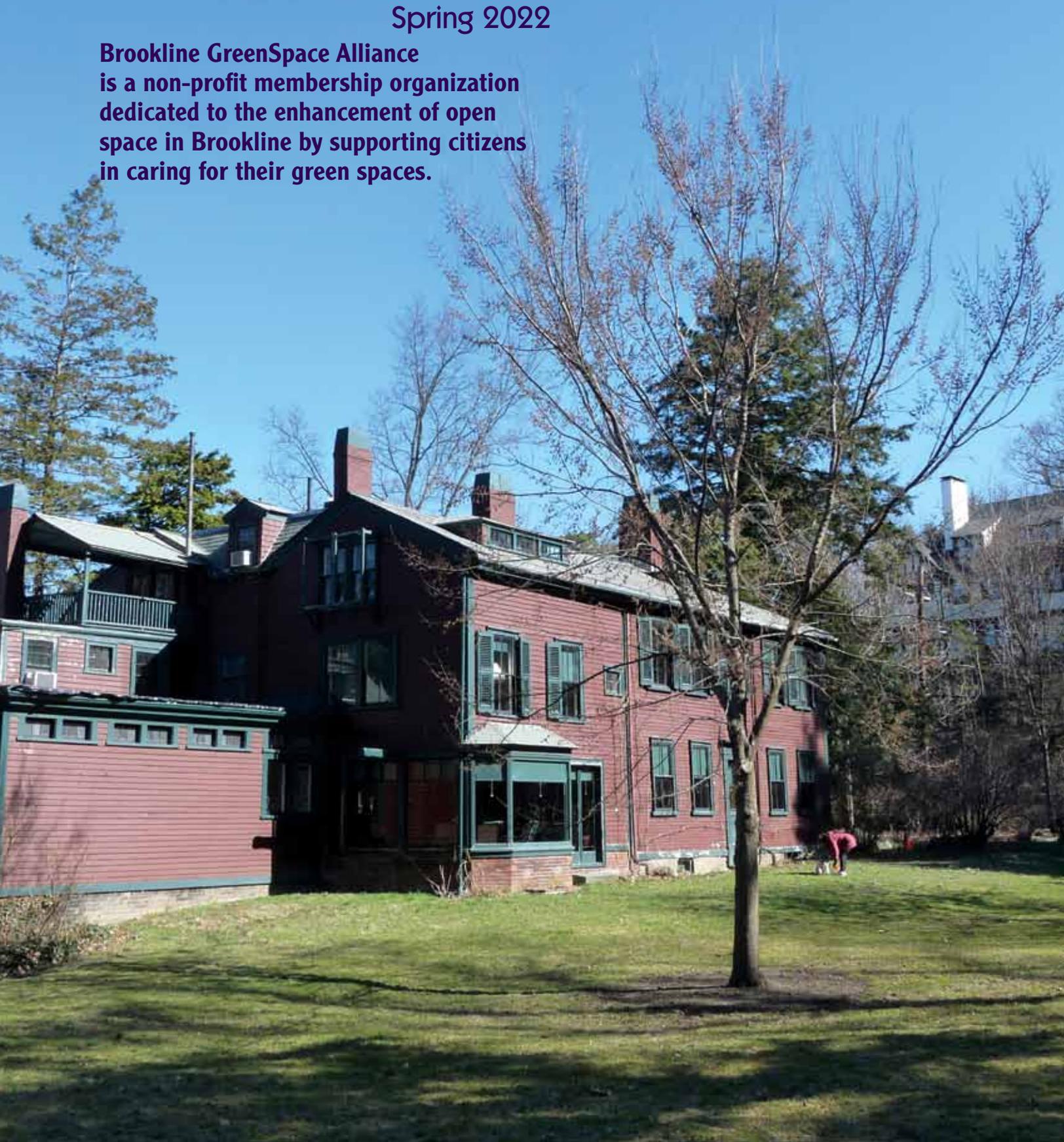


# PLACE

Spring 2022

**Brookline GreenSpace Alliance**  
is a non-profit membership organization  
dedicated to the enhancement of open  
space in Brookline by supporting citizens  
in caring for their green spaces.



