, Hartford Conn.," in *Beautifying Country Homes*, n.p. A legend for the lettered items (aka "Explanatory References") appears at the bottom of the one-page text describing Plate XVIII.

²⁶ According to Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 153, the Vaux-designed Museum building is "[n]ow used by golfers."

²⁷ *Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1862* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1862), 29. This quote is from the appendix, "Report of the Committee on Improvements," 27-30; that committee was chaired by John S. Butler.

In 1861, when Weidenmann was implementing the Olmsted and Vaux design, Olmsted continued to oversee construction at Central Park; he also accepted the position of secretary and chief executive officer of the newly formed U.S. Sanitary Commission, a medical and supply relief organization for Union soldiers on the Civil War front.²⁸ Vaux continued working on designs for the Hartford Retreat, including renovation and expansion plans for the main building in 1863.²⁹ Vaux and Withers were eventually hired to design additions to the Retreat building, and they were also tasked with unifying the architectural aesthetic of the building as a whole after nearly 40 years of ad hoc expansions.³⁰ Butler was pleased with the final results of that work, comparing the consolidation by Vaux, Withers & Co. to a country estate.³¹ After that, the Retreat became a facility for mostly affluent clientele.³²

Seen in plan, the Olmsted and Vaux design fails to make explicit how patients and visitors would arrive and depart from the asylum because there were two “Main Entrances” indicated: one along Retreat Avenue and centered on the northwest edge of the property and another along Maple Avenue near the southeast corner of the grounds. A larger winding road called the “Public Drive” connected these two main entrances while narrower paths called “Patient Drives” intersected the wider Public Drive providing connections to the main building and other areas. Superintendent Butler insisted that the public have some access to the newly designed grounds, thus the Public Drive was open to community traffic “every summer afternoon.”³³ Olmsted and Vaux subdivided circulation routes by types of use, just as they had done at Central Park, albeit on a much smaller scale. This design gesture was functionally pragmatic and served a marketing purpose. In 1864, Butler noted,

The Drive, which gives the public an opportunity of observing these pleasant changes without exposing ourselves to interruption or intrusion, is exerting a happy influence abroad, in making it evident that the externals of a lunatic asylum need not be repulsive, and may lead to the reflection that its inner life is not without its cheerful, home-like aspects.³⁴

The Retreat’s Committee on Improvements noted that, “From whatever point of the drives or walks the grounds are viewed, the effect upon the eye is now harmonious and striking.”³⁵ By 1878, the “Business Entrance” had “become the principal and most prominent approach to the Retreat, and from which strangers, visitor, and patients get their first impressions of the institution.”³⁶ Reorienting the main entrance this way transformed the earlier spatial hierarchy of Olmsted and Vaux’s design that Butler had so admired. Various new structures were added to the west side of the Retreat, including a utilitarian “greenhouse,” all realized under the direction of Connecticut-based architect

²⁸ *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume IV, Defending the Union: The Civil War and the U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1861-1863*, eds. Jane Turner Censer (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 4-5.

²⁹ *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1863* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1863), 5. “Having a fine location, with spacious grounds, which are both ornamental and useful, and with the recent additions of museum, bowling saloon and amusement hall, for the recreation of patients [...] [f]urther improvements for rendering the Hospital buildings more commodious and useful, and for giving them a more cheerful aspect, both externally and internally [we] have procured plans from Mr. Vaux [...] for the remodeling and enlargement of the buildings.”

³⁰ *Forty-Fifth and Forty-Sixth Annual Reports of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn.* (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, Printers, 1870), 21.

³¹ *Ibid.* The superintendent noted that, “[e]xternally the plain and factory-like-looking building has been converted into a beautiful home-like structure, more resembling a country residence of a private gentleman than a public building or hospital.”

³² Goodheart, *Mad Yankees*, 161-162.

³³ Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 153.

³⁴ *Fortieth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1864* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1864) 18. This quote is also included in Weidenmann, “Retreat Park, Hartford Conn.,” in *Beautifying Country Homes*, n.p.

³⁵ *Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1862* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1862), 27. This quote is from the appendix, “Report of the Committee on Improvements,” 27-30; that committee was chaired by John S. Butler.

³⁶ *Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Officers of the Retreat for the Insane, at Hartford, Conn., April 1878* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1864), 6.

George Keller (1842-1935) and the new asylum superintendent Henry P. Stearns (1828-1905). The primary purpose of Stearns's greenhouse was to grow flowers for the halls during winter.³⁷ This was not merely a decorative flourish; Stearns professed those flowers placed throughout the asylum in winter would be as therapeutic to patients as the grounds, the pleasantly colored walls, and the "beautiful pictures" throughout the building.³⁸ It was common for both private and state asylums to have greenhouses for this purpose.

Olmsted and Vaux designed and consulted on at least two other asylums concurrently during the early 1860s, including the Moses Sheppard Asylum in Towson, Maryland, and the Bloomingdale Asylum in upper Manhattan. Several years before his death, Moses Sheppard (1771-1857), a Quaker and successful Baltimore merchant, arranged a sizeable endowment for creating an asylum or hospital for the insane within the greater Baltimore area.³⁹ The asylum trustees held an architectural design competition in 1859 for a large main building for 200 patients on a 375-acre site in Towson.⁴⁰ Landscape gardener Howard Daniels (1815-1863), a man perhaps best known for cemetery design and whose Central Park design competition submission won fourth place, was working on Druid Hill Park in Baltimore in 1860 when he was hired to design the Sheppard Asylum grounds.⁴¹ The trustees were still unsure about what they wanted for the building, so they asked the medical superintendent of the Bloomingdale Asylum, Dr. D. Tilden Brown, for advice.⁴²

As Brown prepared his recommendations for the Sheppard Asylum trustees, he and Olmsted also had preliminary discussions about designing the Bloomingdale Asylum grounds. Olmsted provided Brown with some "valuable counsel & [a] diagram" of a proposed enclosure (an 8' to 10' wall) for the Bloomingdale facility, but financing and board approval impeded any further development or execution.⁴³

After his return from a European trip, Brown prepared a report for the Sheppard Asylum trustees, and Vaux prepared some preliminary drawings after Olmsted recommended him for the task.⁴⁴ In the fall of 1862, the three men communicated with one another for a very different reason: Vaux was seriously ill for several weeks with either typhus or "brain fever," and Dr. Brown treated him.⁴⁵ Brown updated Olmsted on Vaux's condition, which Olmsted wrote about in letters to his family. Vaux was prescribed "morphine, brandy and leaf tea" to help alleviate the "acute inflammation of the brain." The illness made Vaux delusional and paranoid, so much so that Brown admitted him to the Bloomingdale Asylum for medical treatment and convalescence.⁴⁶ Vaux recovered by the end of the year and began working on projects again, including the Sheppard Asylum.

³⁷ Ibid, 14.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Sheppard Asylum was chartered in 1853 via a bill passed in the Maryland Legislature. For more on this institution, see Henry M. Hurd, "The Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital," in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada, Volume 3*, ed. Henry Mills Hurd (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1916), 558-570. See also Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 153-156, and Bliss Forbush, *The Sheppard & Enoch Pratt Hospital: 1853-1970. A History*. Philadelphia and Toronto: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1971.

⁴⁰ Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 153.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ D. Tilden Brown to Frederick Law Olmsted, 9 March 1861, in *Frederick Law Olmsted Papers: General Correspondence*, Manuscript/Mixed Media, Library of Congress, accessed 10 March 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss351210053/>.

⁴⁴ Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 153.

⁴⁵ Frederick Law Olmsted to Mary Perkins Olmsted (wife), 15 September 1862, and Frederick Law Olmsted to John Olmsted (father), 15 September 1862 in *Frederick Law Olmsted Papers: General Correspondence*, Manuscript/Mixed Media, Library of Congress. Accessed 10 March 2019, www.loc.gov/item/mss351210060/. See also Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 160.

⁴⁶ In a subsequent letter to Mary on 23 September 1862, Olmsted noted that Vaux "has gone to Dr. Brown's," presumably meaning Bloomingdale. See Frederick Law Olmsted to Mary Perkins Olmsted, 21 September 1862, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume IV*, 423. See also Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 160.



Figure 6. Calvert Vaux, *Façade of the Moses Sheppard Asylum, Towson, Maryland*. Image source: "Sheppard Asylum, front elevation," Courtesy of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, Digital Collections, <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101575485-img>.



