SOUTH PARK—
THE ERA OF 1871–1893

Post-Civil War Chicago offered Olmsted and Vaux magnificent opportunities. By 1868 they had begun to design the 1,600-acre suburban community of Riverside. Olmsted had been approached to design Lincoln Park and looked forward to planning the whole series of parks being anticipated for the city. In 1869 he and Vaux were instead commissioned to design the two avenues leading to the thousand-acre South Park. The following year they were hired to plan that park as well. The proposal they submitted in 1871 envisioned South Park as the great metropolitan park of the region, with a range of landscapes and functions that made it virtually a park system by itself. The inland park, or the Upper Division, and eventually called Washington Park, took advantage of the flatness of the site to provide a great hundred-acre meadow surrounded by ninety acres of open groves threaded by carriage drives and walks. A refectory pavilion and carriage concourse overlooked the meadow, and in the remaining enclosed Upper Plaisance the designers planned a Mere for boating, a Mall with picnic areas, a hilly Ramble, and an extensive flower garden. The Lower Division, later called Jackson Park, had a mile of lakefront beach and a 165-acre interior lagoon providing sheltered water for boating. There was to be a long pier running out into Lake Michigan, a Promenade concert ground, a concourse and woods on the lagoon, and headlands for picnicking, as well as two meadows or “Greens.” Connecting the two parks was the Midway Plaisance, nearly a mile long and 700 feet wide, with broad allées and a central canal for small boats and rowing regattas. The designers experimented by providing densely planted, enclosed areas that they called “plaisances” that would be closed at night, and separate “open” areas with little or no shrubbery and undergrowth that would be lit at night and could safely be kept open after dark.

The promise of the aftermath of the Civil War in Chicago was dashed by the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871 within a few months of the submission by Olmsted & Vaux of their plan for the South Park. The fire burned the papers and plans of the South Park Commission and the economic depression following the Panic of 1873 greatly slowed construction of the park. Even so, Olmsted’s friend and occasional colleague Horace W. S. Cleveland oversaw the first stages of construction in 1872–74. He directed the grading, planting, and construction of drives in the South Open Ground of Washington Park, following the Olmsted & Vaux plan fairly closely except for the addition of a Ramble with winding paths near the parkway entrance on the northeast side. Construction continued during the 1880s, although when Olmsted examined the park in 1881 he warned that the park was being developed along two conflicting lines—one being simple, broad landscape and the other decorative horticulture. The latter was exemplified by mosaic plant constructions, including a large globe of the world.

SOUTH PARK—THE ERA OF 1871–1893
13.2. Diagram of Chicago South Park plan showing “Open” and “Plaisance” areas as described in report by Olmsted, Vaux & Co. of 1871.
13.3. Diagram of 1871 General Plan, identifying major features
13.4. North Drive with paths and newly planted trees, northwest section of Upper Division (Washington Park), 1870s

13.5. View toward southwest at "Park Quadrant," the South Grove Parkway entrance at the northeast corner of the Upper Division
13.6. Decorative plant constructions in Upper Division, 1889
The World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 gave Olmsted an opportunity to create some of the lagoon scenery in Jackson Park that he and Vaux had proposed in their plan of 1871. As a contrast to and relief from the formality of the Court of Honor of the Exposition, Olmsted designed the Lagoon with its Wooded Island and scattered small islands. He brought in many railroad-car loads of plants from the countryside and produced a display of profuse, lush plantings. As he instructed his chief plantsman, “the whole lagoon district must, through its wildness, luxuriance, unrestrained and informal aspect of natural scenery of a type rarely seen in close connection with grand affairs, be a foil for the highly enriched, refined and delicate gardening decoration of other parts of the Fair Ground.”

