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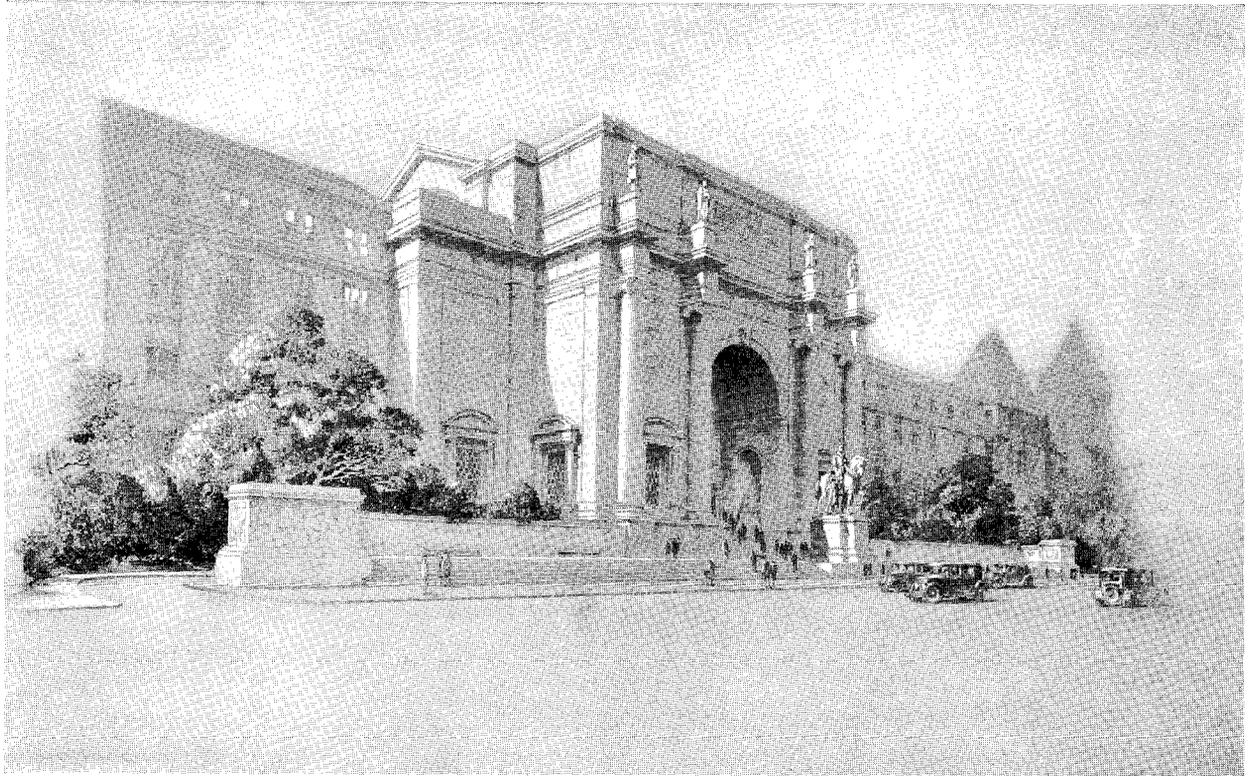
# Free Public Education in Nature and Art

combined in

## Original Central Park and Museum Plans, 1857-1871

OF  
ANDREW H. GREEN  
FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED  
CALVERT VAUX

*Prepared for the Municipal Art Society, March 30, 1931*



THE NEW EAST FAÇADE OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM  
THE NEW YORK STATE ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL  
To be erected by the State of New York

## ORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL PLANS AND PURPOSES OF CENTRAL PARK, 1857-1869

AMERICANS whether in or out of political life have never been known to fail when a public educational need is clearly and forcibly demonstrated. Since 1875 the City of New York has without hesitation united with the State of New York in advancing the great educational building program of the American Museum as conceived in 1869-1870 by Andrew H. Green, President and Comptroller of Parks (1858 to 1870) and subsequently "Father of Greater New York." The vast building, now of 25 Sections, including the 4 Court Buildings, was located and designed as to original ground plan of 21 Sections, situation, and easterly approaches on Manhattan Square by Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, September 17, 1875<sup>1</sup>.