Figure 7. Calvert Vaux, *Back of the Moses Sheppard Asylum, Towson, Maryland*. Image source: "Sheppard Asylum, back elevation," Courtesy of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, Digital Collections, <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101583613-img>.

In his bequest for the Baltimore asylum, Sheppard had stipulated that the edifice must stylistically "resemble domestic architecture," a genre in which Vaux was already prominent, having designed a number of residences, such as those discussed in the revised edition of his book *Villas and Cottages* (1864). Designed in 1861, the Sheppard Asylum building began to be constructed in 1862, and Vaux continued to work on the project throughout the Civil War period. (Figures 6 and 7) Although Vaux was expected to make the exterior "resemble domestic architecture" Brown insisted that the

interior reflect some of the asylum design ideals espoused by Thomas Story Kirkbride, the prominent doctor and superintendent at the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane outside Philadelphia. The resulting building did not strictly conform to the staggered, shallow V-shaped linear building plan Kirkbride promoted in his treatise *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane* published in 1854 (Figure 8); rather, it comprised two L-shaped buildings (one for each gender) with double-loaded corridors that still enabled patient ward organization by severity of illness.⁴⁷ (Figure 9) Abundant windows in every room provided significant views of the landscape. Construction progress was incremental, and the building was not completed until 1891.⁴⁸

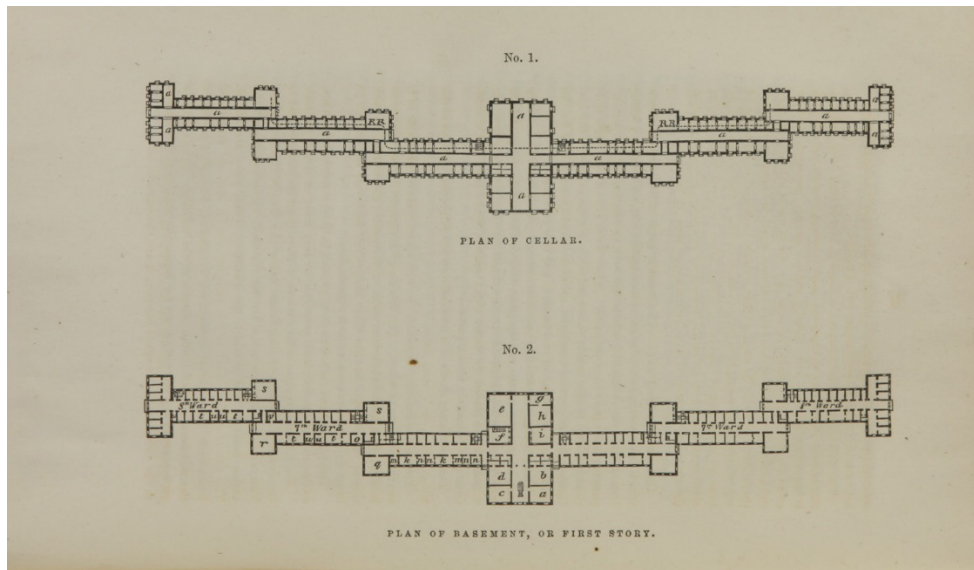


Figure 8. "No. 1: Plan of Cellar; No. 2: Plan of Basement or First Story." Image source: Thomas Story Kirkbride, *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane*. Philadelphia: Unknown Publisher, insert between 30-31. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Kowsky, 155.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 153.

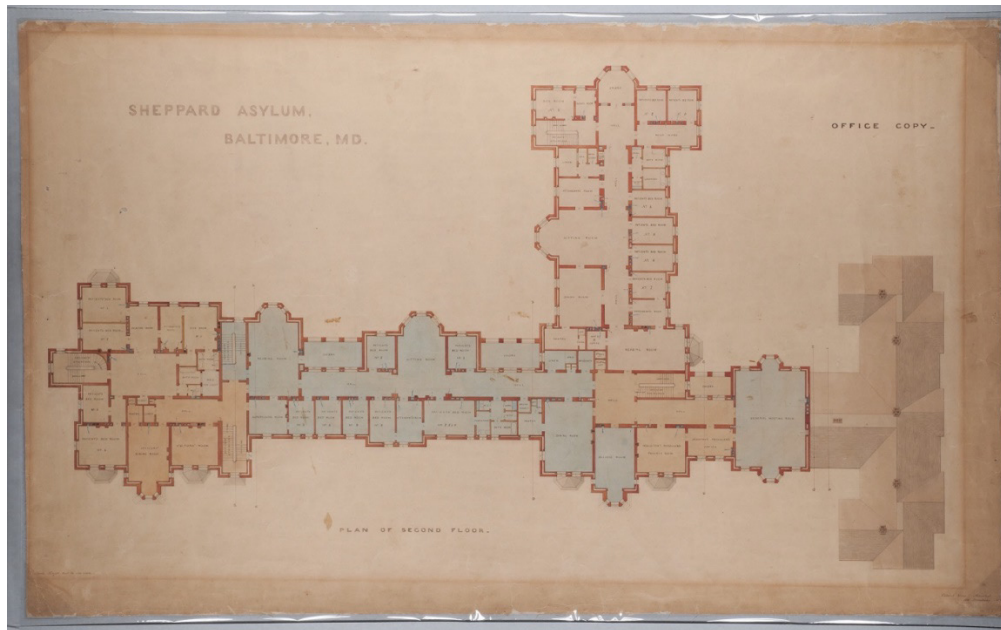


Figure 9. Calvert Vaux, "Plan of Second Floor," Sheppard Asylum, Towson, Maryland, ca. 1861. Image source: "Sheppard Asylum, Baltimore, MD., plan of second floor," U.S. National Library of Medicine, Digital Collections, <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101575491-img>.

Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane, 1871

As Olmsted and Vaux threw themselves into fresh projects after the war, New York State resumed focus on building state asylums for the insane. This was not, however, a response to an increase in mental illness from war trauma. Links between combat experiences and post-war psychiatric symptoms were not yet clearly understood, but statistically there was an inferred need to house more mentally ill poor throughout the state.⁴⁹ Based on the recent state census, an 1867 *New-York Times* article estimated that there were approximately 4,000 insane people in the state, of whom 650 were housed in the asylum at Utica, a facility meant for 500 patients. Approximately 2,000 insane were housed in county poorhouses, where they received little to no appropriate treatment.⁵⁰ Dr. Sylvester D. Willard presented his *Report on the Condition of the Insane Poor in the County Poor Houses of New York* (1865) to the state legislature, which spurred legislation for the conversion of the former New York State Agricultural College site into the Willard Asylum for the Chronic Insane, which opened in 1869.⁵¹ Even so, the legislature was already making plans for another state asylum, one specifically for the acute insane—shorter-term, curable patients.⁵² In 1867, "An Act to Organize and Establish the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane" passed the state Legislature, and Governor Ruben Fenton (1819-1885), with help from reformer Dorothea Dix (1802-1887) who was lobbying in Albany at the time,⁵³

⁴⁹ For example, during the American Civil War, medical diagnoses of veteran's posttraumatic mental health issues were usually attributed to physical war injuries or other physiological issues. It was not until World War I that an array of veteran mental health issues was recognized, broadly speaking, as "shell shock." For more on this evolution, see Matthew J. Friedman, "History of PTSD in Veterans: Civil War to DSM-5," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed 29 March 2019, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/history_ptsd.asp.

⁵⁰ "Hudson River Hospital for the Insane," *The New York Times*, 15 February 1867, 8.

⁵¹ John Ordranax, *Commentaries on the Lunacy Laws of New York and on the Judicial Aspects of Insanity at Common Law and In Equity, including Procedure, as Expounded in England and the United States* (Albany, NY: John D. Parsons Jr., Law Publisher, 1878), 34-35.

⁵² Robert M. Elliott, M.D., "The Care of the Insane in New York," in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, ed. Henry M. Hurd et al. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1916), 117.

