

Notes on O.C. Simonds and Ann Arbor's Parks

22 May 1905 from Park Commission minutes:
"Resolved that Mr. Burns be authorized to get Mr. Simonds to draw a plan for developing and laying out the Boulevard Park, provided that such a service can be obtained for a sum not to exceed \$100."

23 May 1905 "New Park Board Held Meeting: General Plans: Were Discussed at Length--Dr. Copeland to Report on Park Near M.C. Depot--Members to Tour the City Wednesday"

The commission was to take a tour of the city and meet to "put their heads together and decide upon a definite plan of action covering a period of years which it will be possible for them to carry to a successful conclusion with the resources at their command."

"Ann Arbor and vicinity are regarded as furnishing the landscape gardener with an almost incomparable field; for his art might easily transform the beautiful spots about the city into parks and boulevards of singular attractiveness. In this connection, one of the dreams of the commission which, although little more than a dream, everyone hopes to see realized at some time, is the park along the Huron river extending below this city to Ypsilanti and above this city to the summer resorts several miles up stream. Mr. Olmstead, the celebrated landscape gardener from Boston, is in Ypsilanti today and is looking over the ground and the possibilities of constructing the proposed boulevard between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti along the river bank. He will be in the city tomorrow, at which time he will probably meet with the commission."
(Ann Arbor Daily News)

25 May 1905 "Commissioners Toured City: Inspected Parks: Experts From Chicago to Advise Commission How to Proceed in the Work of Civic Improvement--Many Plans Under Consideration"

Report on discussions by the park commissioners: "Needs and possibilities were talked over in some detail. It was decided to bring Mr. Simons [Simonds] of Chicago to this city within the near future to advise the commission how best to improve Riverside Park otherwise known as the Boulevard property. Mr. Simons is an expert on matters pertaining to property improvement and the beautifying of public parks. Commissioner Douglas was appointed to look after the improvement of Springer park on Tappan street and steps will soon be taken to improve the Scheutzenbund park at the southwest corner of the city limits. Felch park on East Huron street is also to be transformed by the landscape gardener and its possibilities of beauty realized. Dr. Copeland is at present carrying on negotiations with the M.C.R.R. to discover if the company will share with the city the expense of improving the Hennings property opposite the M.C. depot.

Mr. Olmstead of Chicago has postponed his visit to this city until the first week in June, when he will confer with the commission relative

to plans of civic improvement which time the commission will form plans of action more definite and comprehensive in scope"
(Ann Arbor Daily Times)

8 June 1905

FLO, Jr. visits Ann Arbor area as guest of the Civic Improvement society in Ypsilanti. Met members of the Ann Arbor parks committee and noted that improvements should build upon existing features of the city and region, i.e., the drive between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. (AA Daily News)

16 June 1905

FLO visited "the new city park"(Cedar Bend?) with Supt. Alexander and Prof. Wines. "The distinguished landscape artist was greatly pleased with the park, but warned Supt. Alexander that it may be spoiled if judgment is not shown in attempts to improve it. Nothing in the line of change is better than too much, for the natural advantages of the place are so great that comparatively little needs to be done. By all means the park should not be too much cut up with roads, and, in fact, said Prof. Olmstead, no road at all should be built through the tract. This decision he based on the steepness of the rise, which will necessitate a very winding path and will cause considerable territory to be used."

FLO went on to suggest clearing an area for a turn around with hitching posts. "The first thing to do is to clear up the place, and then the paths should be laid out. Very little should be done in the way the best effects will be secured by laying out large lawns and preserving the many open spaces. A grove of trees should be set out along the boulevard above the park, but in general the best results will be secured by making use of the material already at hand, rather than by the introduction of new trees and shrubs."
(The Ann Arbor Argus-Democrat)

16 June 1905

"To Improve Landscape: A Great Landscape Artist is Here: Pleased with Outlook: An Informal Reception is Given for Him at Cook House Last Evening"

FLO was asked to comment on having looked over the landscape around Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.