The present 62d Annual Report<sup>2</sup> may appropriately open with an historical review of the Original Educational Plans and Purposes of Central Park in the foundation period of 1857-1869. These original plans and purposes have been entirely lost sight of in recent years and both the American and Metropolitan Museums have come to be regarded as *encroachments* instead of as integral parts of the original Central Park System.

Between the years 1857 and 1869, the foundation period of Central Park, popular education in Science, Art, History, and Literature, combined with the beauty and inspiration of Nature, was the prominent motive in securing financial support for a great and costly enterprise. Popular education then as now made the stronger appeal to the public. Accordingly Andrew H. Green, as the most prominent citizen of the period and first Comptroller of the Parks, wrote these educational motives into the State and City Charters and Contracts. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux unhesitatingly located in the Park embracing Manhattan Square, several scientific institutions,

<sup>1</sup>"Diagram indicating proposed modification of the design of Central Park, adaptation to requirements growing out of the proposed improvements on Manhattan Square, September 17th, 1875." Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect.

In Board, September 17, 1875. Approved and the design provisionally adopted, except in respect to the archway, foot approaches to Manhattan Square. Wm. Irwin, Secretary, Department of Public Parks.

<sup>2</sup>The 62d Annual Report of The American Museum of Natural History.

including above all the superb ground plans of the American and Metropolitan Museums. Fortunately for the people of our generation, we have a full written and documentary record, as well as all the original plans of Olmsted and Vaux and addresses of the Commissioners of Parks. From the above documents the following resumé may be made.

The construction of Central Park, begun in 1857, the first Vaux-Olmsted plan of 1858, the establishment of the Department of Public Parks in 1870, and the broad artistic, scientific and educational plans were continuously fostered by Andrew H. Green, Father of Greater New York, who between 1857 and 1870 served as President of the Commissioners of Central Park and as Comptroller of Parks. Popular Education was his controlling ideal.

Central Park Ideals of ANDREW H. GREEN,<sup>1</sup> 1857-1870. On April 17, 1857, the Legislature passed an act confining the boundaries of Central Park and appointed a body of eleven commissioners of Central Park, each to hold office for five years and to receive no compensation; this body included Andrew H. Green. April 30, 1857, the Commission was organized and Andrew H. Green was made Treasurer June 9, 1857. As a former President of the Board of Education he had broader and larger educational views than any of his colleagues. In 1858 he was elected President of the Commissioners of Central Park and on September 15, 1859, he was made Comptroller of the Park and for the next ten and one half years the construction of Central Park was prosecuted under his personal direction. September 11, 1857, Frederick Law Olmsted was appointed Superintendent of Central Park. April 28, 1858, Olmsted and Vaux won the first prize for the competition for laying out Central Park; Olmsted became Architect-in-Chief with the very efficient cooperation of Calvert Vaux. Early in 1859 the Park was enlarged from 59th to 110th Street, between Fifth and Eighth Avenues; the awards for the whole of Central Park aggregated \$6,291,016.30.

In 1859 Andrew H. Green spoke of the desire for "healthful recreation and exercise, and the taste for the natural beauties of the Park." An astronomic observatory was approved by the Board January 6, 1859; in 1860, the Commissioners welcomed observatories, museums of natural history, zoological and botanical gardens and galleries of art, but deemed it proper that the means for their establishment, maintenance and arrangement should be derived from private sources; in 1861 on Andrew H. Green's

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<sup>1</sup>THE LIFE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OF ANDREW HASWELL GREEN, by John Foord. Doubleday, Page and Company, Garden City, New York, 1913.

motion a Conservatory was erected for public use and enjoyment. From 1859 to 1863 Andrew H. Green never ceased to insist on the necessity of incorporating in the Park zoological and botanical gardens; he welcomed a zoological collection worthy of the city as ancillary to "that great free public educational system which he called already the pride of the city." In 1865 (December 30), Andrew H. Green renewed his support of the zoological garden.

In the report for the year ending December 31, 1861: "The Board desired to encourage, under proper organizations, the establishment within the Park of collections of art and of science, of botanical and zoological gardens, that combine instruction with amusement." This educational policy is reiterated to the exclusion of all other enterprises and purposes. This was the first step towards the half private, half municipal support, under which the American and Metropolitan Museums were founded in 1869-1870. In August and September, 1868, Andrew H. Green went abroad for the purpose of studying the park systems and other municipal features of European cities.