⁵³ Thomas J. Brown, *Dorothea Dix: New England Reformer* (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1998), 330. According to Brown, Dix was appealing to various state legislatures (Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio) to build more state asylums for the chronic insane.

appointed a five-man committee to procure a suitable site for the hospital somewhere along the Hudson River below Albany.⁵⁴ A donated, 206-acre site just outside of Poughkeepsie was selected because it was “geographically central, easily accessible by river and railway, and distinguished for its salubrity and commanding beauty,” plus it was in close proximity to a “large and active community.”⁵⁵ A nine-man hospital board of managers was appointed, and they selected Dr. Joseph M. Cleaveland for superintendent, who had been a physician at Utica for several years, as well as a member of the Hudson River State Hospital site search committee.⁵⁶ The board bought 84 additional acres of adjacent land in order to “secure the privacy of the exercise grounds of the patients,” an abundant water supply from a stream, as well as a stone quarry for construction materials.⁵⁷

The board selected the firm of Vaux, Withers & Company to design the building. However, Vaux was part of two different firms at the time: an architectural firm with Withers and a landscape architectural firm with Olmsted. Both firms worked on designs for the Hudson River State Hospital. Architectural historian Francis Kowsky has speculated that the job of designing the grounds may have come to Olmsted, Vaux & Company “as a result of [Dr. D. Tilden] Brown [of the Bloomingdale Asylum] recommending Olmsted serve with him on the committee [...] to locate a site for the hospital.”⁵⁸ Neither man ultimately served on that committee, but a significant colleague of Olmsted’s did—namely, Dr. Cornelius Rea Agnew (1830-1888), a Columbia College-trained physician, surgeon general of the state militia (1858-1865), and member of the Executive Committee of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC).⁵⁹ Agnew and Olmsted worked together on hospital ships during the Virginia Peninsula campaign, and Agnew treated Olmsted in Saratoga Springs, New York, during the summer of 1862, when the latter was seriously ill and jaundiced.⁶⁰ Agnew was appointed by the governor as one of the nine founding managers of the Hudson River State Hospital, and he served on the three-man committee tasked with “procur[ing] plans for the hospital.”⁶¹ Thus, it is possible that Agnew suggested, if not advocated, for Olmsted to be the Hudson River Hospital’s principal landscape architect in 1866.⁶² The “committee on plans” hired the firm Olmsted, Vaux & Company “to prepare a plan for the improvement of the grounds.”⁶³

Unfortunately, only a few landscape plans of the Hudson River State Hospital—archived or published—are known to exist and most are unavailable to researchers due to their fragility.⁶⁴ There are, however, some published plans and elevations of the main hospital building. Similar to previous asylum designs, the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane was Kirkbridgian—organized with a center main/entrance building flanked by staggered, ward wings divided by gender, which enabled preferred patient distribution dictated by severity of illness, meaning that the best behaved/quietest patients were nearest the center main and the noisiest, most refractory patients were at the very end of a sizable

⁵⁴ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane, for the year ending November 30, 1867* (Albany, NY: C. Van Benthuysen & Sons, 1868), 5. See also Ordonaux, *Commentaries on the Lunacy Laws of New York*, 37, and “Hudson River State Hospital. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.,” in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, 165. The section in Hurd erroneously states that this happened in 1866, but primary sources confirm 1867.

⁵⁵ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 343, n. 49.

⁵⁹ For a short biography of Agnew, including a portrait photograph, see “Cornelius Rea Agnew,” *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 4, Defending the Union: The Civil War and the U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1861-1863*, ed. Jane Turner Censer (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 78-80. See also Wood Roper, *FLO*, 162, 170, 187, 191-193, 209, 215, 225.

⁶⁰ “Cornelius Rea Agnew,” 78.

⁶¹ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 6-7.

⁶² This is my assertion. Thus far I have not seen any other source—primary or secondary—make this connection between Agnew, Olmsted, and the Hudson River Hospital for the Insane.

⁶³ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 10. .

⁶⁴ There are eleven Vaux, Withers & Co. architectural drawings and one topographic survey map (1867) made by Samuel [sic] D. Backus in the New York State Archives, Albany; however, that collection is closed to researchers “due to fragility pending completion of conservation treatment.” At the time of this writing, no conservation treatment has been done or is scheduled.

wing, farthest from the center main.⁶⁵ (Figures 10 and 11). This type of building maximized the number of windows which provided natural light and facilitated additional air circulation during warmer months.

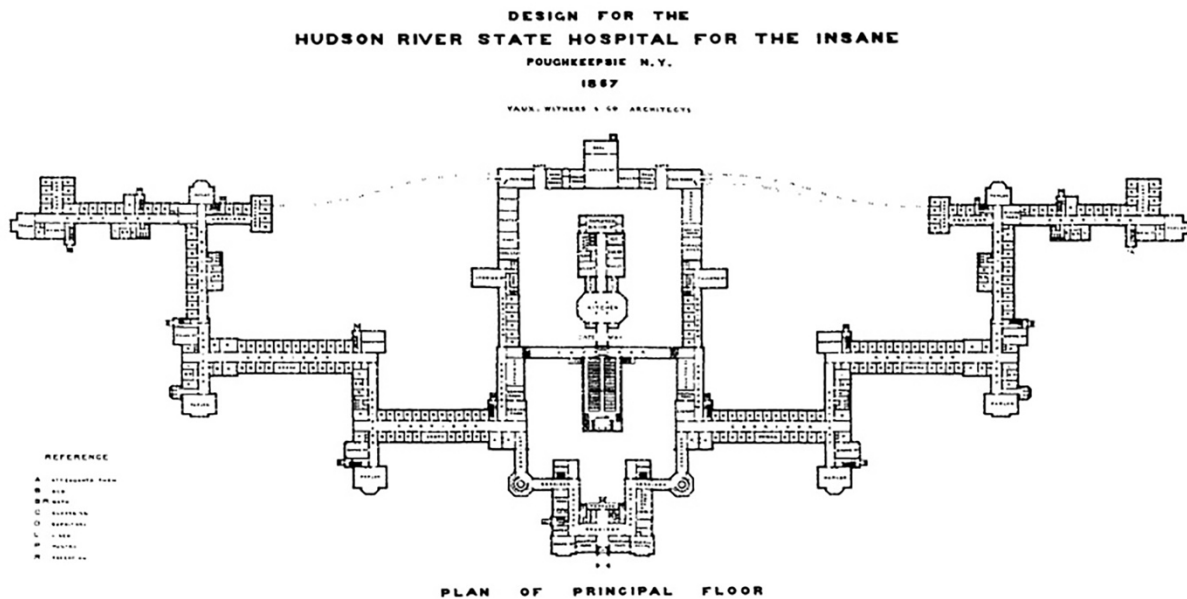


Figure 10. "Design for the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 1867. Vaux, Withers & Co. Architects." Image source: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

⁶⁵ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 8. The report states, "The wards for the more excited patients are farthest removed from the central building, and have bedrooms only on one side of the corridors."