"Mr. Olmstead said he was not ready to make a report on the landscape he had seen. He was taking in all the impressions he could and was trying to guard himself from forming conclusions until he was more fully informed. He did not think that the work to be looked forward to in the two cities was so much in formulating schemes for extensive parks, as the country was too near to be encroached upon to any appreciable extent in the near future. There were many natural advantages in this section and he had been surprised as to how much greater they were in the vicinity of the two cities and between them and between them than they were for some distance away from them on either side. He did not think that full value had been utilized of the Huron river. Its recreative value had not been to any extent utilized. He thought that much could be done towards making this recreative value available."
(The Ann Arbor Argus-Democrat)

1 July 1905

from Park Commission minutes:
Simonds report on "The Boulevard Park" accepted

3 July 1905

"Office Abolished: Park Commission Do Away with Park Superintendent: Don't Spoil Nature: Was the Advice of Landscape Architect Simonds--Make Few Changes in Riverside Park"

Read Simonds' report at the Park Commioners' meeting

"Ann Arbor, Mich., June 30, 1905. To the Ann Arbor Park Commissioners--

Dear Sirs: I have spent today in looking over the grounds which you have recently acquired for park purposes and wish to congratulate you and the city of Ann Arbor on having secured so beautiful a piece of ground. The land borders the Huron river for some distance and contains a hillside from the top of which one gets beautiful views of the city and the valley of the Huron. The river banks and portions of the hillside are covered with attractive native trees and shrubs. Every city should try to secure for posterity an attractive native woodland. It is not so important to develop the park by introducing carefully kept lawns and flower beds, but it is important to retain the native growth. No landscape gardener can plant as well as Nature has planted. Some years ago I visited with William Robinson his country place about thirty miles outside of London. Upon this there was a tract of sixty acres of original forest. He assured me that such tracts were extremely rare in England and were prized very highly. We are in danger of losing our native woods especially about cities, and the boys and girls of the future will be deprived of a great deal of the pleasure which their parents and grandparents employed if they cannot have a chance to go out into the woods.

With your limited income the force of men employed at Cedar Bend park should be reduced to a minimum. What is needed is merely to give the public facilities to see the beauty which now exists along the river and hillside, that is those who drive or walk should be enabled to reach the points of interest with ease and comfort. I find that it is quite feasible to make a driveway with easy grades connecting the river drive with the Boulevard at the top of the bluff. The construction of such a drive should be the first work undertaken, but it should not be undertaken until the lines are established and the road carefully staked out. Some of the work which has been done in the park is unnecessary and a wasteful expenditure of money. It is unnecessary, for instance, to mow the hillside. Nature has covered it in a beautiful manner with sumachs and various wild flowers, which are attractive in appearance, even if some of them might be weeds on a farm. It is unnecessary to dig a hole around a tree for a little pool of water or to introduce any other trivial feature intended for ornamentation. Bog gardens, lily ponds, etc. may be very properly introduced in time, but first let us make the drives and walks that are necessary and before introducing any feature let it be carefully considered. Nothing is so expensive as doing work over two or three times.

There is a town of forty or fifty thousand inhabitants on the Mississippi river [probably means either Quincy, IL or Hannibal, MO] which has a number of parks. In this town there is no park superintendent, the duties superintendent being performed by the President of the Park Commission, without charge to the city. A park of about 40 acres with magnificent views up and down the Mississippi river, is usually cared for by one man. This man works every day. When more than one man is needed, he is foreman, but he does as much work as any other man. The same system prevails at each of the other parks. The annual income is quite limited but good use is made of it so that the city now has, free from debt, a larger number of acres. The money has gone for the purchase of land, for the building of roads, for planting, and a small percentage for care. With this city as a precedent, I should say that ordinarily, there would be employed in Cedar Bend Park, one good man, who should be willing to labor with his own hands, physically able to do a good day's work and still have judgment enough to keep money from being wasted. He should be employed at the present time in cutting out dead trees, cutting off dead branches and working on the grading of the drive. With the amount of money at your disposal you should be able to grade the drive during the present year. It could then be thrown open to the public so that they could easily drive through the park and learn what a valuable acquisition it is. When the frost is coming out of the ground in the spring, the drive might be closed. This is frequently done in other cities until such time as the city is able to macadamize the park drives.

