

Guide to the Olmsted Papers and Records at the Library of Congress

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The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers and the Olmsted Associates Records are located in the Reading Room of the Manuscript Division in the Madison Building, Library of Congress. This newest Library of Congress building is at the southeast corner of the intersection of First Street SE and Independence Avenue.

Frederick Law Olmsted Papers

(60 microfilm reels)

The papers have been microfilmed, and the Library of Congress has prepared a guide to them entitled, "Frederick Law Olmsted: A Register of his Papers in the Library of Congress" which is available in the Manuscript Reading Room. The papers span the years 1777 to 1952 and are divided roughly into four categories: Correspondence, which is arranged chronologically (reels 1-23); Subject, which is arranged topically by type of landscape design project (reels 24-41); Speeches and Writings (reels 41-47); and Miscellany (reels 48-51). Reels 52-60, containing material added to the collection since it was first deposited, have financial records (1855-1903), correspondence relating to Central Park, Louisville parks, Mount Royal, Niagara Falls Reservation, and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, as well as miscellaneous documents and writings. Individual reels of the Papers, or the full set, may be purchased from the Library of Congress or ordered on inter-library loan.

The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers editing project has prepared computerized correspondence lists which also serve as guides to the Olmsted papers. The lists include all post-1865 letters to and from Olmsted as well as third-party letters. The lists contain the following information: sender; recipient; date of the letter; landscape design project with which it deals (by job number); repository; location (if the letter is located in the Olmsted papers, the reel and frame numbers are included); and a letter code if Olmsted signed the letter in the name of the firm. The lists can be sorted and searched by any of the above fields.

Olmsted Associates Records

A register to the Olmsted Associates Records similar to that provided for the Olmsted papers can also be consulted in the Manuscript Reading Room. The Olmsted Associates Records span the years 1670 to 1950 and are the records of the Olmsted landscape architectural firm. They include correspondence, letter-books, memoranda, reports, plans, specifications, lists, clippings, and other related material. The records are divided into eight series.

Series A: The Letterbooks, 1684-99

(76 volumes)

The letterbooks are bound copies of letters sent, chronologically arranged, and fully indexed by name of recipient. They contain business letters, cost estimates, planting procedures and instructions, and various requests: or information. Some personal correspondence is occasionally found in the business material. From 1900 on, outgoing letters are filed in the B series Job files. The ink has faded so badly in volumes 22 through 29 (June 1892 to Sept. 1893) that they are virtually illegible. The indexes in the volumes have been microfilmed, and are on two reels, shelf number MSS. 18,274. They can be purchased, or ordered from the Library of Congress on interlibrary loan.

The Olmsted Papers editorial project has compiled a computerized list of all correspondence in the A series through August 22, 1895 (volume 41). This list gives the correspondent's name and the numbers of A series volumes with letters to that person. There is a separate entry for each design project about which the firm wrote a correspondent. The list may be sorted and searched alphabetically or by job number, producing either a listing for all the jobs with which a correspondent was involved, or an alphabetical listing of all correspondents for a particular job in the letterpress volumes. The researcher can then take this list of volumes and use the microfilmed indexes of the letterpress volumes to locate the page numbers for letters to a given correspondent.

Series B: Job Files, 1871-1950

(523 containers)

The job files are arranged by job number and may range in size from one folder to over two hundred. The folders are stored in containers numbered BI-B523. Correspondence and other material for each job is arranged in rough chronological order. These files contain letters received and (after 1899) sent, as well as information about landscape designs and work arrangements, as well as notes, diagrams, and other printed matter.

There are two sets of indexes available for the job files. The first is a set of job books which serves as a numerical index. It includes all jobs undertaken by the firm for which job numbers were created, as well as jobs in which the firm was interested, created a job number, but did not perform any work. This list consists of photocopies and is located in container B1. The second index is a microfilm copy (shelf number MSS. 15,316) of the firm's index cards for the job file and lists the jobs undertaken by the firm alphabetically, geographically, and by category. These microfilm indexes are all incomplete to some extent, and vary in completeness. The alphabetical index--reels 1 through 6--is the most complete; the geographical index, on reel 7, is nearly as complete, while the index arranged by category of work is incomplete and unreliable.

In the Manuscript Reading Room there are also two oversize volumes that are a copy of the master job book at the Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline. These volumes list the projects undertaken by the firm, by job number. (A number of projects done by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. did not receive job numbers, but have now been assigned numbers by the editors of the Olmsted Papers.) For anyone seeking information about any of the firm's landscape design projects, series A and B would probably be the most useful.

Series C: General Correspondence, 1884-95

(4 containers)

The correspondence in this series is largely routine in nature. It contains work requests and comments about park and estate development.

Series D: Special Correspondence, 1874-99

(4 containers)

Most of the correspondence in this series relates to the landscaping of the World's Columbian Exposition. In addition, five letterbooks contain material relating to the US Capitol Grounds dated 1874-91.

Series E: Business Records, 1868-1950

(19 containers)

This series contains reports of visits to job sites as well as quarterly and monthly reports, nursery orders, journals, ledgers. The material is arranged by type of record.

Series F: Scrapbooks and Albums, 1893-1917

(13 containers)

This series contains bound newspaper clippings arranged by subject with a loose chronological arrangement within each volume. It also contains photograph albums. Series G: Miscellany, 1890-1950 (2 containers). This series contains miscellaneous letters, letter fragments, resolutions, and deeds that are arranged by type of material or by subject.

Series H: Family Papers, 1868-1903

(9 containers)

This series contains journals, account books, letterbooks, and family and personal letters. The material is grouped by type of material, with each group having either a complete chronological arrangement, or a combination alphabetical-chronological arrangement.