1. Frederick Law Olmsted to Rudolph Ulrich, March 24, 1891
13.8. Plan of the Wooded Island and islets in the Lagoon, Jackson Park, March 20, 1891

13.9. Construction of islands at south end of the Wooded Island

13.10. Outlying islets of the Wooded Island in the East Lagoon with planting completed.

"The city has grown up out of a swamp, and as far as I know a swamp without beauty; let us show the possible beauty of a swamp, even without trees." George B. Post's Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building is seen under construction in the background, with one of the electric-powered launches planned by Olmsted to serve as water taxis.

2. FLO to Rudolph Ulrich, March 24, 1891
13.11. Photograph by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., of planting of the shore at the northern end of the Wooded Island, c. 1893

"The thing is to make it appear that we found this body of water and its shores and have done nothing to them except at the landings and bridges. They were rich, rank, luxurious, crowded with vegetation, like the banks of some tropical rivers that I have seen on Louisiana bayous."  

3. FLO to Rudolph Ulrich, March 24, 1891

13.12. Photograph by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., of shore of the Wooded Island, c. 1893
13.13. Photograph by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., of shore of the Wooded Island, c. 1893

13.14. Electric launch in service during the Exposition
Following the Exposition, Olmsted and his partner John C. Olmsted undertook to redesign Jackson Park, removing the foundations of the great temporary exhibit buildings and creating a simplified version of the 1871 lagoons. In the process, Olmsted stated his determination to make Jackson Park "the finest domestic boating park in the world."\(^4\)

The remaining filled areas from the Exposition provided new space for sports both on the Lake Michigan side of the lagoons and on the southern inland side of the park. The plantings installed in the park by the Olmsted firm were extensive and varied—from the surroundings of the boathouses and gymnastic grounds in the western section to the lush planting of the shores and islands of the lagoon, as well as innovative and naturalistic plantings on the Lake Michigan beachside and bluffs.

4. FLO to Joseph W. Donnersberger, April 20, 1894

13.15. Frederick Law Olmsted, “Skeleton plan” study, c. March 21, 1894
13.16. Revised General Plan of Jackson Park, 1895
with footprint of World’s Columbian Exposition
Buildings shown in red
GENERAL PLANTING PLAN
JACKSON PARK

PLANTING LIST

GENERAL PLANTING PLAN
FOR JACKSON PARK
A transcription of "Planting List" on "General Planting Plan for Jackson Park, 1897"