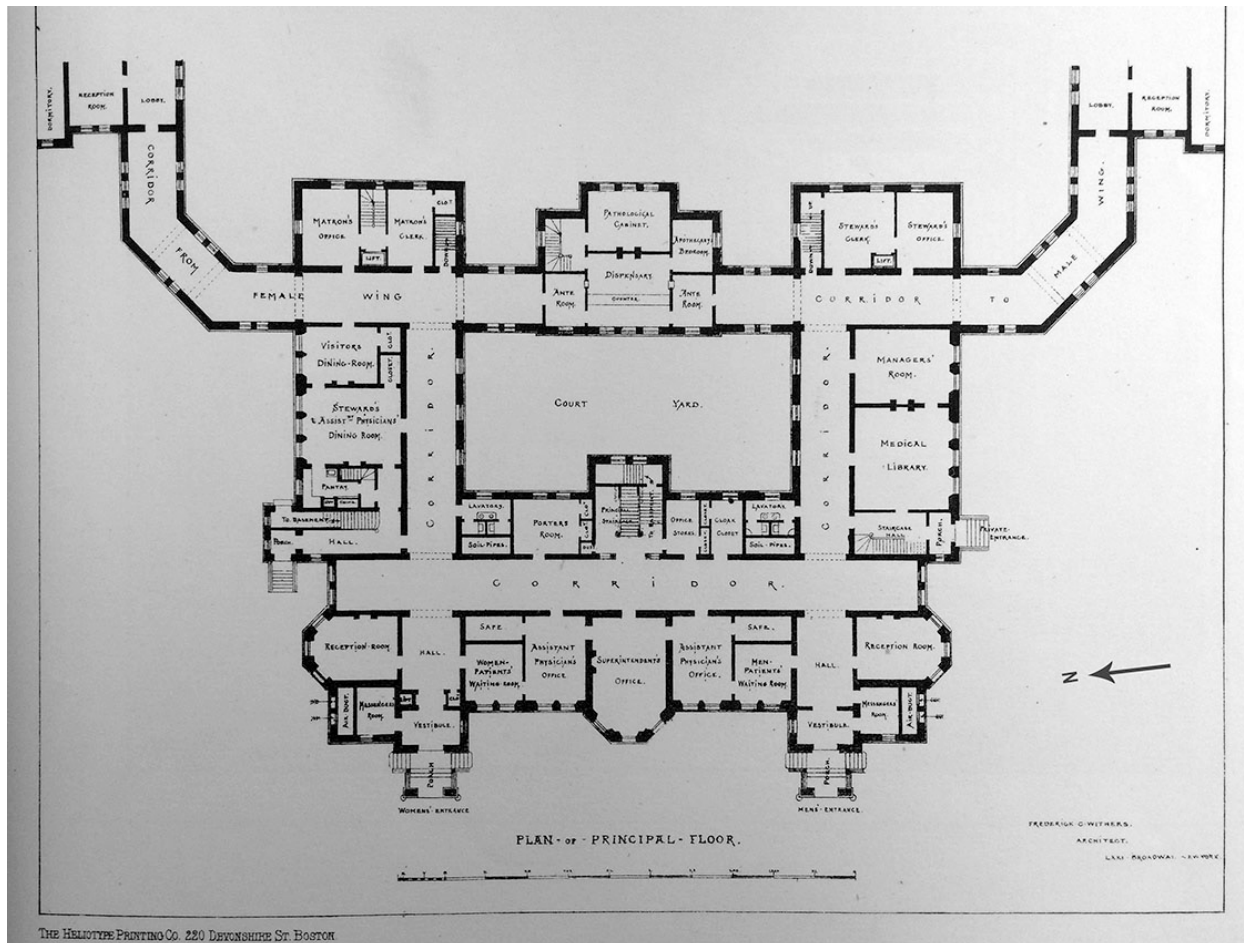


Figure 11. Hudson River State Hospital, Poughkeepsie, New York. Plan of Principal Floor. North arrow added by the author for clarity. Image source: *American Architect and Building News*, Vol. 4, No. 139 (24 August 1878), inert between pages 64 and 65.

The original design was meant to house 400 patients with 200 women in the north wing and 200 men in the south wing. Each wing had its own “main entrance” on the west-facing façade as well as vestibules, reception rooms, and waiting rooms. An interior corridor linked the two sides, at the center of which was the superintendent’s office with a bay window. There were four parlors on the western side of the building as well, placed to offer views of the Hudson River in the distance. Interestingly, although the hospital managers hired the firm Vaux, Withers and Company, most sources attribute the building’s design primarily to Withers because of its High Victorian Gothic style, an aesthetic for which Withers was well known.⁶⁶ (Figure 12).

⁶⁶ Francis R. Kowsky, *The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America after 1850* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 73-74.



Figure 12. "Hudson River State Hospital, Poughkeepsie, New York. Centre Building. F. C. Withers, Architect. New York." Image source: *American Architect and Building News*, Vol. 4, No. 139 (24 August 1878), inert between pages 64 and 65.

Even though no accessible Olmsted and Vaux landscape plan is known to survive for the Hudson River State Hospital, several of the early annual reports provide insight into on-site construction logistics and how landscape was perceived as a distinct resource for the institution. The hospital was going to be built on a 25-acre plateau, which had good drainage because of the steep slopes along its edges; it also commanded exceptional views of the river and surrounding countryside.⁶⁷ The hospital and its infrastructure would occupy the first third of the property closest to the river, while the two-thirds of the site behind the building would be used for pleasure grounds, gardening, and farming.⁶⁸ This back area was also large enough to provide a decent privacy buffer between the hospital and adjacent properties. There were two brooks on the site that initially provided the bulk of water to the institution,⁶⁹ but they soon proved insufficient so a reservoir and settling pond were built "a mile and a quarter from the Hudson river [sic], and more than half a mile from the hospital buildings" to augment the water supply.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* In the report they call these bodies of water on the site "brooks," thus I repeat the word here. Additionally, the report notes that "hydraulic rams forced" brook water into a holding tank, which delivered water to the hospital building, and the superintendent's residence and the hospital green-house were supplied with water from the other brook.

⁷⁰ *Fifth Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane, for the Year 1871* (Albany, NY: The Argus Company, 1872), 5. The Hudson River was notoriously turbid; the settling pond was the upper basin in which particulates could settle before water was released into the lower basin that served the hospital. On the very last page of the report, in the Appendix, the managers relayed anecdotes about the challenges at other asylums lacking adequate water supplies. The asylums mentioned included the Central Illinois Hospital for the Insane, Jacksonville, which tried repeatedly to use wells and cisterns to little avail; Utica, Willard, and Binghamton, in New York State; and the State Hospital for the Insane in Middletown, CT. They also noted the most recently established asylum—Buffalo—had made an agreement with the city to share its municipal water supply. They closed by stating that, "the water-supply of a great hospital should, wherever it is possible, be absolutely independent and entirely at its own control." 24. (Original emphasis)

Much of the hospital's building material was collected onsite. The quarry consisted of laminated bluestone, which was harvested for the foundation floor and walls.⁷¹ Much of the soil excavated had a lot of gravel, which was used for road surfaces as well as the outdoor terrace at the back of the main building.⁷² Some coarse sand was collected onsite for "common mortar," but that had to be supplemented with additional coarse sand from the riverbanks, and, "[f]or the fine mortar of the external brickwork" Rockaway sand had to be imported from afar.⁷³ 11,000 "North River hard bricks" were brought for the initial construction phase, and that supply flow likely continued throughout construction because, during the 1800s, there was an extensive brick industry along the Hudson River.⁷⁴

A road was built from the plateau to the river's edge to meet the new hospital wharf, a more expedient and less expensive path for building supplies. The next closest wharf was one and a half miles away, and the public roads leading to the hospital site had steep grades, which could have added significantly to delivery costs.⁷⁵ The Hudson River Railroad track was adjacent to the river's edge, so the hospital built a trestle and truss bridge over the track to access its wharf.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the first season of construction was challenging and subsequent seasons were beset with additional building delays, cost overruns, and controversy.

The first seven patients were finally admitted in 1871. By 1872, the hospital had spent one million dollars on construction, but the building was only partially complete, accommodating only 212 of the projected 500 patients it was supposed to serve.⁷⁷ In annual reports, there was no mention of meandering pleasure grounds, although references to a "garden" appear in various expense reports, which note the cost of gardening implements, seeds, and other supplies. By the 1880s, the hospital was profiting from small amounts of produce sales. Criticism about the exorbitant costs prompted the state to defer some construction. By 1886, an additional \$500,000 had been spent, but the hospital still could house only 400 patients.⁷⁸ In the 1890s, the hospital completed several renovations and expansions, which increased its population to 1,970 patients by the end of the century. One wonders how much, if any, of Olmsted's landscape plan was implemented for this hospital since no landscape design drawings survive and he was mentioned once in the very first annual report (1867) but not again thereafter.⁷⁹

Buffalo Asylum for the Insane, 1881

The city of Buffalo had been lobbying for a large state asylum since 1865, when the state began to accelerate its approval of new asylum construction and was proposing to build one somewhere in western New York.⁸⁰ In 1870, Buffalo won the bid to become the location of the newest state asylum, a facility for 500 patients, with the passage of "An Act to establish [...] the Buffalo State Asylum for the

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

⁷² Ibid., 15.

⁷³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14. For more on the brick industry, see George Hutton, *The Great Hudson River Brick Industry: Commemorating Three and a Half Centuries of Brickmaking* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane*, 13. The managers noted that from the dock 1½ miles away, daily deliveries of 4 ½ tons of construction material cost one dollar per ton, whereas they could receive 15 tons of materials per day at the hospital dock for .30 cents per ton. They estimated they could save up to thirty-thousand dollars over the course of the project.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ "Hudson River State Hospital. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.," in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, 165.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁹ This applies to the Hudson River State Hospital annual reports from 1867-1886. At the time of writing, I did not have access to the annual reports from 1887 to 1899, thus information about that period is mostly derived from Hurd, "Hudson River State Hospital. Poughkeepsie, N.Y."

