

Olmsted's 1883 Plan for Colgate University and its Impacts on the Campus

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Introduction

For those interested in Frederick Law Olmsted's academic campuses, 1883 was a banner year.¹ He returned to Amherst College to advance ideas for its eastern slopes that he had first explored a dozen years before. More importantly, he began the plans for Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, probably the most exquisite of all Olmsted's campus visions. Also in that year, but less well known, was his meteoric involvement in the planning and development of Madison University, as today's Colgate University was then known.² Olmsted visited the campus in Hamilton, New York, and generated a plan and a report on the siting of two buildings in which he offered numerous observations on the state of the grounds. Circumstances at Madison mitigated against a direct embrace of his plan or his ongoing involvement with the campus. Unlike the Lawrenceville or Amherst cases, Olmsted's actual involvement with the campus at Madison proved rather fleeting. Yet, I will argue that Olmsted's visit to Hamilton planted some seeds from which decisive physical and attitudinal shifts grew and blossomed. Those seeds took some time to gestate, but their impact was substantial. Though most of Colgate students and staff are not aware of it, defining qualities of their campus owe much to Olmsted's suggestions of almost a century and a half ago.

¹ The scholarly resources on Olmsted and campus architecture are extensive. At the front of the line is the work of Charles Beveridge, and specifically his work with Paul Rocheleau on *Frederick Law Olmsted. Designing the American Landscape* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995); his "Olmsted - His Essential Theory," *Nineteenth Century. Journal of the Victorian society of America*, 20/2 (2000), 32-37; and the multivolume *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977 -). Within the latter, Vol. 12, *Plans and View of Communities and Private Estates* (2020) is particularly relevant. David Schuyler's "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Origins of Modern Campus Design," *Planning for Higher Education*, 25/2 (Winter 1996-97), 1-10 is also foundational.

² James Allen Smith, *Becoming Colgate. A Bicentennial History* (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University Press, 2019); Howard Williams, *A History of Colgate University, 1819-1969* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969).

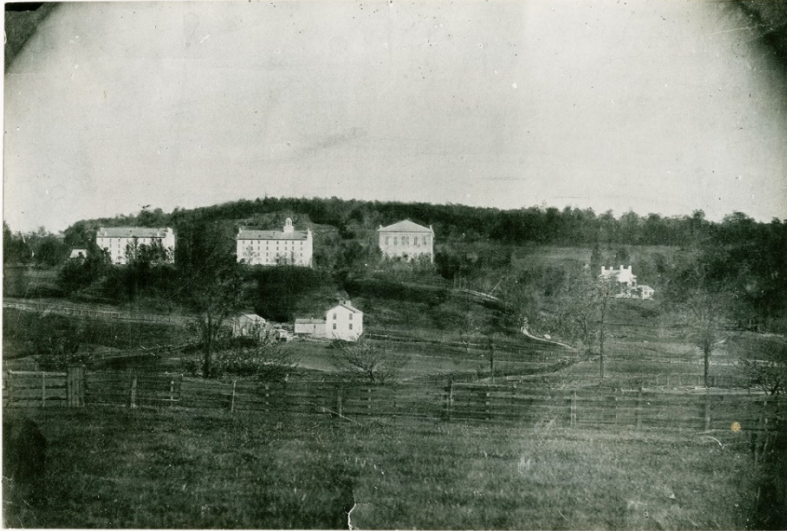


Figure 1. Photograph of Madison University from the North, circa 1868. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives. The three major buildings most of the way up the Hill are, from left to right, East Hall (1834), West Hall (1827), and the Hall of Alumni and Friends (1859-61). The house to the right on the bluff is Spear House (1835). The Hascall Farmhouse and Barns (1830s) occupy the midground, with College Street gradually rising from right to left just beyond them. Finally, the light snaking path rising between Alumni Hall and Spear House was the historic pedestrian route from the lowlands up to the Hill. In 1868, virtually all the land immediately north of College Street was dedicated to farming and pasturage.

Madison University on the Eve of the Olmsted Visit

In 1826-27, the Baptist Seminary that became Madison University in 1846 first occupied its grounds on the northern slopes of a hill located three quarters of a mile south of the Village of Hamilton, New York. Over the ensuing decades, a line of three substantial but blocky and largely unembellished buildings occupied a terrace located about 120 feet above the lowlands around Payne Creek. Life within the university was focused on that hill south of College Street (the historic east-west road that passed by the Jenkins and "Haskill" [sic] homes before passing just south of the President's house in Figure 2). Students lived, studied, exercised, ate, and received their post on the campus. There was limited daily commerce with the village center, and the farm fields that occupied the Payne Creek lowlands reinforced a sense of isolation of the university grounds on the hill.

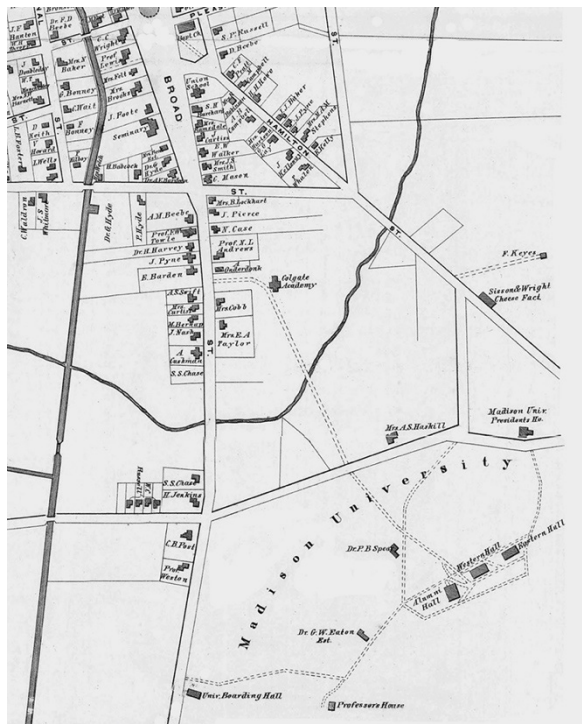


Figure 2. Detail of Map of the Village of Hamilton, N. Y., showing Madison University, 1875. From D. G. Beers, *Atlas of Madison County from Actual Surveys by and under the Direction of D. G. Beers*. Philadelphia: Pomeroy, Whitman & Co., 1875. Colgate University, Special Collections.



