

BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

November 2006

PARKS FOR BIRMINGHAM

Name an answer to conquering stress, finding venues for exercise and perfect fresh air to breathe? As it turns out, the solution's been around for more than a century.

The Society's newest book and an accompanying exhibit at the library, draw on concepts from the brilliant mind of America's finest expert in sculpting the space around us—the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted, who created Central Park, Biltmore Estate, U.S. Capitol Grounds and more.

Their answer: strategically planned parks to achieve all the desired goals.



THE RIVERWAY, BOSTON
An inspiring indication of the latent park possibilities of Village and Valley Creeks



Above, Olmsted Brothers, *A Park System for Birmingham*, 1925.
Below, Village Creek, Digital photograph by Brian Rushing, 2005.

The history: as *The Olmsted Vision: Parks for Birmingham* explains, the Olmsted firm came up with a perfect vision for our city as early as 1925. "The report stated that parks are important to cities to refresh nerve-strained men and women and to provide exercise and fresh air, which add so much to physical development of children, reduce crime, and promote good citizenship," says Marjorie White, director, Birmingham Historical Society.

The book and the exhibit first look back—at the needs of early Birmingham and the ways the initial report was utilized to form, among other things, the suburb of Mountain Brook. However, the 72-page soft-cover volume of color photographs, numerous drawings, and detailed historical data also addresses today's Birmingham.

"The principles were followed at the beginning—Mountain Brook, Linn Park, and Rushton Park are wonderful examples of the plan in reality, White explains." She adds that the report was heeded in terms of expanding recreational opportunities in the community, not the also-recommended thought of major land acquisition.

"We're finally implementing the vision in a grand way today by acquiring and developing vast areas—greenways along creeks and ridges," she continues. The volume, unlike many historical books that address only the past, overlays the theories to contemporary Birmingham's park planning—particularly emphasizing floodplains and ridge tops.

The book, in its past-and-present views of parks, includes:

- More than 100 historic drawings, plans, and photos
- Fascinating, forward-thinking concepts voiced 90 years ago
- The application of the original thinking in today's city
- Optimism for the future of Birmingham—both from the standpoint of beauty and recreation, but also economics and the environment.

The Society expresses appreciation to Alabama Power Foundation, Inc., Cawaco Resource & Development Council, Inc., Vulcan Materials Company Foundation and the Susan Mott Webb Charitable Trust for financial support to print our 2006 book and to volunteer readers, including Katie Tipton, Julius Linn Jr., Brian Rushing, Tom Maxwell, Paul Kennedy, Victor Blackledge and James White. Marjorie White and Heather McArn co-authored the volume. Carolanne Roberts wrote this newsletter.

The *Olmsted Vision* is the BHS Members' publication for 2006. A copy has been mailed to paid members. **If you have not received your copy, please call 205-251-1880.**

Putting flesh on the bones of Birmingham's civil rights history.

That's how Marjorie White, Birmingham Historical Society director, describes the new exhibit of 41 never-before-seen photos from the archives of *The Birmingham News*. Each depicts the turbulent and emotional events sweeping our city during the 1950s and 60s. The exhibit runs through December 30 in the Library Gallery of the Birmingham Public Library.

The photos, shot by *News* photographers yet never published, reveal gripping and telling moments such as:

- A child bearing a sign reading "Can a Man Love God and Hate His Brother?"

- Mayor Albert Boutwell following the news of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing
- A youthful and determined Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth counseling Freedom Riders
- A pensive, brooding Dr. Martin Luther King
- Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor directing arrests of marchers
- The arrest of high school student Mattie Howard, demonstrator in the Childrens' Crusade
- Calming the crowd after a house bombing

Continued on back

“These are extraordinary portraits of real people who lived this Movement,” says White of the collection drawn from the *News* archive of more than 5,000 unseen civil rights images. “They are the people, the places, and the action—what you expect from good photo-journalism. Thousands of words fill history books, yet, in these photos, *this* is the story of the Birmingham Movement.”

A *News* photo intern named Alexander Cohn discovered the negatives filed by year and photographer during his summer employment with the paper. He digitized 2,000 of the images, and interviewed living photographers and Movement participants for background. A portion of those photos may be viewed online at www.al.com/unseen.

“Each photo in the Library exhibit is captioned, placing it in the context of its part of the story,” says White. “Seeing the



April 6, 1963. The first march of the Birmingham Campaign led by the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth concludes with prayer before Police Capt. George Wall arrests the marchers in front of the federal building (today's Vance Courthouse) on Fifth Avenue North. Photo courtesy *The Birmingham News* Collection, BPL Archives.

exhibit shows you the power of the photographs—and you better understand the circumstances of what took place.

“All these years later, the history is still painful,” she continues, “but as Reverend Shuttlesworth himself concluded, ‘*Let it never be forgotten that the Birmingham Movement provided the vehicle and the shock force that shook the nation’s moral conscience.*’”

The events in Birmingham directly resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Bill, providing equal rights for all Americans.”

The exhibit is open to the public at no charge.

Society Calendar

December 1-30, 2006
The Olmsted Vision Exhibition
 Birmingham Public Library, 1st Floor
 2100 Park Place

November 5-December 30, 2006
“Unseen . . . Unforgotten”
The Birmingham News Civil Rights Photographs
 Birmingham Public Library, Library Gallery

Feb. 27, 2007, 7:00 p.m.
Annual Meeting
 Birmingham Botanical Gardens



One Sloss Quarters
 Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Don't miss the
**Olmsted Vision &
 Civil Rights Photos Shows**
 at the Public Library
 throughout December.

Publication and Membership Order Form

___ Copies *The Olmsted Vision* @ \$25.00 postpaid \$ _____
 ___ **SPECIAL OFFER:** Box of 20 @ \$275 postpaid _____
 ___ Membership in the Society for one calendar year.
 Membership includes *The Olmsted Vision*, news-
 letters and invitations to special events @ \$40.00 _____
 Total enclosed \$ _____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Credit Card: ___ VISA ___ MC # _____

Name on card: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Please send a gift of membership ___ or *The Olmsted Vision* ___ to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Fax or mail to: Birmingham Historical Society, One Sloss Quarters, Birmingham, AL 35222. Telephone: 205-251-1880, Fax: 205-251-3260. www.bhistorical.org