⁸⁰ Francis R. Kowsky, *The Best Planned City in the World: Olmsted, Vaux, and the Buffalo Park System* (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press and the Library of American Landscape History, 2013),140.

Insane.”⁸¹ H. H. Richardson was hired as architect and became an officer of the board.⁸² For the grounds, the managers wanted designs from “Olmsted, Vaux & Co., the celebrated landscape architects of New York Central Park and Brooklyn Prospect Park.”⁸³

The tone of the *First Annual Report of the Managers of the Buffalo Asylum for the Insane* (1872) was energetic and optimistic; it described the construction progress of the first building season, after many “vexatious delays in the legal proceedings necessary to acquire possession of the land.”⁸⁴ The city of Buffalo bought 203 acres adjacent to “The Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery” for \$60,000, which created a verdant cluster of landscape types on the north edge of town. The city donated the land to the state for the asylum and secured free and unlimited water from the city water works in perpetuity.⁸⁵ Construction began during the spring of 1871, and it focused on erecting the center main administrative building and two wards on the east side⁸⁶ (Figure 13). A “general plan” of the Richardson building accompanied the *First Annual Report*, which illustrated a large, V-shaped, Kirkbridgian behemoth, as well as a larger Olmsted and Vaux landscape plan that divided the site into various zones. Pleasure grounds with pastures graced the front of the building, separate gardens for men and women were behind the building, and beyond those were the “farm lands” (Figure 14).

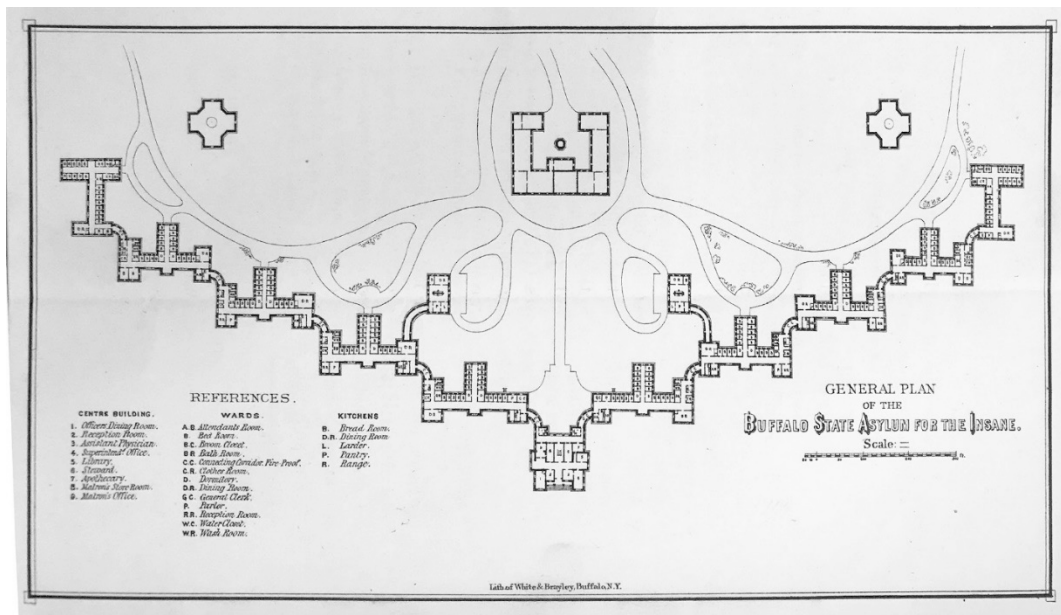


Figure 13. “General Plan of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane. Lith. Of White & Brayley, Buffalo, N.Y.” Image source: *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane [for the year 1871]* (Buffalo, NY: White & Brayley Printers, 1872), insert between pages 10 and 11.

Having the façade face south was fundamental to the interior and exterior functions of the building. On most of the wards, double-loaded corridors projected northward from single-loaded

⁸¹ “Chap. 378, Laws of 1870,” in Ordonaux, *Commentaries on the Lunacy Laws of New York*, 38.

⁸² *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane [for the year 1871]* (Buffalo, NY: White & Brayley Printers, 1872), preface, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁴ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 7.

⁸⁵ “State Provision for the Insane: Buffalo State Asylum, Its History and Description,” in *American Journal of Insanity* Vol. 29, No. 1 (July 1872): 4. See also *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 10. In the *Annual Report*, they estimated that the water “will be worth not less than five thousand dollars a year.”

⁸⁶ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 6.

corridors. Patient rooms lined the north side of the longer hallway that had a bank of windows facing south, which maximized natural light. As noted in the first annual report of the board of managers, “This hall serve[d] as a promenade, recreation room, and general public room for all the patients,” a practical architectural design feature given Buffalo’s notoriously harsh winters.⁸⁷

An ovoid drive encircled the laundry and workshop building, which had six additional spokes radiating from it, five of which connected to the wards, kitchens, and center main, and one of which extended to a “high level farm road” which led, in turn, to the barn, stables, and farmhouse that were in a distant part of the site (See Figure 13). A peripheral drive called a “belt road” encircled the extensive “farm lands” where produce, and perhaps flowers, were grown to supply the asylum kitchens and wards.

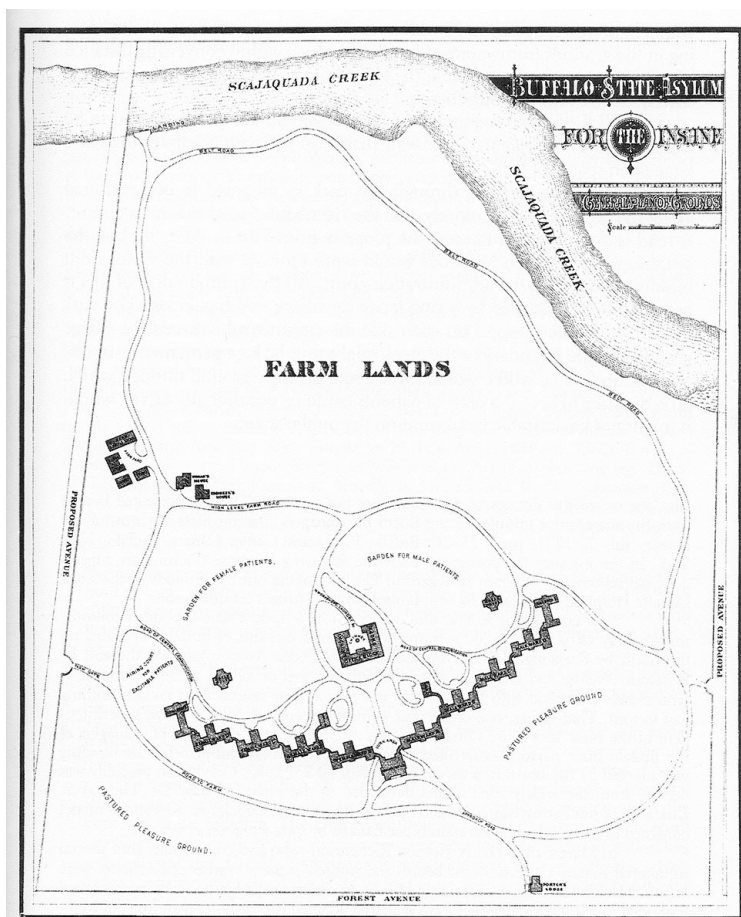


Figure 14. “Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, General Plan of Grounds.” Image source: *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane [for the year 1871]* (Buffalo, NY: White & Brayley Printers, 1872), insert between pages 18 and 19.