Figure 3. View of Colgate Academy and Grounds from the Hill looking North, c. 1875. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives. The Colgate Academy stands in the distant center, and the white path at the left led to the Hill. Figure 1 was taken from a position near the eroded patch in the right distance.

Early in the 1870s, James B. Colgate disrupted that isolation when he oversaw the purchase of numerous lots around Payne Creek and combined them into the grounds for the Colgate Academy, the preparatory wing of the University. He also funded the construction of the stylish Academy Building, which housed classrooms, offices, a library, and a chapel - but not residences - for the academes. As a result, daily University activity was drawn north across College Street for the first time. A single path linked the hill to the Academy building, but that path was often impassable because of snow or washed away when thaws swelled Payne Creek. Moreover, some properties on the north side of College Street, particularly the Hascall farm, remained in private hands. In a spatial sense the Academy grounds and the University Hill operated as neighbors more than as parts of a continuous campus for most of the 1870s.

In those same years, boarding policy at the university changed dramatically. Since the foundation of the school in 1820, the boarding of all students in a common facility was a bedrock policy, and the Boarding Hall on the west side of the campus served as a real and a symbolic gathering point after being built in 1838. In the post-bellum decade, the University relaxed that policy, forcing students to migrate toward boarding and rooming establishments in the village. By 1874, when the Boarding Hall formally closed, fully half the students lived off-campus and thereafter all students contracted for private boarding off campus. After decades of operating as a closely contained and somewhat insular institution well south of the village, the boundaries of the sensed "campus" became uncertain and porous. The termination of the boarding obligation altered the university's longstanding commitment to farming as much of its grounds as possible. Some board members continued to prioritize leasing the farmland after 1874 as a source of university income, but such practice flew in the face of increased student interest in recreational and aesthetic qualities of the land. In effect, the university grounds – they still would not have used the term "campus" – became a point of ongoing contention as the university introduced a custodian who slowly and grudgingly assumed responsibility for the upkeep of selective facilities. The 1870s proved to be very unsettled years on the campus. Some younger faculty (and especially James M. Taylor and Lucian Osborn) suggested the need for a professional campus plan to help clarify and resolve the competing visions of the place. Yet their voices were not persuasive, and much of the senior leadership still tended to see any investment in the grounds as a drain of support for instruction and student scholarships.

However, late in 1882, circumstances changed, when two Academy students died of diphtheria while living in East Hall, and the State Health Department was brought to the campus to report on sanitary conditions.³ Water sources that had served the school for decades were criticized, as was the rudimentary plumbing associated with bathroom facilities recently installed in East Hall. The management and maintenance of the University grounds and facilities had followed minimal, ad hoc practices for decades. The time had come for a more comprehensive look at the grounds and their operations.

Olmsted's Visit and Report to Madison University

Albert S. Bickmore, a member of the university board and guiding force in the creation of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, contacted F. L. Olmsted on April 9, 1883, noting that "Madison University ... desires to have the skillful eye of some landscape architect look over its grounds and suggest some supreme plan for their improvement."⁴ Olmsted must have assented to a day visit without establishing a date, because Lucian Osborn, Professor of Natural Sciences, followed up with a letter to him on May 15 trying to arrange the "consultation with reference to general plan for the improvement of our Campus" in time to prepare a report for the annual June board meetings. The June

³ E. Kuickling, "Report to E. H. Moore regarding Madison University," February 6, 1883. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives

⁴ Albert S. Bickmore to F. L. Olmsted, April 9, 1883. Library of Congress, Olmsted Associate Papers.

deadline was not met, and it was only after a flurry of correspondence in early October that the visit became a reality. James B. Colgate, the Chairman of the University Board, was anxious to meet with Olmsted around the middle of that month and volunteered to cover the costs of the visit and its outcomes. He made his desire clear to Bickmore on October 4, enclosing a letter of invitation that he hoped would be forwarded to Olmsted. He also relayed that "I would prefer that our visit should not be known. I would like his views unbiased by any suggestions of Spear and others. He and I can do half of our business before it is known we are there."⁵ Clearly, priorities for the campus within the Madison University leadership were subject of some strong tensions.

Olmsted spent October 18 in Hamilton, with his primary companions being James B. Colgate and President Ebenezer Dodge. His explicit task was to suggest sites for two buildings whose construction was considered imminent. One was to be a science building housing laboratories as well as the University specimen collections. The other was a fireproof library that had been a priority of J. B. Colgate for some time. Given Olmsted's insistence that details should always be clarified in relationship to the whole, it is hardly surprising that his considerations for the grounds ran deeper and broader than just the pair of foreseen structures. He opened his report with a caution: "Before fixing possible positions for the additional buildings now definitely in view for Madison University, a scheme should be tentatively formed admitting of the continued introduction at a later period of still other buildings."⁶ Whatever the focus sought by Madison, Olmsted's vision would be characteristically broad.