It seems to me exceedingly important that you should acquire the land along the opposite river bank so as to prevent the destruction at any future time of the large and beautiful trees that now grow on this bank and add greatly to the beauty of the scenery. I am not sure but this is more important even than the building of a drive or walk. What I wish especially is to ask the Commissioners not to do work on things that will not be of permanent value or things that are liable to be changed or discarded.

Yours respectfully,
O. C. Simonds"
(Ann Arbor Daily Argus)

17 July 1905

from Park Commission minutes:
note about work being done between Cedar Bend and the River with the road being laid out by Prof. Simonds. Objections were raised to the road as laid out by Simonds that would necessitate a cut in the bank

15 Dec. 1905

from Park Commission minutes
O. C. Simonds hired to lay out the driveway for Cedar Bend Park (@ time was used extensively for pleasure-riding, driving, picnics, and swimming)

notes that driveway passes at foot of vineyards, ascends hill to the Boulevard
mentions that grass in the park to be cut with scythes, ditches/tile laid to drain swampy areas
bridges to be built to connect the mainland with the island, across the creek from Boulevard, and a cement bridge on the Boulevard

recommends planting of entrance to Cedar Bend--4240 shrubs, 16 trees, 3' wide path from Maiden Lane to the Cottage, 2 cement footbridges, baseball diamond, finish road, plant shrubs to stabilize stream banks

18 Dec. 1905

Park Commission proposes six mile boulevard system .
Commissioner George Burns read the following comments:

"Your committee believes that we should attempt to preserve and make available all the natural sceneries about Ann Arbor. This requires that we develop a system of parks and boulevards, the latter forming broad rivers bringing the country into the town and broadening into little parks at places best suited naturally for it. We should exert our efforts:

1. To develop and preserve the river banks.
2. To develop the ravines along the river. Such places offer unlimited opportunity for pleasant walks and resting places.
3. To develop drives from parts of the city which are so unfortunate as to lie away from the river to the river. These should be partly on the numerous ridges which command distant views and enable one to look down upon the tops of lofty trees and shrubs lining the neighboring ravines. Such views should be preserved for the benefit of future generations.
4. To develop drives and walks along the river bank. What is more restful to the tired than a walk or drive along the beautiful river?
5. To develop small parks along the boulevards in more level districts. These parks should be developed principally as play grounds. They should not be too small nor need they be extremely large. The development of the park idea should not be abused to such an extent as will interfere with the pleasure of the children. Such a condition would injure the entire undertaking

With these points in mind I desire to submit for your consideration the following partial plan for the development of a boulevard and park system. This should be extended to reach all around the city.

I would suggest that the boulevard begin at the city limits on Main Street. It should then run east to State. Leaving Main the boulevard would command the survey of the forty acres comprising the grounds of the Ann Arbor Golf Club. This is to be sure a pretty park, but even the "unselect" would welcome to enjoy its beauty "from afar." From State Street it should run east on Park Street. This street runs through a very pleasant country which will soon develop into a resident district under the stimulus of this

arrangement. The boulevard should enlarge into a small park and should include Hamilton Park.

Continuing east on Park Street, the next park should be the present fair grounds. This ground is partially low and not especially adapted for a park but it could be developed with little expense through a term of years into an ideal play ground. The necessity of this is apparent. We need several baseball diamonds where the young men can play and get away from the streets and loafing places, also a gridiron, etc.