In the *First Annual Report*, the engineer-in-charge, Marsden Davey, detailed the progress of the first season of construction on the site, an account that provides valuable information about landscape-related building practices in 1871.⁸⁸ Davey noted that the asylum grounds were “located in the former village of Black Rock, now known as North Buffalo,”⁸⁹ a small port village on Lake Erie that was within

⁸⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁸⁸ Marsden Davey, “Engineer’s Report,” in *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 19-26.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 19.

former Seneca territory, at the headwaters of the Niagara River. The site was bounded by Scajaquada Creek to the north, Forest Avenue to the south, the yet-to-be extension of Elmwood Avenue to the east, and a proposed avenue (today's Rees Street) to the west. Builders surveyed the site from January to May 1871; two undated drawings from the Frederick Law Olmsted Archives in Brookline, Massachusetts, illustrate land surveys with the asylum building and drives superimposed onto the data (Figure 15). One map has one-foot interval topographic lines and select spot elevations that articulate existing grade conditions. Another map (not shown here) includes extensive spot elevations, existing steep ravines, and surficial and underground streams. Together, the two reinforce the condition Davey described in the annual report: "[t]he natural surface of the ground is undulating, and portions of it rugged, being traversed by several ravines which cross it generally from east to west."⁹⁰



Figure 15. Untitled. Topographical map with select land survey spot elevations, 1871. Image source: "Job number 00612-18, New York State Asylum, Buffalo." Courtesy of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (aka The Olmsted Archives), Brookline, Massachusetts.

The ravines facilitated drainage on the site, but construction crews still had to do a significant amount of cut and fill. As workers excavated for the center main foundation, they discovered an underground spring that flowed "about 400 gallons per hour," which was initially used as a water source

⁹⁰ Ibid.

during construction.⁹¹ The spring had “five outlets or streams, which had to be traced up to a common source,” some of which flowed “through the crevices of the rock” underground. In front of the center main was a “natural basin [...] in the rock, about six feet long by four feet wide, that held water to the depth of about six inches. It has been walled up with masonry and arched over, thus forming a reservoir.”⁹² The latter was connected the city sewer in order to maintain a steady water flow that could continually flush the system. Grading around the building drained water towards this reservoir, where pipes directed runoff to a juncture underneath the main entrance that connected to the municipal sewer system. Andropogon Associates’ relatively recent redesign of that “South Lawn” area included rain gardens in front of the former center main building, a configuration that complements the existing “natural basin” described in the 1871 annual report.

It remains unclear why the designers and managers decided to site the asylum’s center main building where they did. As Davey noted,

the location was a difficult one to manage, being in the most rugged part of [the] south ravine, in a hollow sixteen feet below the general surface of the surrounding land, and the spring [...] flowing through it, it became necessary to cut channels in different directions to allow water to pass so as not to impede the operations [...].⁹³

The foundation of the center main was built on “solid rock,” the top of which “lies from sixteen to twenty-four feet below the surface of the ground at the building.”⁹⁴ Directly behind the center main was a “sunken area” (see Figure 15) which was level with the basement, thus the solid rock basin sloped downward from the higher elevations on the south side to the lower elevations towards the north side. Olmsted and Vaux exploited this natural feature, creating sunken passageways underneath the connecting corridors of the center main and ward wings, wisely allowing central egress between the front and back of the massive building.⁹⁵ Because there was so much “surplus earth” after grading Forest Avenue, that excavated material was used to fill in and level “the portion of the ravine around the building” and to “grad[e] the court yard in the rear of the centre building.”⁹⁶

The surrounding landscape context was the most obvious justification for the building’s placement:

The location of the building is the finest that could possibly be selected, as regards to the view from its surroundings. The view from the park will present a fine architectural

⁹¹ Ibid, 20.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 21.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 22. Additionally, in the Cultural Landscape Report of 2008, the authors state, “Because the shifting topography, with changes in elevation measuring as much as 16 feet, the foundation of the asylum building and its sunken drives could be constructed without the expense of blasting rock.” See “Chapter III: Buffalo Asylum: Olmsted Vaux Landscape History & Evolution,” 6. The statement is a bit misleading because, during construction, when they were digging trenches to build the foundation and basement, Davey noted in the *First Annual Report* that “Some of the trenches [for construction] were seven, eight and nine feet deep, though hard pan and clay of the most compact kind, a portion of which had to be drilled and blasted, as the pickaxe had little or no effect upon it.” 22.

⁹⁵ Olmsted wrote “Preliminary Suggestions for the Grounds of the Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane” for a meeting of the asylum trustees and managers on 7 July 1871. Regarding the grade difference between the front and back of the center main, Olmsted noted, “This gives an opportunity for constructing subways under the connecting corridors for communication between the front and the rear system of roads. The need for the passage of wheeled vehicles from front to rear will probably be frequent, and the gain in certain emergencies, as when fire engines would be needed to be moved from one side to the other, might be of great importance, the distance to be saved being over half a mile.” See “Preliminary Suggestions for the Grounds of the Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane,” in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 452.

⁹⁶ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 23.

perspective, and from the park circle, on Bird Avenue, known as Soldiers' Place, the entire front of the building will be fully exposed.⁹⁷



Figure 16. *Historic American Buildings Survey, Photocopy of undated photograph from the collection of the Buffalo Historical Society-State Lunatic Asylum, 400 Forest Avenue, Buffalo, Erie County, NY*” Courtesy of the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.ny0207.photos/?sp=7>.

Throng of visitors would see the asylum and its grounds on the way to the park and be able to see it or the two tall towers of the center main from points within the park itself (Figure 16). The asylum was not meant to be hidden or separated from the community; rather, it was made highly visible, a towering testament to the city’s and the state’s munificence. According to an 1872 article in the *American Journal of Insanity*, the asylum would “overlook the city, the Niagara River, and have a distant view of Lake Erie.”⁹⁸ The area between downtown Buffalo, the asylum, and the park were underdeveloped at the time, so the views described were possible. One can easily imagine seeing “the city, the Niagara River, and have a distant view of Lake Erie” from the tall towers on the asylum’s center main; however, according to architectural historian Francis Kowsky, those elements were ornamental and “drew inspiration from William Burgess’s unrealized 1866 design for the London law courts, [but] had no apparent function [...]”⁹⁹ As such, the towers may have seemed like a surprisingly unnecessary and expensive architectural expenditure but they served (and continue to serve) as a distinctive landmark in the area.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid, 21. See also 9-10: “The buildings will, when completed, present a fine architectural perspective from the avenues and approaches to the Park which the City of Buffalo has recently laid out and is now improving, the west line of which bounds the Asylum grounds.”

⁹⁸ “State Provision for the Insane: Buffalo State Asylum, Its History and Description,” 6. The article also repeated the line from annual reports of “and [the asylum] will present a fine architectural perspective from the park and its approaches.”

⁹⁹ Kowsky, *The Best Planned City in the World*, 141. Kowsky originally stated this in his essay “Architecture, Nature, and Humanitarian Reform: The Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane,” in *Changing Places: Remaking Institutional Buildings*, eds. Lynda H. Schneekloth, Marcia F. Feuerstein, and Barbara A. Campagna (Fredonia, N.Y.: White Pine Press, 1992), 51-52. This assertion was repeated in the 2008 Historic Structures Report for the Buffalo Asylum (for which Kowsky consulted): Goody Clancy (Architecture, Planning, Preservation firm), *Historic Structures Report, the Richardson Olmsted Complex, Buffalo, NY* (Buffalo, NY: N.p., July 2008), 3, 50.

¹⁰⁰ In the essay, Kowsky also speculated that Richardson may have been partially inspired by the architecture of the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh (1870), designed by David Bryce (1803-1876), the Scottish architect, as well as by “Richardson’s knowledge of French asylums, which generally had a chapel at their center, as in fact, was the case here, where the upper floor of the administration building originally housed a large room for worship services.” (51) This was not, however, unique to French asylums or the Buffalo

As at the Hudson River State Hospital, construction of the Buffalo asylum partially depended on the availability of various nearby materials. In addition to describing the underground springs and the building's orientation, Davey mentions the "abundance of clay on the ground suitable for making first-class brick [...]"¹⁰¹ The ravines "contain[ed] [...] deposit[s] of rich, alluvial soil, varying from six inches to four feet in depth."¹⁰² Construction crews removed a lot of the alluvial soil from the south ravine under the soon-to-be-erected center main and mixed it "with sods and turf" from places where they graded, which was then repurposed. Davey noted that, "[t]his material, when well composted, will be found invaluable for top-dressing the lawns, gardens and farm lands." Davey estimated the mixture could "cover an area of fifty acres for a depth of three and one-half inches" and believed that "twice as much more [could] be obtained without [...] interfering with the general contour of the ground."¹⁰³ Another construction document, an "Agricultural Drainage Map for South-East Section of Grounds," shows the layout of an extensive drainage system in front of the male wing, with 3" terra cotta pipes (drainage tiles) that led into larger pipes, which eventually discharged runoff into Scajaquada Creek.¹⁰⁴ This kept the "pastured pleasure ground" and entrance drives dry, manageable, and navigable.