Olmsted's Report: Exploring the Trees in the Forest⁷

In his report, Olmsted politely noted that the stone and its vernacular employment in Madison's first three buildings was "very respectable" "in comparison with most college buildings."⁸ However, he then followed up with serious criticism of the legacy structures:

"they fail to make as strong or as pleasing an impression as should properly result from constructions so extensive for a single purpose upon a site so commanding. The reason is obvious. Neither of the buildings has any noticeable architectural significance. Any one of them, that is to say, seen by a passing stranger near a large town would be as likely to be taken for a factory, a warehouse, a barrack, a hospital or a poor house as for a seat of learning. There is nothing in any one of them telling of intellectual refinement or grace. They have a bleak northern exposure. Their more conspicuous fronts are in shadow, and in two of them the natural texture of the stone has been intentionally concealed and a blank and expressionless surface obtained by white washing. Finally, they have been placed so far apart that they affect the imagination more as a series of independent edifices than as a group cooperative to a central purpose."⁹

He also found little to praise in the university plantings, characterizing them as "raw, bleak and wild but perfectly prosaic." The open pastures south of the buildings and higher on the hill toward the quarry were "inhospitable," a condition that could be redressed by allowing their natural growth or by hastening it by the inexpensive planting of seedlings.¹⁰ Regarding the northern slope of the hill, he observed that the plantings served "no purpose of convenience" and were "wholly discordant with the

⁵ J. B. Colgate to A. S. Bickmore, October 4, 1883. Library of Congress, Olmsted Associates Papers

⁶ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 622.

⁷ A reconstruction of the Report from the Notes is available in the Library of Congress is attached as an Appendix.

⁸ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 635.

⁹ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 634, 633b

¹⁰ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 637b, 638b.

modeling of the surface and the disposition of the natural growth."¹¹ There was a sense of frontier rudeness and neglect within an environment that should offer a civilizing model for its students.

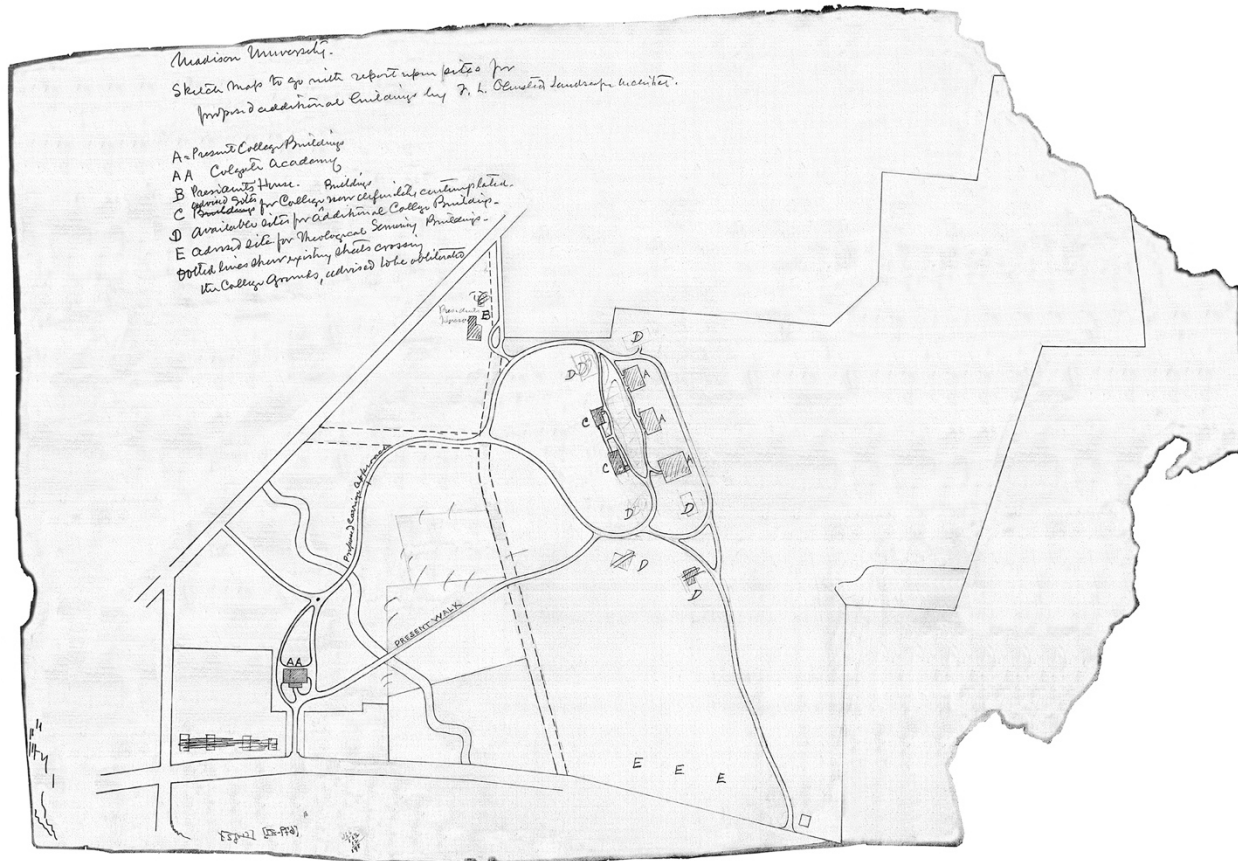


Figure 4. F. L. Olmsted, Madison University. Sketch Map to go with report upon sites for proposed additional buildings by F. L. Olmsted, Landscape Architect. October 1883. Graphite on tracing paper, 18.5 x 25.25". Brookline, MA. Olmsted National Historic Site. 679-Z1. Key: A = Present College Buildings/ AA Colgate Academy/ B President/s House./ Proposed sites for College Buildings now definitely contemplated./ D Available sites for additional College Buildings/ E Advised site for Theological Seminary Buildings./ Dotted lines show existing streets cross the College Grounds, advised to be obliterated. It seems quite likely that Olmsted used the Beers 1875 map of Hamilton when generating this roughly traced sketch map. What is less clear is the source of the University property lines as they extended up the hill from the historical campus.

Several observations were not confirmed in the written report but may be wrested from Olmsted's "Sketch Map." There are "available sites" at the flanks of his proposed site for the laboratory and library complex, as well as one on the flanks of the existing trio of buildings. It is possible to hypothesize that these sites anticipated a quadrangular organization such as ultimately developed at Colgate years later. However, extreme caution should be taken on this point, for, as his clear delineation of a strong slope between the new and extant rows reflects, virtually none of his proposed sites (D) would have stood on grade with the legacy trio.¹²

¹¹ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 638b. In the 1840s and 1850s, the students had initiated most of the planting programs on the campus, with one of their early projects being an allée extending down the northern slope from a point midway between East and West Halls.