At the close of the year 1868 came the American Museum offer as follows: December 30, 1868, Theodore Roosevelt and others addressed the Park Board regarding the establishment of a Museum of Natural History. ". . . Comptroller Green replied, concurring in the desirability of establishing in the Park a museum which should become an aid to the educational system of the city. In 1869 he elaborated this idea in one of his cogent public papers, in which he went into the history of such collections abroad, and showed the particular need of them in a democratic country and the desirability of placing them in large cities where their usefulness would be greatest. He advocated the teaching of natural history in the public schools and the establishment of the museum to afford facilities for its study. . . . 'The time has therefore arrived when the attention of all interested in education in this city may be fitly drawn to the Central Park—to what is already accomplished there, and for what is further preparing to be done, to render it a great storehouse of appliances for the mental improvement of the youth of our city.'

April 5, 1870, the Legislature broke up the original Park Commission by placing the management of the Parks in charge of a board of five commissioners appointed by the Mayor, who included Andrew H. Green, on the new Board of five; the original commissioners endorsed Andrew H. Green's ten years' administration.

Education, Science and Art were correlated throughout with the beautiful landscape development of Olmsted and Vaux, between the years 1857 and 1871. In 1869

and 1870, Olmsted and Vaux eagerly welcomed the foundation of the American Museum (1869) and the Metropolitan Museum (1870) and planned the sites and approaches for each. Within their original plans, copied in the Report of 1871, are mentioned an Arsenal Museum, a Museum of Natural History, a Zoological Garden, an Observatory, a Conservatory of Plants, several of which are located on the Olmsted-Vaux Central Park map of April 20, 1871, namely, the Humboldt Monument (1), the Conservatory (42), proposed Art Museum and Hall (43), and Museum Arsenal and Park offices (3).<sup>1</sup>

These educational purposes were written into the original charter of the State and Contract with the State as shown in the following excerpts:

*An Act to Incorporate The American Museum of Natural History, April 6, 1869:*

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

“The American Museum of Natural History,” to be located in the City of New York, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining in said city a Museum and Library of Natural History; of encouraging and developing the study of Natural Science; of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and to that end of furnishing popular instruction.

*Contract with the Department of Public Parks:*

Whereas, by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New York, passed April 22d, 1876, entitled “An Act in relation to the powers and duties of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, in connection with the American Museum of Natural History, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” the said party of the first part is authorized and directed to enter into a contract with the said party of the second part, for the occupation by it of the buildings erected or to be erected on that portion of the Central Park in the City of New York, known as Manhattan Square, and for transferring thereto and establishing and maintaining therein its museum, library and collections, and carrying out the objects and purposes of said party of the second part.

<sup>1</sup>First Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks for the Year ending May 1, 1871. New York, 1871. This Report was disavowed both by Andrew H. Green and Messrs. Olmsted and Vaux because it appeared under the political auspices of Mayor A. Oakey Hall and Comptroller Peter B. Sweeny.

*"An Act providing for the Construction of a Free Public Education Building as a Memorial to Theodore Roosevelt . . . ,"* Chapter 265 of the Laws of 1930 (An Act to amend chapter six hundred and fifteen of the laws of nineteen hundred and twenty-four. . . . Became a law April 1st, 1930, with the approval of the Governor).

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

As a tribute to the memory of Theodore Roosevelt there shall be erected, at a cost to the state of not exceeding three million five hundred thousand dollars (\$3,500,000), in the city of New York upon a site provided by the authorities of such city, adjacent to the American Museum of Natural History in such city, an education building, chiefly for the benefit of the youth of the state, which shall hereafter be known as and become the New York State Roosevelt Memorial. Such city is hereby authorized to dedicate to the state the site therefor.

Andrew H. Green, in January, 1869, wrote the following significant letter<sup>1</sup> to Messrs. Roosevelt, Choate, Morgan and other Founders of The American Museum of Natural History:

GENTLEMEN:

The Commissioners of the Central Park have received your communication, in which inquiry is made if they are disposed to provide the reception and development of a large and valuable collection, as a nucleus of a Museum of Natural History.