1 Ulmus americana, Elm
2 Ulmus campestris, English Elm
3 Fraxinus pubescens, Red Ash
4 Acer negundo, Box Elder
5 3 feet apart
   Ilex verticillata, Black Alder
   Cornus sericea, Silky Cornel
   Rosa multiflora
   Ligustrum Ibeta, Amoor River Privet
   Syringa vulgaris, Lilac
   Viburnum opulus, High-bush Cranberry
   Hibiscus syriacus, Althea
   Philadelphus coronarius
   Sambucus canadensis
6 2 feet apart
   Pyrus arbutifolia, Choke berry
   Berberis thunbergii
   Hypericum prolificum, Shrubby St Johnswort
   Myrica cerifera, Bayberry
7 3 feet apart
   Spiraea thunbergii
   Spiraea opulifolia, Nine-bark
   Hydrangea paniculata
   Forsythia viridissima
   Deutzia crenata
   Lonicer a orientalis
   Philadelphus coronarius
   Arundo typos kerrioides
   Weigelia rosea
   Rosa rugosa
   Cydonia japonica, Japan Quince
8 3 foot apart
   Rose wicharaiana
9 2 feet apart
   Potentilla fruticosa, Shrubby cinquefoil
   [Rhus aromatic, Sumac]
   [Rosa nitida]
   Rosa lucida
   Ribes cynosbati, Gooseberry
   Spiraea salicifolia, Meadow sweet
   Berberis vulgaris, Barberry
   Berberis thunbergii
   Symphoricarpos occidentalis, Wolfberry
   Spiraea tomentosa, Steeple bush
   Cornus sanguine, Red Dogwood
   Viburnum acerifolium, Dock maple
   Myrica cerifera, Bayberry
   Rhus aromatic, Sumac
   Celastrus scandens, Bitter-sweet
   Spiraea opulifolia, Nine-bark
   Ilex verticillata, Beach Alder
   Staphylea trifoliata, Bladder nut
   Symphoricarpos vulgaris, Indian currant
   Aralia spinosa, Hercules club
   Rhamnus catharticus, Buckthorn
   Pyrus arbutifolia, Chokeberry
   Xanthoxy lum americanum, Prickly Ash
10 5 feet apart
   Sassafras officinale, Sassafras
   Cornus florida, Dogwood
   Cercis Canadensis, Red-bud
   Crataeg us cr uis-gali, Cockspur thorn
   Acer pennsylvanicum, Moosewood
   Pyrus aucuparia, Mountain Ash
   Ptelea trifoliata, [Hop] Tree
   Acer spicatum, Mountain Maple
   Amelanchier canadensis, Shad-bush
   Crataegus coccinea
   Viburnum dentatum, Arrowwood
   Hamamelis virginica, Witch hazel
   Rhus typhina, Staghorn Sumac
   Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch
   Betula lenta, Sweet Birch
   Acer dasy carpum, Silver Maple
   Acer saccharinum, Sugar Maple
   Acer rubrum, Red Maple
   Quercus alba, White Oak
   Quercus prinus, Chestnut Oak
   Quercus macrocarpa, Burr Oak
   Quercus palustris, Pin Oak
   Quercus rubra, Red Oak
   Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch
   Acer negundo, Box Elder
   Populus balsamifera, Balsam Poplar
11 3 feet apart
   Populus caroliniana, Cotton Wood
   Populus fastigiat a, Lombardy Poplar
   Salix regalis, Willow
   Salix laurifolia
   Salix Russian Golden
   Catalpa speciosa, Catalpa
12 3 feet apart
   Spiraea opulifolia, Nine-bark
   Berberis vulgaris, Barberry
   Ligustrum vulgare, Privet
   Cornus sericea, Silky Cornel
   Clethra anilifolia, Sweet pepperbush
   Rhus glabra, Sumac
   Ligustrum Ibeta
   Amorpha fruticosa, False indigo
   Symphoricarpos vulgaris, Indian Currant
   Rosa lucida, Wild rose
   Viburnum prunifolium, Black Haw
   Ribes floridum, Wild Black Currant
   Viburnum opulus, High-bush cranberry
   Cephalanthus occidentalis, Button Bush
13 Acer dasycarpum
14 Acer platanoides, Norway Maple
15 Acer rubrum, Red Maple
16 Alnus americana
17 Catalpa speciosa
18 Salix alba, Willow
19 Tilia americana, Basswood
20 Quercus alba, White Oak
21 Quercus prinus, Chestnut Oak
22 Quercus macrocarpa, Burr Oak
23 Quercus palustris, Pin Oak
24 Quercus rubra, Red Oak
25 Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch
26 Crataegus oxycanth a
27 3 feet apart
   Ligustrum vulgare, Privet
   Clethra anilifolia, Swet pepperbush
   Cornus sericea, Silky Cornel
   Cornus stolonifera, Red Osier
   Ligustrum Ibeta
Symphoricarpos vulgaris, Indian Currant
Xanthoxylum americanum, Prickly Ash
Carpinus americana, Hornbeam
Viburnum dentatum, Arrow-wood
Spiraea opulifolia, Nine bark

28 Trees 20 feet apart
Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch
Betula lenta, Black Birch
Quercus alba, White Oak
Quercus coccinea, Scarlet Oak
Quercus rubra, Red Oak
29 Populus monolifera, Cottonwood