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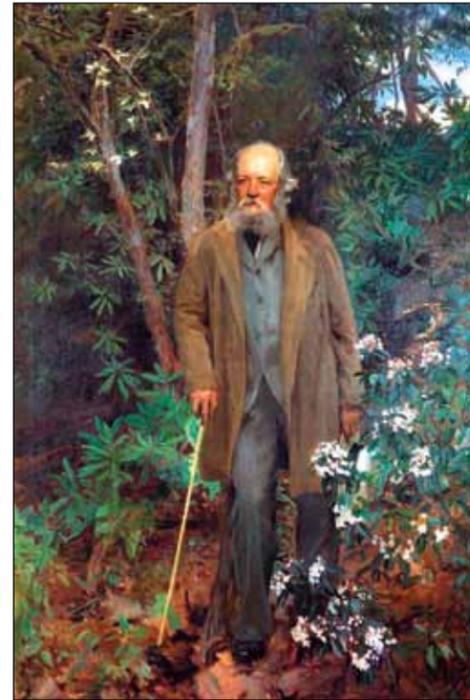
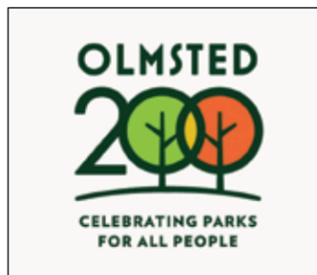
Cover photo: Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site with replaced elm tree in the foreground

## Olmsted Bicentennial--April 26, 2022

2022 marks the bicentennial of the birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, America's visionary maker of parks and public places. (1822-1903). In 1883, after supervising the design and construction of such landmarks as Central Park and the US Capitol Grounds, Olmsted moved his family from New York City to 99 Warren Street in Brookline, Massachusetts. It was here that he also re-established his office. "Fairsted," as he called it, served as both a home and the world's first full-scale professional practice of landscape architecture. All the processes of design, from drafting to printing, were carried out there. From Fairsted, the firm collaborated with an impressive galaxy of suburban neighbors who were among the regional and national leaders in the fields of architecture and horticulture, among them Henry Hobson Richardson and Charles Sprague Sargent.

Olmsted created a notable body of park, institutional, and private residential designs that influenced the essential shape of cities. He instilled in his colleagues and apprentices the philosophy that thoughtful and purposeful landscape design, which respected natural site conditions, should provide restorative public experiences, necessary for a healthy society. To carry out his work, Olmsted developed a firm where he supervised the education, not only of his sons, John Charles, and Frederick Law, Jr., but of his many apprentices, such as Henry S. Codman and Charles Eliot, who he felt had the talent and temperament to advance the evolving landscape design profession. The senior Olmsted believed that landscape architects needed more than knowledge of plants and soil; they needed to understand the artistic nature of their work and how designed landscapes could influence human activity and social values.

Through all the designs that Olmsted created there runs one dominating and consistent conception. He simplified the scene, clearing and planting to clarify the "leading motive" of the natural site and heighten the effect of a particular quality of nature. The result was a series of designs that combined richness and wildness of planting with unified composition. Information about the many events in celebration of Olmsted's bicentennial can be found at [www.olmsted200.org](http://www.olmsted200.org) and [www.olmstednow.org](http://www.olmstednow.org). Information about the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site can be found at [www.nps.gov/frla](http://www.nps.gov/frla)



Portrait of Frederick Law Olmsted by John Singer Sargent, 1895. Biltmore Estate, Asheville, N.C.

## H. H. Richardson and F. L. Olmsted

Deborah Rivers, AIA, LEED AP

Author Hugh Howard gave an online talk recently about his book, *Architects of an American Landscape: Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Reimagining of America's Public and Private Spaces*, published in January 2022. Howard said when he approached his editor about writing a book to restore H. H. Richardson's position in American architectural history, his editor asked, "If so few know him, who will buy your book?" Considering that, Howard came up with the idea to add Frederick Law Olmsted, whom he had discovered to be Richardson's most influential mentor.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Green Hill neighborhood of Brookline was home to many distinguished citizens and thought leaders, including Charles Sprague Sargent (first director of the Arnold Arboretum), Henry Hobson Richardson, and Frederick Law Olmsted.

Richardson and Olmsted had met years earlier when both lived on Staten Island and maintained professional offices in Lower Manhattan. They might have met on their daily ferry rides to their offices or at the Century Association, a New York social club for authors, artists and others with cultural interests.

In their first collaboration, Richardson and Olmsted were invited to design the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane in late 1869. Olmsted made suggestions to Richardson about siting the building thus breaking down the scale of this extensive structure and integrating it into the landscape. The building and grounds formed a restorative setting that supported the treatment of the patients.