The Commissioners appreciating the views you so kindly express entirely concur in the desirability of the establishment of a Museum in the Park, that shall become an aid in the Great Educational System of the city, concentrate and develop Scientific efforts in all departments of Natural History, and at the same time be an instructive and acceptable resort for the people of the city, and for the throng of strangers that visit it.

The Commissioners of the Park will very gladly receive the collection to which you allude, and will use their best exertions toward the establishment of a Museum of Natural History, of an extent and excellence in all its departments that will be creditable to the city, and in their efforts towards the development of such an institution the Commissioners of the Park will highly esteem your valuable co-operation.

I am, gentlemen, with great respect,

ANDREW H. GREEN,  
Comptroller of the Central Park.

<sup>1</sup>The First Annual Report of the American Museum of Natural History, January, 1870. New York. (Written by Joseph H. Choate.) Pages 17-18.

In the following year Comptroller Andrew H. Green wrote to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Museum, as follows:

...permit me to express, on behalf of the Park Commissioners their high appreciation of the enlightened sentiment that has provided so generously for all interested in this department of science, and, at the same time, the hope that this auspicious beginning may, by the continued augmentation of similar liberalities, become an unequalled treasury of science alike honorable to the public spirit of the citizens by whom it has been inaugurated, and an indispensable aid to those engaged in efforts to increase the knowledge of the science that it is intended to illustrate.<sup>1</sup>

Under the guidance of the Trustees, the first American Museum section on Manhattan Square was planned and the cornerstone laid by President Ulysses S. Grant, June 2d, 1874. Among several addresses were those of Robert L. Stuart, second President of the Museum, and H. G. Stebbins, President of the Department of Parks, from whose address may be taken the following excerpts:

... To the stranger who comes here to-day these rugged foundation walls and these rough surroundings are not well calculated to make a pleasant impression; but to us who have watched the rapid growth northward of this city, and who were familiar with the barren and rocky ground upon which the Central Park has been created, it requires but little strain upon the imagination to conceive of the speedy occupation of all these vacant lots by substantial dwellings, and to picture to ourselves the spot upon which we now stand, known as Manhattan Square, as covered by the proposed Museum of Natural History, costing, ere its final completion, not less than \$6,000,000, and embracing a collection of objects of scientific interest second to none other in the world. . . .

With the hearty co-operation of the Natural History Society, sustained by the genius of Olmsted and the architectural skill of Vaux, and certain of the sympathy of an enlightened people, the Department of Public Parks looks confidently forward to the successful completion of the magnificent scheme, the commencement of which may now be pronounced as fully inaugurated.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The First Annual Report of The American Museum of Natural History, January, 1870. Page 20.

<sup>2</sup>The Fifth and Sixth Annual Reports of The American Museum of Natural History. December 1st, 1874. New York, 1874. Pages 41, 42.

In the year 1896, the Andrew H. Green tradition of the union of Education, Science, Nature, Conservation and beautiful landscape treatment, was passed on to Henry Fairfield Osborn when he succeeded Andrew H. Green in the leadership of the Zoological Society and artistic and scientific development of the Bronx Zoological Park. Out of the Zoological Park training, and led by the men who were trained in its service, came the unparalleled Bronx Parkway, the Westchester Park Commission, the beautiful new Yonkers and Sawmill Valley Parkways.

#### SUMMARY

*From 1857 to 1930, both in the State and in the City, free public education of the people has been the dominant note in all legislation and all appropriations, in literal fulfilment of the Central Park ideals of Andrew H. Green, the founder of Central Park and one of the Founders of The American Museum of Natural History.*

#### ACCESSIBILITY

The popular inspirational and educational influence on young and old, to which the City of New York and public-spirited citizens combined have since 1908 contributed upwards of \$30,000,000, cannot be fully realized and capitalized until the Museum is made readily accessible to the greater part of the six million people now residing within the limits of Greater New York who desire to approach on foot, and to many of whom the payment even of a trolley fare is a matter of economic importance. From the north, access will be improved by the Central Park subway. From the south, people will come by the Central Park West subway and new City Bus System. From the east, access can be made only by safe, well-lighted and well-guarded day and evening approaches across Central Park which now presents a great impassable and forbidding barrier to the east side population.