¹² Olmsted also suggested by lightly crossing out the building footprints for two historic faculty homes on the western bluffs of the campus that he considered those spaces suitable for development rather than preservation.

The heart of Olmsted's recommendation for Madison turned on his insistence that, as an institution of higher learning and civilization, the university structures deserved architectural distinction while the grounds merited harmonious management. He argued that such distinction could be lent to the whole by strategically siting the proposed library and laboratory. He proposed that the two buildings be built in a line on the downward slope of the hill between 100 to 200 feet north of East, West, and Alumni Halls. As his sketch shows, the land between the two rows would slope notably, with the result that the arrangement would acquire a dynamic and picturesque energy when seen from below on an approach road from the north. He positioned the two new buildings exactly north of the spaces between the three earlier structures, with the intent that they would alternatively integrate and then separate visually as the visitor approached the hill. The inert isolation that Olmsted sensed in the legacy buildings was replaced by a complex and visually animated ensemble. If the new buildings were richly elaborated with "windows, a tower, a massive porch or other feature some fine expression of a distinctive purpose suitable to a university, this expression would become a common property of all. Under these circumstances the fact revealed by the old buildings of the early condition of the university would be interesting and even give something of a venerable character to the group as a whole."¹³

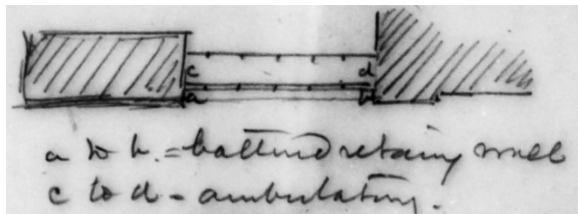


Figure 5. F. L. Olmsted, *Detail of Laboratory and Library Complex from Olmsted's Notes for his Report to Madison University*. October 19, 1883. Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 622.

Olmsted pressed further on details of the new structures, which he envisioned as a pair linked by a "massive parapet" "continuous with their walls," and capped by a "pergola or vine clad trellis" that would create a continuous "terrace walk" between them. In effect, the architecturally elaborated new structures would frame the view of West Hall above and beyond them, pulling it into an ensemble "telling of intellectual refinement or grace."¹⁴

The perspectival choreography that Olmsted envisioned depended to a substantial degree on a new approach road for the university – the "proposed carriage approach" of the Sketch Map. Twin curving lanes would launch from the Academy building, intersect with a lane connecting to lower Hamilton Street at a junction marked by an island and then sweep to the east before then swinging south and up the hill to another fork leading to eastern and western loop roads up to the hill terrace. Olmsted's focus on the eastern portion of the plain for the carriage approach took advantage of the more gradual slopes in that area to assure a "uniform grade of 1 in 20 from the meadow near the brook to the university buildings,"¹⁵ but its picturesque advantages were also obvious.

That the boundary lines identifying the historic Hascall farm as well as grazing land just north of College Street owned by Spear are lightly crossed out also reflected his assumption that those lands would, or should, be purchased by, and absorbed within the Madison campus.

¹³ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 632b.

¹⁴ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 633b.

¹⁵ Library of Congress, F. L. Olmsted, Sr., Personal Papers, Box 46, Folder 5. Microfilm Reel 40, Frame 624b.

Olmsted rather boldly suggested that College Street "should, if practicable be obliterated" if the new carriage path was introduced. The advantage was that the north-south unity and flow of the campus would be greatly enhanced, and major entry points pushed to the northern and southern ends of the campus. The literal impact of such a change is challenging to imagine. College Street had been developed as a major east-west road in the southern reaches of Hamilton within three years of its founding in 1794. No resident of the community could realistically imagine its elimination. In a sense, College Street had long served and would continue to serve Colgate as a de facto edge of the hill, and the hem of what has come to be known as the "Middle Campus." We can only speculate as to the detailed consequences had it been "obliterated" in the 1880s. Certainly, the north-south flow of the campus would be increased, and Colgate would have evolved in very different ways.¹⁶

Olmsted's Report: Seeing the Forest

The fundamental contribution of Olmsted's 1883 Report and Plan for Madison University was to challenge – indeed to uproot – two outdated aspects of its self-conception. First, he recognized that it no longer operated as an elevated realm distant from the village and removed from the lowlands and plain at the base of the hill. From 1826 through the 1870s, Madison University had understood its "grounds" as a tight precinct floating above the surrounding farmland and blessed with magisterial vistas over the village toward the northwest. Originally and enduringly those vistas served to beckon seminary students toward the distant frontier where they would spread the "Word of the Lord." After the traumatic Native American removal controversy of the very late 1840s, in which influential Baptists nearly succeeded in transplanting the university to the burgeoning city of Rochester, the significance of the vistas was compounded by their embrace of the Chenango Valley as a singularly precious home. Older leaders of the institution such as President Dodge and Treasurer Philetus B. Spear had embraced traditional conceptions of the campus over the previous, unsettled decades.¹⁷ James B. Colgate, who had initiated and financed the construction of the Colgate Academy north of Payne Creek, appears to have initially imagined that the resultant "park" would be largely ancillary to Madison University's real grounds up the hill. Even L. Osborn, one of the younger and more progressive faculty involved in planting and campus enhancements in the 1870s, described the grounds to Olmsted in May 1883 as encompassing but "20 Acres," i.e., just the knot of buildings on the hillside terrace.¹⁸ Olmsted challenged such a compartmentalized understanding of the grounds in his recommendations, unveiling a vision of a combined hill and plain that endures to this day.

¹⁶ In the century following Olmsted's visit College Street proved decisive in the siting of James B. Colgate Library in 1890, the 1893 Gymnasium, the 1937 James C. Colgate Student Union, the 1959 Case Library.