Continuing east on Park Street we should enter the land of Granger to the line of Scott's woods, which we unfortunately now cannot get. We should then turn north through a beautiful valley on Scott's place to Washtenaw Avenue. From Washtenaw there is a street, Valley Street, running north along the ridge and commanding a fine view to the east. This street ends at the city limits. The boulevard should then continue north to Geddes, through the road to Huddy hill and down that ridge, commanding the most magnificent views of any one locality around the city to the Huron River. Thence west through School Girl's Glen, which at present is a dumping hole for all kinds of rubbish and a disgrace to the city. The boulevard should continue west to the Fuller Street bridge across the Michigan Central. After crossing the railroad I would branch the boulevard, one branch continuing on Fuller to the east end of the old boulevard, the other crossing the river at the left and passing through Cedar Bend Park to the boulevard above. I have stopped at Broadway because I lacked the detail information to carry it further. The boulevard thus outlined is about six miles in length.

Most of the above boulevard is already open and has been accepted by the city. A large part, if not all, of the remainder will be opened and graded without expense to the city[.] If this policy is adopted I would recommend that we take up the matter with the council and ask:

1. That this road be turned over to the Park Commission to be developed as a boulevard, when entirely opened by the property owners.
2. That steps be taken to secure Hamilton Park on conditions to those once offered to the city.
3. That steps be taken to secure the fair grounds. It seems entirely feasible that the high school authorities would be willing to join us in the enterprise. We all know how severely they are tried to secure a suitable playground for their students. I am not entirely clear as to the details of such an arrangement. Perhaps it might be best to turn over to them completely about five acres, which amount is about what I am told they need, or perhaps only give them complete control of certain parts during the school year and allowing general use by the city during the summer months. The details would be arranged in the basis of the amount of money given by the city or the school district for maintenance and development.

The committee was continued [?] with instructions to draw out a route for the proposed boulevard around the western part of the city. The idea was to continue it from Cedar Bend avenue on Broadway west, to strike over the hill by St. Thomas cemetery, take in the Spring Street view and cut across Seventh Street or some other route which might give a better view.

It developed that the plan had been talked over with many of the property owners along the route as outlined in the report and most of them were willing to grade and turn over to the city the land needed without cost to the city.
(Ann Arbor Daily Times)

16 July 1906

from Park Commission minutes:

"A competent landscape gardener shall be employed to lay out the said plot under the supervision of the Board of Park Commissioners and the University Authorities and the expense shall be shared equally by the City and the University."

"The city shall bear the expense of constructing roads to be laid out by said landscape gardener through said parcels of land"

University to provide directorship of whole garden for 3 years and expend annually \$500 per year (for three years) for planting and care of land

will not require the city to pay more than \$500 per year for three years for caring for and improving the property including the construction of the roads

roads to be "permanently dedicated to the use of the public"

26 July 1906

"Big Park for the U. of M. and City"

Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Nichols gave 32 acres to U. of M. to be added to 23 acres of land purchased from A. J. Mummery by the city (including School Girl's Glen) and to a 3 acre gift of river frontage for a park of 58 acres. The Nichols gift is described as extending from the cemetery to Huddy Hill with 10 rods of frontage on Geddes Avenue. The terms of Nichols gift was that the land should be used for a Botanical Garden and Arboretum for the University and for the schools of Ann Arbor. Under the agreement among the regents, donors, and the city, a landscape gardener was to be hired to develop "a single plan for the whole tract, the expense to be borne by the city and university jointly."

"The University is to expend \$750 per year for the care and management of the whole, and the city to police the grounds, and to build the roads through the entire park which, when completed, are to be dedicated to the public. The city is not to expend over \$500 per annum on the park."
(Ann Arbor News)

26 July 1906

"Park Assured by Nichols Gift"

similar to the above article

"The purpose of the gift is that the students may have a place to study the flora of Ann Arbor and all regions of a similar climate and hence the tract will be developed as a botanical garden and arboretum, as expressed by Mr. Nichols, and the plants will be preserved in their natural state where possible."

"Dr. and Mrs. Nichols will donate all the land on the Nichols tract except the residence lot near the cemetery line, now occupied. The Huddy place adjoins the Nichols tract on the east and sooner or later the connecting link will be furnished which will combine the boulevard property and the whole furnish a park scheme of hill, valley and stream of surpassing loveliness."