By 1874, the center main and first two male wards on the east side were completed in stone, and the initial entrance drive was also finished. The three remaining male wards were built with brick instead of stone in order to lessen construction costs.¹⁰⁵ In 1877, the superintendent asked Olmsted to provide a more detailed landscape plan for the southeasternmost portion of the asylum grounds.¹⁰⁶ (Figure 17). The designed paths on that plan were more nuanced than in earlier iterations, with wide, curving carriage drives supplemented by a lengthy pedestrian loop that curved through the area labeled "pastured pleasure ground" in an earlier plan. The planting list that accompanied the coded planting plan is presumed lost so the specific meaning of numbers and letters marked on the plan remain unknown.¹⁰⁷

asylum; for example, insane asylums completed earlier in the state also had chapels in the center main, such as those at Blackwell's Island, Utica, and Binghamton.

¹⁰¹ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum*, 21.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁴ In the *First Annual Report*, Davey mentions drainage tiles in another part of the site (25), which makes it likely that the map represents additional drainage tile pipes in front of the building. Drainage tiles were commonly used on large projects, including Central Park.

¹⁰⁵ Heritage Landscapes, "Chapter III: Buffalo Asylum: Olmsted Vaux Landscape History & Evolution," 11. For the 1874 completions, the authors cite the *Third Annual Report* (1874), 5-6; for the comment about brick instead of stone, they cite the *Sixth Annual Report* (1876/7), 11-21.

¹⁰⁶ "Preliminary Suggestions for the Grounds of the Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane," in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 455, n 3. See also Heritage Landscapes, "Chapter III: Buffalo Asylum: Olmsted Vaux Landscape History & Evolution," 11.

¹⁰⁷ Heritage Landscapes, "Chapter III: Buffalo Asylum: Olmsted Vaux Landscape History & Evolution," 11.



Figure 17. “Planting Map for Southeast Section of Grounds. Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, [ca. 1877] Fred. Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect.” Image source: “Job number 00612-24, New York State Asylum, Buffalo.” Courtesy of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (aka The Olmsted Archives), Brookline, Massachusetts.

The park-like design contained clusters of trees and shrubs that strategically concealed and revealed views of the building from various paths. Visitors would enter between two large groups of trees and shrubs, which framed the façade obliquely as the two center main towers projected assertively above the tree line. The southeast and east edges of the property were densely planted, screening the interior grounds from external views except at narrow openings, where passersby would get a glimpse of the asylum landscape and the building. As the trees and shrubs matured, the 180-foot towers would still rise above the verdant masses, which maintained the institution’s architectural prominence with strong vertical elements.¹⁰⁸

With the completion of the east wing, the Buffalo facility began to accept patients from the asylum at Utica in December 1880.¹⁰⁹ Although the east wing was intended for men only, both men and women were housed there, separately, for the first ten years of operations. The first ward west of the center main was completed in 1891; a second ward adjacent to it was completed in 1893, and, by 1895, “the final three buildings necessary to complete the original plan were erected.”¹¹⁰ Two years later, a completely separate building for “acute cases” was built near the east edge of the site, along Elmwood Avenue.¹¹¹

McLean Asylum for the Insane, Belmont, Massachusetts

In 1872, the trustees of Massachusetts General Hospital consulted Olmsted about potential sites for relocating its psychiatric division, which led to the establishment of the McLean Asylum for the

¹⁰⁸ For example, see “Administration Building [aka Center Main], Buffalo State Hospital,” n.d., in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, inserted between 190-191. The photograph was likely taken in the 1890s or early twentieth century. During the 1890s, photographs accompanied each state hospital’s annual reports.

¹⁰⁹ “Buffalo State Hospital,” in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada: Volume 3*, 183.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* See also Heritage Landscapes, “Chapter III: Buffalo Asylum: Olmsted Vaux Landscape History & Evolution,” 23. The authors made a map of the site conditions at the end of the nineteenth century (circa 1899); it shows the Kirkbridian building complete, the new acute patient building fronting Elmwood Avenue complete, a railroad switch line that enters the site from the northwest corner and ends at the back of the workshop buildings, and additional asylum auxiliary buildings encroaching on farmland.

Insane. Like asylums associated with New York Hospital and the Pennsylvania Hospital, McLean operated as a branch of Massachusetts General Hospital and had received its first patients decades before, in 1818.¹¹² The facility was located on the former estate of Joseph Barrell (1739-1804) in “Charlestown” (today’s Somerville), on the outskirts of Boston. Barrell House was one of the first commissions given to architect Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844), the well-known designer of the Faneuil Hall expansion (1806), University Hall in Harvard Yard (1813-1816), and the early Massachusetts General Hospital building (1818), today’s Bulfinch Building. The 211-acre Barrell estate, named Pleasant Hill, was renowned in the late 1700s for its landscape, with ornate gardens incorporated into a *ferme ornée* and views that overlooked the Charles River and the city of Boston beyond.¹¹³ When Massachusetts General bought the property, the trustees built additional three-story brick houses to accommodate patients in lodgings adjacent to the newly expanded mansion. The mansion itself served as the administration building for 77 years, until the McLean Asylum moved to Waverley (an area in Belmont approximately three miles northwest of Mount Auburn Cemetery) in 1895.¹¹⁴

Back in 1872, however, the greater Boston area was expanding, and the McLean Asylum had been enveloped by “railroad tracks, cheap housing [tenements], factories, and meat-packing establishments.”¹¹⁵ The trustees of Massachusetts General began looking for a different property in order to relocate the McLean Asylum. Properties in Waltham, Arlington, and Belmont were considered. Olmsted visited all three sites on behalf of the trustees of McLean as part of his initial landscape design consultation.¹¹⁶ In December, he wrote a letter to the chairman of the board of trustees, noting some strengths and challenges for each location and offering general suggestions for the new asylum layout that reflected some of his recent asylum design experiences elsewhere. He assured the trustees that each site contained the proper “conditions of purity, moisture, exposure, &c.” and that none would be “affected by marshy exhalations” of miasmatic vapors.¹¹⁷ He advised them to choose a location that would require the least amount of land modification and suggested specific building features that were very similar to those at the Buffalo asylum, such as south facing windows to harness good daylight and soft breezes. He recommended gender segregated wards so that “men would not look upon windows or grounds accessible to women,” patient illness classifications in order to distribute them spatially, and, lastly, a means to separate the most “violent and noisy” patients from the “quiet and convalescent” ones so that the latter would not be disturbed by the former’s behavior.¹¹⁸

Some of Olmsted’s suggestions—such as separating men and women, or arranging patients based on diagnoses—were, by the 1870s, long-held asylum standards that even predated Kirkbride’s renowned midcentury propositions. Olmsted also paraphrased Kirkbridian design standards (without attribution), such as:

a central building for offices of administration with a series of buildings two stories in

¹¹² George T. Tuttle, “McLean Hospital, Waverly, Mass.,” in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada, Volume 2*, ed. Henry Mills Hurd. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1916), 601.

¹¹³ Kristine Burton, “The Garden of Colonial Flowers at Munroe Tavern: A Collection of Flowers Grown in the Boston Area before 1830,” *Garden History* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 1997), 52.

¹¹⁴ Tuttle, “McLean Hospital, Waverly, Mass.,” 605-606, 611. Tuttle noted that the Boston and Lowell Railroad took over the former Pleasant Hill property after McLean moved in 1895.

¹¹⁵ See footnote 2 explaining the letter “Frederick Law Olmsted to Henry Bromfield Rogers [Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mass General], 13 December 1872,” in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 588, citing Tuttle, “McLean Hospital, Waverly, Mass.,” 606. Beveridge uses the term “cheap housing,” whereas Tuttle uses the term “cheap tenements.”