¹⁷ Though not a focus of this paper, it is worth noting that Spear led a select group of graduates of the early Seminary and University in flooding the *Madisonensis*, the student paper, with 'days of yore' accounts of the buildings and grounds in the 1880s and 1890s. Within those fascinating articles, the sense of a wondrous place lost to time and change were palpable.

¹⁸ L. Osborn to F. L. Olmsted, May 15, 1883. Library of Congress, Olmsted Associates Papers.



Figure 6. W. Freeman, *Madison University, Hamilton, Madison Co., New York*, 1846. Lithograph. Private Collection.

Secondly, Olmsted insisted on Madison's updating of its architectural aesthetic if it was going to fully embrace its responsibility as a seat of learning. His ingenious exploitation of the proposed new buildings, rich in modern massing and architectural complexities, to serve as a screen that would both challenge and interact with the vernacular, boxy simplicity of legacy trio on the hill, was a way to thrust the university forward. East Hall, West Hall, and to a lesser extent Alumni Hall were reminders of an anti-aesthetic phase in the life of the University, when spartan minimalism channeled inhabitants' energies toward the spiritual. As a champion of the architecture and landscape as agents of cultural development and civilization, Olmsted suggested to the University that it might better serve its students by fostering civility and culture by means of its physical environment.

Aftermath of the Olmsted Visit to Madison University: 1884-90

By early March 1884, word had spread that the "location of the new library and laboratory buildings is at last determined. They are to stand in front of the old University buildings, on the brow of the hill overlooking the Village. The library building is to be directly opposite the area between East and West Colleges. The laboratory building is to stand between East [sic] College and Alumni Hall."¹⁹ However, as with many rumors, this confident projection proved false.

¹⁹ "College and Town," in *Madisonensis*, 46/10 (March 1, 1884), 7.

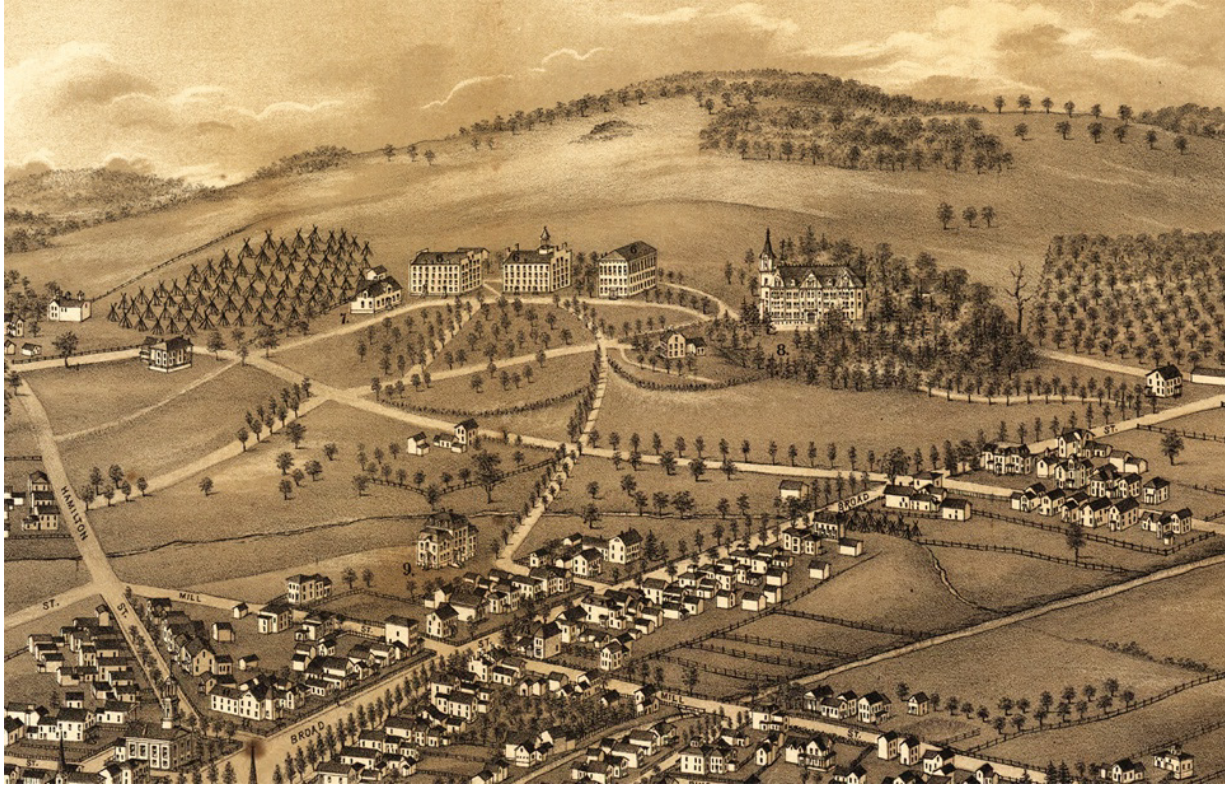


Figure 7. L. R. Burleigh, Detail of *Hamilton, N. Y.*, 1885. Lithograph. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. The Laboratory (7); the new Seminary (8) and the Academy (9). Burleigh's rendering of the overplanting of the northern slope of the hill confirms Olmsted diagnosis.

By April 19, the excavations for the laboratory building, (Hascall Hall, 1885) commenced, but not in the location recommended by Olmsted. It was built about 60 feet north of, and roughly level with, the eastern end of East Hall, and it was the first Madison building to be oriented toward the west rather than the north over the valley. Apparently, Olmsted's recommendations had been disregarded.



Figure 8. Henry Hill, *View of Laboratory at Madison University from the Southwest*, 1884. Colgate University, University Archives and Special Collections.



Figure 9. T. I. Lacey, *New Theological Hall, Hamilton NY, 1885*. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives.