(Ann Arbor Daily News)

27 July 1906

"Ann Arbor Secures A Beautiful Park"

similar to the above two articles

"Ann Arbor is fortunate in having another beautiful park that will soon be open to the public. The new park extends from Geddes avenue through to the river and it includes one of the prettiest spots around Ann Arbor, School Girl's Glen."

"At their last meeting the common council passed a resolution to purchase a plot of land from Mr. Mummery. This plot consists of 25 acres and besides including the Glen the land extends east several rods to as to include the high grounds there and the wooded slopes that extend along the river."

In describing the Nichol's gift--"It includes the valley and willow grove that is at present a favorite place for marshmallow parties."

"A competent landscape gardener will be secured to lay out the park and it will be left in its natural state as much as possible."

"The park is easily accessible. A road runs back to the park from Observatory street and there will be an entrance on Geddes avenue. There is also the road that runs into School Girl's Glen from Miller avenue. This is one of the strong features of this new park. It is very close to the residence portion of the city and it is but a few blocks from the street car line. With a very little cost it can be made into one of the prettiest beauty spots in the state and it will not be for looks alone, as the botanical department of the University will put it to practical uses."

(Ann Arbor Weekly Argus)

16 August 1906

"Simonds is Here: Chicago Landscape Gardener in the City: Looked Over Park: This Morning He and Profs. Burns and Newcomb Took a Walk One Main Road"

Simonds had a consultation with the city park commission and walked through the [Arboretum] property and "was delighted with

the prospect. He thought the University already had an excellent botanical garden, and with a little work it can be made into one of the best in the country."

"While in the city Mr. Simonds will lay out the private grounds of Prof. Markley, Burns, Newcomb and Dr. Copeland, who have bought lots on Oxford road and Geddes avenue and will build houses there in the near future. The one decorative scheme will pervade all of these lots of these gentlemen and the work will be carried on with this plan in view."
(Ann Arbor Daily Argus)

17 August 1906

"The Landscape Gardener Here and at Work: O. C. Simonds, the Famous Landscape Gard[e]ner of Chicago, Has About Completed the Work of Laying Out the Park and Arboretum"

"Ann Arbor is to be congratulated on acquiring such a beautiful park as can be made out of the Arboretum and Mummery tracts," said O. C. Simonds, the well-known Chicago landscape gardener to a Times reporter today. Mr. Simonds is here for the purpose of platting the University's and the city's recently acquired property, and is also looking after a number of private yards on Oxford road, where beautiful homes are to be built by Profs. Jones, Markey [Markley] and Newcomb and Drs. Copeland and Burns. [Edward Jones --625 Oxford, George P. Burns--605 Oxford. The Oxford Conference Center was built on these properties. Frederick Newcomb's property at 1817 Geddes is just to the west of the Arboretum entrance, and Joseph Markley's property at 1816 Geddes across the street is now divided into apartments.]

'The land is quite varied,' said the landscape gardener, 'and this will mean an exceptional opportunity to grow plants of all kinds for there will be abundant light and shade.' Mr. Simonds has practically decided on the plans for the proposed park. There will be a main drive-way connecting the Geddes avenue on the south with the river road on the north. There will probably be a branch road connecting with the Observatory drive. The street north of the cemetery will be continued with a curved drive until it reaches the river road. From all parts of this proposed winding road, a large panorama of the Huron river valley may be viewed, and on certain days even the water tower at Ypsilanti may be seen. This road is to be about three-fourths of a mile long.

Mr. Simonds will also make the plans for the tree planting and the walks. He says that there will be comparatively few drives through the arboretum, owing to the fact that the botanical specimens can be better understood on foot. Undoubtedly many plants will be introduced into the gardens which are new in this locality. There is little doubt of their growing on the tract, as the land includes high, dry sandy land, as well as clay land, hillsides facing in all directions, meadow and marsh lands. The main aim of the University authorities is to introduce such plants as will be used by the students in their studies in the botanical department. With the flower beds and walks both tracts will form a delightful park for

recreation and pleasure seekers. Many of the trees already growing on the land will be saved. Oaks, lindens, maples, and elms will predominate in the selection of trees."
(Ann Arbor Daily Times)