¹¹⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted to Henry Bromfield Rogers, 13 December 1872, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 584.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 585. Olmsted does not mention miasmatic vapors by name, but it is surely that to which he refers. Germ theory had not yet replaced miasma theory as an explanation of disease causation.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

height branching from it on opposite sides, each building adapted to lodge a number of patients, and each series arranged *en echelon*, the wings either advancing (sic) or receding from the line of the front of the administration building.¹¹⁹ (Original emphasis)

It is likely that some of the trustees would have been aware of these Kirkbridgian and earlier-established design orthodoxies, and McLean's superintendent at the time, Dr. George F. Jelly (1842-1911), certainly would have been familiar with such standards through professional networks and literature.¹²⁰

Later in his letter to the trustees of the McLean Asylum, Olmsted reiterated that they should find a site that would need the least amount of modification, noting that "the less the topography of any site which may be selected shall either oblige you to make alterations of the surface by grading, or compel you to modify such an arrangement, the better it is for your purpose."¹²¹

Olmsted believed the Waltham site would require the most work. The Arlington site would not require a lot of grading, but "the basement would have to be excavated chiefly from rock, and the grounds on all sides would be inconveniently rugged," therefore, he thought it the least desirable. He may also have wanted to avoid being involved with another project that repeated some of the same construction challenges faced at Buffalo during the first year of its construction. Olmsted liked the Belmont site best because the "buildings could be perfectly realized with but slight and inexpensive alterations of the surface."¹²²

Furthermore, he argued, the conditions at Belmont would encourage "moderate exercise and tranquil occupation of the mind" because the "wooded land [...], judiciously thinned to groups and glades, opened by walks of long curves and easy slope, would by the time your buildings were ready for occupancy, afford what is chiefly wanted in this respect."¹²³ He considered the Belmont site "a positively excellent one," although he cautioned that an "instrumental survey" of each site would be necessary for a more definitive comparison. In the end, the trustees did choose the Belmont location and built the new McLean Asylum there, based on a "cottage plan" organizational type, where detached buildings were distributed strategically across a larger portion of the property, housing a smaller than usual number of patients within each building, which was supposed to imbue the institution with a more domestic, home-like environment. Olmsted provided some rough preliminary plans sometime during the 1870s, "but most of the landscape design work was done by others."¹²⁴

The End for Olmsted & Vaux

Although design work during the early 1870s began auspiciously for the firm Olmsted, Vaux, and Company, the long simmering tensions between the two principals had become untenable, and they dissolved their partnership and the firm in the fall of 1872.¹²⁵ Both men had endured the on-again, off-again employment pattern for overseeing Central Park and the New York City Parks Department for several years, which was largely the result of political power shifts from one city administration to the next. Both continued working on public park projects independently after the dissolution of their firm.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 585-586.

¹²⁰ For a brief biography of Jelly, see "Dr. George Frederick Jelly," in *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada, Volume 4*, ed. Henry Mills Hurd. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1916), 431.

¹²¹ Frederick Law Olmsted to Henry Bromfield Rogers, 13 December 1872, in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 586.

¹²² Ibid., 587.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, footnotes 4 and 5 to the letter Frederick Law Olmsted to Henry Bromfield Rogers, 13 December 1872, 588. It is unclear if any of the rough preliminary plan drawings still exist. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site does not have them in its archives, although it does have some later McLean material from the early twentieth century (1923), when the Olmsted Brothers ran the firm.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 3. See also Wood Roper, *FLO*, 342-343, and *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 6, The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company*, 2, 69, 642.

Vaux remained in New York and Olmsted relocated Brookline, Massachusetts, with his family in 1883, establishing a new solo firm that produced some of the best-known designs of his later career, such as the public parks in Boston, designs for portions the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and work for George Washington Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. The professional paths of Olmsted and Vaux still occasionally crossed after they ended their partnership and they remained friends up until Vaux's death in the 1890s.

Olmsted's health began to decline significantly in the early 1890s and by 1895 he was showing signs that his memory and cognition skills were diminishing. Fortunately, his son Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957) and nephew/adopted son John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) were already working in the Olmsted office and were able to maintain the firm's workload.

Doctors suggested that Olmsted take time off to rest in a "mild, damp climate," so the family decided to travel back to England. Olmsted, his wife Mary Perkins Olmsted (1830-1921), their daughter Marion, and Frederick Jr. sailed to England in November 1895.¹²⁶ Five days later, Calvert Vaux went missing, and his body was found in the water at Gravesend Bay, Brooklyn, the next day. Newspaper accounts stated it was likely an accident, that Vaux may have fallen off of a pier. Neither suicide nor homicide was suspected. At the time of his death, Vaux was 71 and two *New York Times* stories published about his disappearance and death described him as a *landscape architect* rather than architect, as he is more commonly referred to as today.¹²⁷

When still on the ship to England, Frederick Jr. became increasingly concerned about his father's mental state as Olmsted became progressively more preoccupied with the past, "the state of his soul," reminiscences of childhood ministers, and reading the Bible, something he had not done previously.¹²⁸ Olmsted became suspicious of people working in the firm, including his son John, and was concerned that they were staging a "coup" against him. The sojourn in England did little to quell these impulses, although he still managed to encourage Frederick Jr. to go to Kew Gardens for information and advice about completing the arboretum at Biltmore.¹²⁹

While abroad, the entire family suffered from various ailments. Mary was so concerned about their daughter Marion's mental state that she worried Marion might "'go off' like Charlotte," a reference to Olmsted's niece/stepdaughter who was committed to an asylum in 1883. Charlotte Olmsted Bryant (1855-1908) remained institutionalized until her death in 1908.¹³⁰ Neither man's families were impervious to affliction and both had close relatives with mental illness. Vaux's daughter Helen H. Vaux Donaldson committed suicide in 1904, allegedly due to her extreme "zeal for study" and research with her husband, Henry H. Donaldson, a neurologist and professor at the University of Chicago.¹³¹ Years later his son, Downing Vaux, committed suicide in 1926.¹³² Sadly, the therapeutic benefits of virid asylum landscapes were not enough for family members of some of the very men who designed and promoted their curative qualities.

As Olmsted's symptoms worsened while still in England, he was temporarily placed in two different sanitarium while the family continued to travel. He did not hear of Vaux's death for months but was distraught when he finally did. The Olmsted family returned to the United States, and they tried to care for him themselves for a couple of years, but his memory and cognition were getting worse, and his

¹²⁶ Wood Roper, *FLO*, 470. They sailed on the *Cephalonia* departing from Boston on 16 November 1895.

¹²⁷ "Calvert Vaux was Drowned," *The New York Times*, 22 November 1895, 1. See also "Calvert Vaux Missing: The Landscape Architect Left His Son's Home Tuesday," *The New York Times*, 21 November 1895, 1.

¹²⁸ Wood Roper, *FLO*, 470-471.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 471.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 107, 392. Wood Roper noted that Charlotte and Dr. Bryant were married in Trinity Church in Boston, H. H. Richardson's famed building, in 1878. She was institutionalized after the birth of her third child. In a footnote, Wood Roper stated that Charlotte died in a sanitarium near Norwood, Massachusetts, likely a private facility. It is unclear to which institution Wood Roper was referring.

¹³¹ "Prof. Donaldson's Wife, Insane, Hangs Herself. Was a Daughter of Calvert Vaux, Central Park Landscape Artist," *The New York Times*, 11 November 1904, 1.

¹³² Kowsky, *Country, Park & City*, 292. Vaux's other two children were Julia Vaux (n.d.) and [Calvert] Bowyer Vaux Jr. (n.d.).

violent outbursts were becoming more frequent. By the fall of 1898, Olmsted's family decided to commit him to McLean Asylum, an institution for which he designed a landscape years before.¹³³ He loathed the place and was frustrated that the facility did not implement his design: "They didn't carry out my plan, confound them!" he exclaimed.¹³⁴ Olmsted remained in one of the McLean cottages for the last five years of his life and passed away with his son Frederick at his side on August 28, 1903.¹³⁵

Like most asylums, McLean fell well short of its envisioned ideal. Asylum construction was usually slow and cumbersome, finances were a challenge, and changes in asylum or government administrations could seriously alter institutional priorities; nonetheless, there remained a political and community will to address the perceived need for treating people with mental illness on a scale unimaginable today. Much of the design work of Olmsted and Vaux was a part of a larger public health conversation and their built work provided vital infrastructure, public amenities, and institutional grounds for a wide range of people. Although asylum landscapes continue to be a marginalized typology in the history of American landscape architecture, they were nonetheless an important category of designed landscape that reflected prevalent social values associated with individual health, civic welfare, and statecraft during the second half of the 1800s.

¹³³ Wood Roper, *FLO*, 474.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*