In all likelihood, the departure from Olmsted's suggestions should not be read as a disregard of its ingenuity. Rather, it may well have turned on James B. Colgate's known preference for the Spear House site as the future home for his library.²⁰ In 1884 he still hoped to secure that land from Spear and so may well have been reluctant to act immediately on Olmsted's vision.²¹ The laboratory, however, needed to go forward rapidly, and not surprisingly the University turned to a site that had been thoroughly researched and approved twenty years before. C. B. Cutler was brought in from the Albany area to design the building, which was built with a new higher quality stone obtained in a recently opened portion of the university quarry that Olmsted had personally examined and praised during his October visit. Cutler's building reflected the Queen Anne style, and its rich rooflines and stereometric complexities marked a significant departure from the university tradition of blocky structures. The same might be said of a second building that the Seminary (not the University per se) was preparing to build as the dust settled on Olmsted's visit. The last comments in Olmsted's report suggested that he heard rumors or discussion of a proposed Theological Hall was being projected for Woodland Heights, a bluff in the western reaches of the Hill on which George Washington Eaton (President of Madison University, 1856-68) had resided since the 1830s. Given his conviction that large structures – Old Mains – were inefficient and inflexible, Olmsted suggested that the Woodland Heights site was too cramped closed his report with an almost off-hand recommendation that the Seminary would be better served by a series of smaller structures along Broad Street (E on the Sketch Map). His recommendation was not followed, but as sketches for the projected Theological Hall appeared in 1885-86, its break from the spartan simplicity of the original buildings could not be questioned.

This was a building whose very organization spoke of intellectual ambition and culture in a key a bit bolder than the compact Chemistry Laboratory already under construction. Finally, in 1888-89 when James B. Colgate finally settled on a site for his library, the design developed by Edwin Quick for the

²⁰ In May, that site was announced as the "probable" location for the library. "Improvements," *Salmagundi* '85 (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University), 85.

²¹ Colgate only gave up of the Spear House location in 1887, when a committee finally sited it on the north side of College Street to the west of the President's house. University acquisition and use of the Spear property would have to wait another fourteen years until Spear's death in 1901.

massive structure reflected a bold, sinewy familiarity with the American Romanesque then spreading from the shadow of the great H. H. Richardson.

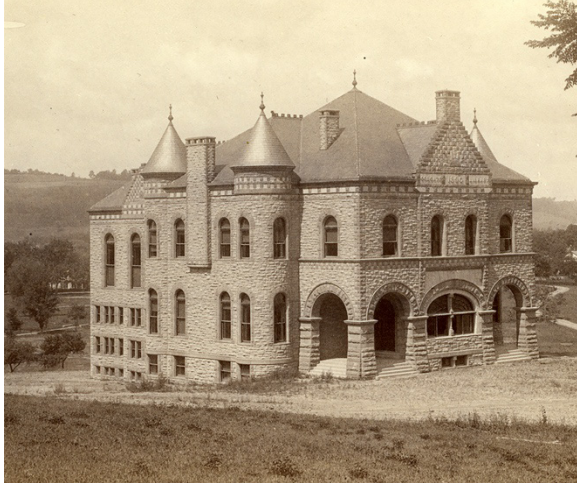


Figure 10. Edwin Quick, *James B. Colgate Library*, 1891.
Colgate University, Special Collections and University Ar-

It is apparent that the next three buildings to populate the campus after receipt of Olmsted's report each brought a strong individual stylistic voice that augmented and altered the rather flat architectural tone that Olmsted had lamented in the Hill's legacy buildings. We would be overplaying our hand to claim that their augmented architectural rhetoric was directly dependent on Olmsted. Yet there can also be no doubt that they initiated a wave of exuberant architectural structures commensurate with an "impression as should properly result from constructions so extensive for a single purpose upon a site so commanding."

Ongoing Reverberations of the Olmsted Visit: 1890 –

There was one anecdote from Olmsted's visit to Madison, that we must recount as we begin to reflect on the long-term influence of Olmsted's plan and ideas for the University. Around 1908, J. M. Taylor, who long served Madison both as distinguished mathematician and as superintendent of grounds, recalled a fortuitous encounter with Olmsted a quarter century before.

Prior to Olmsted's visit, Taylor had often met angry resistance from President Dodge when trimming and uprooting unsightly or crowded trees on the campus. Dodge lamented the loss of any plantings and had little comprehension of, or sympathy for, what Taylor called the "campus improvement." On one occasion, Taylor and the students who served as his assistants trimmed back some of the "most unsightly" of a thicket of locusts that had grown near the path from Spear House to West Hall. Dodge confronted Taylor and strongly admonished him. Yet soon thereafter Olmsted visited the campus, and Taylor exploited the opportunity to bring Olmsted into the conversation. On being asked by Taylor about that very thicket in the hearing of Dodge, Olmsted confirmed that even more of the trees should be cleared. "From that day on, Dr. Dodge was more ready to remove trees than I [Taylor] was myself. ... After this incident Dr. D. was a most loyal supported [sic] of our campus improvements."²²

Though no doubt embellished a bit by Taylor, the story alerts us to the degree to which Olmsted's visit marked a watershed in the history of the campus. Dodge, like many of the older generation held traditional views about the virtues of the natural landscape, and those views had largely

²² James M. Taylor, "Notes from a Lecture on Campus Improvements given to Alumni and Friends in Syracuse," 1908. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives.

prevailed to the 1880s. By 1891, however, the progressive thinking and management of Taylor and others, including many students, inaugurated an era of increased attention to the aesthetic importance of the campus as well as issues of sanitation and infrastructure, which brings us to Madison's brief reconnection with the Olmsted firm.

Early in 1891, the University authorized a "map" to support alumni contributions for a proposed gymnasium toward the western base of the Hill. The print was, in the words of James M. Taylor, "the work of a non-professional."²³ but it was also "a bird's eye view of the plan now being followed." Reverberations of Olmsted's ideas are conspicuous in the roadway that meanders from the north side of the Academy in the foreground across Payne Creek and up the lower hill toward the new Colgate Library. That road certainly does not follow the more easterly route laid out by Olmsted, but it echoes the importance he assigned to connecting the lower and upper campus by means of both paths and carriage-ways.