30 Platanus orientalis, Oriental Plane

31 Lonicera halleana, Oriental Plane

32 3 feet apart
Rhus glabra, Sumac
Corylus americana, Hazel nut
Salix in var
Hamamelis virginiana, Witch Hazel
Sambucus canadensis, Elder
Cephalanthus occidentalis, Button Bush
Tamarix gallica, Shrub Buckthorn
Symphoricarpos racemosus, Snowberry
Xanthoxylum americanum, Prickly Ash
Carpinus americana, Hornbeam
Populus tremuloides, Aspen

33 5 feet apart
Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch
Catalpa speciosa
Populus balsamea, Balsam Poplar
Populus monolifera, Cottonwood
Populus alba, Silver Poplar
Salix laurifolia, Laurel-leaved Willow
Salix v...a
Salix viminalis
Acer negundo, Box Elder
Pyrus americana, Mountain Ash

34 Vitis labrusca 3’ apart
35 Ailanthus glandulosa, Tree of Heaven
36 Betula lenta, Black Birch
37 Betula lutea, Yellow Birch
38 Betula nigra, River Birch
39 Celtis occidentalis, Hackberry
40 Fraxinus americana
41 Fraxinus viridis, Green Ash
42 Liriodendron tulipifera, Tulip Tree
43 Populus alba, White Poplar
44 Populus balsamifera, Balsam Poplar
45 Acer pensylvanicum, Moosewood
46 Carpinus americana, Hornbeam
47 Cercis canadensis, Red bud
48 Cornus florida, Dogwood
49 Ostrya virginica, Hop Hornbeam
50 Pyrus americana, Mountain Ash
51 Salix caprea, Goat Willow
52 Xanthoxylum americanum
53 Acer saccharinum, Sugar maple
54 Liquidamber styraciflua, Sweet Gum
55 Quercus coccinea, Scarlet Oak
56 Fagus ferriginea, Beech
57 Gymnocladus canadensis, Kentucky Coffee Tree
58 Nyssa sylvatica, Tupelo
59 Fraxinus sambucifolia, Black Ash
60 Halesia tetraptera
61 Cladrastis lutea, Yellow Wood
62 Chionanthus virginica, Hop Hornbeam
63 Salix laurifolia, Laurel-leaved Willow
64 Quercus bicolor, Swamp White Oak
65 Quercus phellos, Willow Oak
66 Tilia heterophylla, Linden
67 Juniperus virginiana, Red Cedar
68 Salix in var, shrubby form 3’ apart, Willow
69 Arctostaphylos uva-ursi, 2’ apart, Bear Berry
70 Hudsonia tomentosa, 1’ apart
71 Juniperus sabina, 5’ apart
72 Saxafras officinale, Saxafras
73 Quercus nigra, Black Oak