- 16 June 1908 from Park Commission minutes:
Simonds to lay out drive on the Observatory grounds around north side (known as "Sleepy Hollow"). Desire to extend Huron from 14th to Observatory so that Huron St. would flow into parks (Arboretum). Simonds laid out street--needed OK from University (University was pressuring city to vacate a section of Huron)
- 29 Jan. 1909 from Park Commission minutes:
Simonds hired to lay out park and boulevard from Chubb Street to Cascade Glen, including a park on the north end
- 13 April 1909 from Park Commission minutes:
"park areas should flow like a river" into the center of the city and should include all public buildings

current Arboretum referred to as "Glen Park and Botanical Garden"
- 14 April 1909 Woman's Club of Ann Arbor initiated an effort to make a bird preserve of School Girl Glen. "The bird preserve idea was introduced at the meeting of the club yesterday afternoon by Miss Anna Schryver, who presented the subject of the domestication of our native birds before the women, with the idea of awakening extended interest in the city through the activity of the club."

"We have tamed the squirrels in Ann Arbor until they have become our pets and feed from our hands," said she. "Ann Arbor is known as 'Squirrel Town.' Is it not better that it be known as 'Robin Town?'"

"If we tame the robins and feed them through the winter, we could keep large numbers of them here the year round..."

"Miss Schryver outlined plans by which the robin, the blue bird, the oriole, and the wild grouse could all be tamed, and the specific benefits that could be realized especially in domesticating the latter."

"Miss Schryver was fellow in biology in Clark university for three years and worked in the nature study department. Her idea, which is also that of the club, is to combine the nature study in the public schools with the work of civic improvement in Ann Arbor, extending it along the various lines in which interest can be created."
(Ann Arbor Daily Times)
- 2 Sept. 1910 from Park Commission minutes:
Boulevard from Brooks St. to Chubb N. and East to Mr. Ganzhorn's land to be laid out by Simonds

- 10 July 1913 from Park Commission minutes:
directed that all banks and parts of park roads to be "covered with green" under the direction of Prof. Tealdi, landscape gardener of the university

- 5 Feb. 1914 from Park Commission minutes:
parks are as follows--

The Glen [Arboretum]	90.0 ac. (city owns 30)
Cedar Bend	25.0
Riverside	5.2
West Park	7.5
N. Boulevard	19.0
Felch	2.5
Fair Grounds	19.5
Hanover Square	2.5
9 Triangles	2.5

- 11 April 1914 from Park Commission minutes:
Mr. Springer (assoc. with the Board of Education?) gave a talk to the Civic Association and Playground Committee about playgrounds

- 16 April 1915 from Park Commission minutes:
Fair Grounds becomes Burns Park
N. Boulevard becomes Longshore Drive

- 4 August 1916 from Park Commission minutes:
Cedar Bend Drive--vehicles to enter from Broadway and exit at Wall Street
Glen Drive [Arboretum]--vehicles to enter from Geddes and exit on Fuller or at the foot of Observatory St./Hill

- 4 Oct. 1916 from Park Commission minutes:
renewed agreement for the city to maintain roads in Arboretum--
Glen Drive

- 14 Feb. 1917 from Park Commission minutes:
Julius E. Beal and Aubrey Tealdi met with park board
Park Commission is to keep up roadways/ University to keep up property as a whole and develop it as Arboretum Landscape Park
Policing is to be done jointly
Any extensive site improvements proposed are to be jointly approved by the Park Commission and University (same passed Board of Regents 23 Feb. 1917)

- 23 Oct. 1925 from Park Commission minutes:
Tealdi met before the commission and spoke in favor of closing Glen Drive to automobiles. Made a resolution that vehicles be restricted to use before noon. (same had to be approved by the Board of Regents)

- 18 Feb. 1925 from Park Commission minutes:
Passed a resolution by Pres. Little that Glen Drive be closed from dusk to dawn, gates be erected at the major entrances and operated

by the University. Master keys to be given to the Supt. of Parks
and Detroit Edison