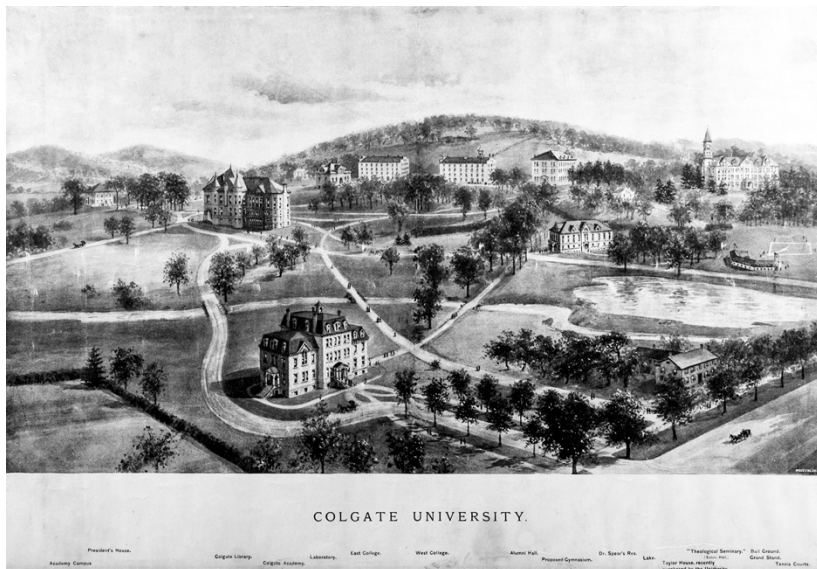


Figure 11. *Colgate University, Spring 1891*. Engraving. Colgate University, Special Collections and University Archives. A photogravure of the print appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on April 23, 1892.

During the summer of 1891, the Executive Committee authorized Taylor to secure a professional plan for the University Campus as a guide to future developments. As part of his effort, he sent an annotated version of the bird's-eye view to the Olmsted firm on July 21. In his notations, he acknowledged that many of the depicted paths had, in fact, not been built, that "the site of the gymnasium was not fixed" and that "the contour of the lake is a matter to be determined." Then he asked on what terms they might "furnish a plan or review this one." Six days later the firm sidestepped the rather awkward request for "review," outlined the normal scope of their services, and stressed that any further work by their firm, and by implication any professional firm, would require the completion of a full, detailed survey. That is the last known correspondence with the Olmsted firm.

In the following weeks Colgate hired Ernest W. Bowditch, of Boston and New York, to produce the detailed survey of the grounds. Bowditch had worked on numerous occasions as a surveyor on Olmsted projects, but we have no documents indicating that he came to Colgate through their recommendation. His survey, funded in large part by contributions from the village residents, was well

²³ J. M. Taylor to F. L. Olmsted & Co., July 21, 1891. Library of Congress, Records of Olmsted Associates.

underway in October of 1891 when he was announced as the University's "landscape gardener," a position he would occupy for the next quarter century. During that time, he often departed from or modified elements in Olmsted's 1883 Report and Plan. However, he also remained true to certain of Olmsted's ideas and thus help weave them into the lasting fabric of the campus. With the assistance of Taylor, he sharpened and enhanced Olmsted's "present walk" between Academy and the hill. Known now as the Willow Path, it remains the pedestrian spine linking the campus to the village toward the north. More conspicuously, Bowditch championed Olmsted's carriage path with its great sweep to the eastern edge of the lower campus. Here he and Taylor initially differed, for Taylor had advanced the meandering road that sliced rather brutally across the field between James B. Colgate Hall and the Payne Creek in the 1891 bird's-eye view. It took Bowditch until 1912 to eliminate that campus scar and realize the magisterial Oak Drive that has defined Colgate's lower campus for the last century, teasing vehicular visitors with shifting glimpses of the hill.

Conclusion

Olmsted's visit to Colgate in 1883 was fortuitous. His observations and analyses galvanized a generation of university leaders as they pulled the campus away from its laconic, missionary roots and engaged with the architectural standards of the emerging century. He also empowered James B. Colgate, James M. Taylor, and others to push ahead with a bold reorientation of the campus, dislodging it from a historic identity as an elevated and insulated precinct flowing east-west on the hill. Olmsted demonstrated that the campus was both hill and plain rather than hill alone, and generations have benefited from the insight.

Many notable campuses, whether they be encountered as elevated plateaus or as episodes within civic grids, are encountered piecemeal. They unfold in small pieces as we cross their boundaries, and as we discover their individual pockets, quads, and buildings in sequence. At the end of the process, we assemble a sense of the whole through an addition of the parts. But the whole always remains a bit elusive. By exploiting Colgate's lowland front door by means of Oak Drive and its pairing with Willow Path, Olmsted laid the foundations for a distinctive entry experience. Whether approaching on foot or by vehicle, one has time and opportunity to perceive, and proceed toward, the campus seen and recognized as a complex whole. We sense its comprehensive scale while at the same time discerning keys to its order that help to defragment our subsequent exploration of its individual elements. Of course, there are subsequent moments of delight and discovery, but as with Olmsted's parks the wonder of those moments never overwhelms our intuitions regarding the unique coherence of the place.

Appendix: Olmsted's Report on Madison University Synthesized from Notes in the Library of Congress²⁴

(640) Madison University. 19th October 83.

Placing new buildings

(622) Brookline, Mass.

19th October 1883,

²⁴ Reel 40. *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*. Library of Congress. Frames 621-640. Accession No. 16,498 Container 45-46. The numbers in parentheses sprinkled across the text identify the microfilm frame from which the subsequent text is taken. The words are Olmsted's own, taken from his notes in the Library of Congress. I want to thank the many Colgate students who have worked with me over the years to stitch these passages together in a coherent and plausible order.

James T. [sic] Colgate

Dear Sir;

Before fixing possible positions for the additional buildings now definitely in view for Madison University a scheme should be tentatively formed admitting of the continued introduction at a later period of still other buildings.