74 Pinus banksiana, Gray Pine
75 Salix nigra, Black Willow
76 Celastrus scandens, 3’ apart, Bitter-sweet
77 1 foot apart

POST-EXPOSITION REDESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF JACKSON PARK
Hypericum kalmianum
Potentilla fruticosa
Rosa blanda
Rosa humilis
90 3 feet apart
Cytissus purpureus
Cytissus nigricans
Genista tinctoria, Wood Maven
Hypericum densiflorum
Hypericum proliflorum
Desmodium penduliflorum
Desmodium japonicum
Coronilla emerus, Scorpion Senna
Corema couradii
Helianthemum vulgare, Sun Rose
Empetrum nigrum
Gaylussacia resinosa
91 Iva frutescens, Marsh Elder
Potentilla fruticosa, Shrubby cinquefoil
Rosa blanda
Hypericum densiflorum
Gaylussacia resinosa
92 2 feet apart
Cotoneaster buxifolia
Cotoneaster microphylla
Cotoneaster horizontalis
Potentilla fruticosa, Shrubby Cinquefoil
Philadelphus microphyllus
Coriaria myrtifolia
Gaylussacia resinosa
93 3 feet apart
Symphoricarpos vulgaris, Indian Currant
Symphoricarpos racemosus, Snowberry
Salix tristis, Sand Willow
Gaylussacia resinosa, Huckleberry
Diervilla trifida, Bush Honeysuckle
Lycium barbarum, Matrimony Vine
Lycium europaeum
Ceanthus americana
94 5 feet apart
Hippophae rhamnoides, Sea Buckthorn
Shepherdia canadensis, Buffalo berry
Tamarix galica
Tamarix tetandra purpurea
95 Pinus mugho 5' apart
96 Potentilla tridentata 1' apart
97 2 feet apart
Rhus aromatica, Sumac
Rosa blanda
Rosa humilis
98 5 feet apart
Corylus avellana, Hazel Nut
Corylus Americana
Corylus rostrata
Cephalanthus occidentalis, Button Bush
Sassafras officianale, Sassafras
Ptelea trifoliata, Hop Tree
99 3 feet apart
Cornus stolonifera, Red Osier
Cornus sericea, Silky Cornel
Salix in var. dwarf
Prunus pumila, Dwarf Cherry
Cornus circinata
100 2 feet apart
Potentilla fruticosa, Shrubby cinquefoil
Hypericum kalmianum
Artemesia frigida
Gaylussacia resinosa
101 4 feet apart
Cephalanthus occidentalis, Button Bush
Alnus serrulata, Alder
Viburnum opulus, High-bush cranberry
102 3 feet apart
Clethra alnifolia, Sweet pepper bush
Asalea viscosa, Swamp Honeysuckle
Salix in var dwarf
103 3 feet apart
Cornus stolonifera, Red Osier
Cornus sanguinea, Red Dogwood
Rosa Carolina, Wild Rose
Myrica Gale, Sweet Gale
Viburnum lentago
104 Clethra alnifolia 3’ apart, Sweet-pepper Bush
105 Rosa carolina 2 ft apart
106 Myrica Gale 3 ft apart
107 Water plants
2 feet apart
Potentilla fruticosa, Shrubby cinquefoil
Rosa nitida, Wild Rose
Rosa lucida, Wild Rose
Ribes cynosbati, Gooseberry
Spiraea salicifolia, Gooseberry
Berberis thunbergii
Symphoricarpos occidentalis, Wolf-berry
[Myrica cerifera, Bayberry]
Rhus aromatica, Fragrant Sumac
Celastrus scandens
Symphoricarpos vulgaris, Indian Currant
Rosa blanda, Early Wild Rose
Rosa humilis
Prunus pumila, Sandcherry
109 Myrica cerifera, 2’ apart
110 Myrica asplenifolia, 2’ apart
111 Gaultheria procumbens, 1’ apart,
Wintergreen
112 Rubus hispidus, 1 Vi apart, Swamp Blackberry
2 feet apart
Vaccinium pennsylvanicum
Vaccinium vacillans
Kalmia angustifolia, Lambkill
113 Gaultheria procumbens, 1’ apart,
Wintergreen
114 Viburnum acerifolium 2’ apart
NOTE — First figures in the beds designate the
plants or mixture of plants to be used in each
space. Second figures show the number of indi­
viduals required to fill each space.
13.20. Detail of 1897 planting plan showing an island and nearby islets in the Lagoon east of Oak Island opposite the western entrance of North Haven that lies west of the North Inlet access point from Lake Michigan.

The plan indicates that water plants are to be planted along the shoreline of the island (typical for the islands in the plan), interrupted in two places with large plantings of as many as 70 and 100 roses (Rosa carolina), whose pink flowers develop into red rose hips. Another area at the water's edge is to be planted with 40 Red Osier dogwood shrubs, while shrubby willows and sweetgale are planted en masse in two other places. In the interior of the island are hundreds of deciduous shrubs, mixed in species, with subtle texture, fragrance, and seasonal color. Three tulip trees (Liriodendron tulipifera), widely spaced, would grow to tower over the shrubs.
13.22 Boats and new boathouse in the western Lagoon

13.21 New path, drive, and plantings
13-13. Baseball in Ball Field, southwest section of Jackson Park c. 1900