Two arrangements are possible for this purpose either of which would be satisfactory. (623) First, there is a plateau which would admit of the extension of the present line of buildings diagonally to the south-east upon land adjoining that now held by the University. Second, (636a) a line of buildings, parallel [sic] with the present and from one to two hundred feet to the north of it. Suitable sites will be found here for four buildings, leaving openings of the full width of the present three buildings of the full breadth of their respective fronts. There would still remain space within the present university lands to the East and West of the main grounds for additional buildings if ever needed. (623) The second scheme would change the exterior aspect of the university more than the first but involve less deviation from the historic habits of the faculty and the students (636b) and would be pursued more economically. It is therefore more in the line of a natural growth.

(631b) By giving the proposed new buildings some suitable architectural expression and placing them so that the vacant spaces between the three present buildings would be from some points of view covered and from all less conspicuous, the consideration thus suggested would be accomplished and the whole series appear to much better advantage than if it more simply extended lengthwise.

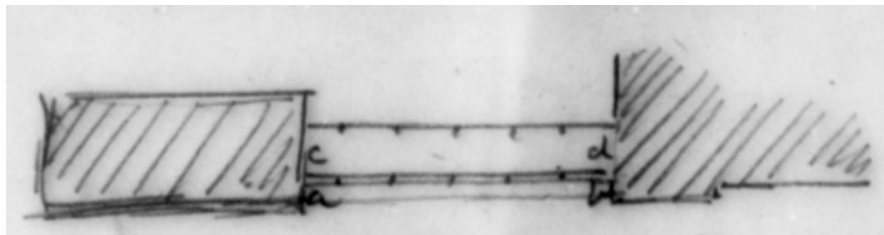
(635) This effect, in regard to which I wish first to say that the present buildings because of the material of their walls and the really simple and modest way in which it is used strike me in comparison with most college buildings as very respectable.

Nevertheless I must point out that they fail (634) to make as strong or as pleasing an impression as should properly result from constructions so extensive for a single purpose upon a site so commanding. The reason is obvious. Neither of the buildings has any noticeable architectural significance. Any one of them, that is to say, seen by a passing stranger near a large town would be as likely to be taken for a factory, a warehouse, a barrack, a hospital as a poor house as for a seat of learning. There is nothing in any one of them (633b) telling of intellectual refinement or grace. They have a bleak northern exposure. Their more conspicuous fronts are in shadow, and in two of them the natural texture of the stone is has been intentionally concealed and a blank and expressionless surface obtained by white washing. Finally, they have been placed so far apart that they affect the imagination more as a series of independent edifices than as a group cooperative to a central purpose.

(633a) If the old buildings just as they are could be seen as coherent parts of a group any single member of which had, through a different arrangement (632b) of windows, a tower, a massive porch or other feature some fine expression of a distinctive purpose suitable to a university, this expression would become a common property of all. Under these circumstances the fact revealed by the old buildings of the early condition of the university would be interesting and even give something of a venerable character to the group as a whole. (630b) The object would be still better served if the Architect should find it feasible to building the new structures mainly of the same stone with the others, to remove the white wash from the old buildings, to replace their dilapidated roofs with roofs of the same material (presumably tile or slate) that should be used in the new, and to reproduce (629) in the new something like the one not quite common-place feature of the old, the solid stepped gable. Again something would be gained if

it should suit the purposes of the laboratory to cover it by a roof so high that looking toward it from the lower ground the gap between the two buildings south of it would be covered.

Finally I will observe that the expression of unity of general purpose would be (627b) still further augmented if the two buildings nearest the observer approaching from the north could have ever so slight an actual architectural connection. These buildings are to contain the library, cabinets,²⁵ and laboratory, between which departments a practical association is discernable. That is to say the pursuit of a single line of investigation might lead the student to pass frequently from one to another of them. With this in view I suggest (626b) that it would cost very little when the two new buildings are under construction to lay up a low retaining wall with a massive parapet of the same stone forming a line of masonry continuous with (625) their walls. The space immediately back of this parapet would be an esplanade upon which would be suitably displayed any enduring objects of interest too large or heavy or otherwise unsuitable to be placed within the walls of the museum. It would also be an ambulatory or terrace walk between the laboratory and the library and would be all the better for this purpose as well as for architectural effect if covered by a pergola or vine clad trellis. (624b)



a to b = battered retaining wall
c to d = ambulatory

I send herewith a sketch sharing the position of the building sites above referred to in relation to the existing buildings and also a proposed line of road from the village through the college grounds, giving access to all the buildings. This admits of a uniform grade of 1 in 20 from the meadow near the brook to the university buildings (628a) and its advantages as a route of approach to the University over the existing roads will be obvious. If this road is made, the straight public road which now divides the natural scenery of the University property by an artificial line should if practicable be obliterated.

(638) The college buildings would appear to much better advantage and the present bleak, raw and wild (638b) unity of landscape character will be further promoted by breaking up the rigid lines of trees which now cross portions of the property in various directions, serving in general no purpose of convenience and wholly discordant with the modeling of the surface and the disposition of the natural growth. It would be better if there were fewer trees in the middle parts of the ground north of the buildings and more scattered irregularly along the outer parts.

(637b) I recommend that the use of the large hill side field close adjoining the University buildings on the South, as a pasture be discontinued. Its value for this purpose does not seem great and the raw, bleak and wild but perfectly prosaic aspect that it gives the neighborhood is inhospitable and at issue with the urbanity of expression desirable in an educational institution. It is probable that if simply protected from cattle it would in time be covered with wood of natural (628b) growth. The process might be hastened by simply sowing it with seeds of trees; still more by cheaply planting it with seedling trees. There are dealers ... who undertake operations of this sort at very low cost.

²⁵ Here he originally wrote and struck "museum."

(639) The map also shows the site which I advise for the Theological Seminary. The only other that has been suggested for it, would in my judgment be found cramped, especially if any considerable addition should in the future be advanced to the building now in contemplation.