In 1872, Richardson's design for Trinity Church in Boston was selected over those by five other firms. In order to oversee the construction, Richardson moved his family to Brookline in 1874. There were several factors that influenced his choice, including the influential people who lived there and the picturesque, bucolic character of the town. The house he rented at 25 Cottage Street also became his office for which he added wings to accommodate his staff.

In 1874, Olmsted was sought out by Charles Sprague Sargent to help create the Arnold Arboretum. After Boston passed the Park Act in 1875, the City approached Olmsted to design a park system for Boston. He and Richardson collaborated on many projects in the Boston area during this period including public libraries in Stoughton, Woburn, Malden, and Quincy, the North Easton Town Hall, and the Boylston Street bridge, part of Olmsted's work in the Back Bay Fens.

While Olmsted worked from New York, he frequently visited his friend and collaborator in Brookline. In



Detail of portrait of Henry Hobson Richardson by Hubert von Herkomer. National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.



25 Cottage Street, H. H. Richardson's home and office. Photo by Deborah Rivers

*Continued on the next page*

## Richardson and Olmsted continued



The office wing at Fairsted  
Photo by Deborah Rivers

early 1881, Olmsted decided to move to Brookline to supervise his work for the Boston Parks and other projects. After renting for two years, he purchased the property that was to become Fairsted, not far from Richardson. Over time he added an office wing to accommodate the Olmsted firm's staff, similar in concept to what Richardson had established at 25 Cottage Street.

Richardson and Olmsted continued to collaborate on projects including "Stonehurst", a house for Robert and Lydia Paine in Waltham, various commuter railroad stations surrounding Boston, and the U.S. Capitol grounds.

After years of declining health,

Richardson passed away at the age of 47 in April 1886 and was buried in Walnut Hill Cemetery in Brookline. The work of Richardson's firm was carried on by successor firms and survives to this day as Shepley Bulfinch.

After F. L. Olmsted, Sr.'s death in 1903, the firm continued as Olmsted Brothers, under the leadership of John Charles Olmsted until his death in 1920 and F. L. Olmsted, Jr., who retired in 1949. In the 1930s, the firm had over 60 employees to handle the large number of projects, including park systems, college campuses, and residential neighborhoods, the firm was designing.

Fairsted, located at 99 Warren Street, was acquired by the U.S. Park Service in 1979 and has been restored as the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. Richardson's house at 25 Cottage Street, unoccupied for more than 20 years, has not fared well. It was once again in danger of demolition along with 222 Warren Street (the home of John Charles Olmsted) in January 2021. After much concern was raised by preservationists, architects, landscape architects, and the general public, the Town of Brookline placed an 18-month demolition delay on the properties. A Local Historic District consisting of 5 properties associated with Richardson and Olmsted was proposed and approved by Town Meeting in November 2021. The LHD is in the final stages of the regulatory process to establish the district. This will protect all five properties from demolition.

H. H. Richardson is considered to be one of America's greatest architects. His buildings created a new American architecture that responded to the needs of a country in transition from rural to urban/suburban in the second half of the nineteenth century. Frederick Law Olmsted is considered the father of landscape architecture. He sought to preserve significant natural places and to integrate nature into the places where all could enjoy it. "Together they improved the world in which their fellow citizens, then and since, live, work, learn and play."<sup>1</sup>

Sources:

Howard, Hugh; *Architects of an American Landscape: Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Reimagining of Americas Public and Private Spaces*, 2022, New York, NY, Grove Atlantic.

O'Gorman, James F.; *Henry Hobson Richardson and His Office - Selected Drawings*, 1974, Boston, MA, Harvard College Library and David R. Godine.

Woy, Jean and McCarthy, Tina, editors, *Study Report Olmsted-Richardson Thematic Local Historic District*, Brookline Preservation Commission, Department of Planning and Community Development, November 2021

<sup>1</sup>Howard, Hugh; *Architects of an American Landscape: Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Reimagining of Americas Public and Private Spaces*, 2022, p.342

### Properties in Proposed Local Historic District:

- 1 16 Warren Street - First Home of John Charles Olmsted and family (opposite Reservoir)
- 2 99 Warren Street - "Fairsted" - Home/Office of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.; Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (National Park Service)
- 3 222 Warren Street - "Cliffside" - Home of John Charles Olmsted and family (corner of Warren and Cottage Streets)
- 4 25 Cottage Street - Perkins-Hooper-Richardson House - Home/Office of Architect Henry Hobson Richardson from 1874 - 1886
- 5 Walnut Hills Cemetery - H. H. Richardson and Julia Gorham Richardson Burial Site



## Olmsted's Vision Restored

Frederick Law Olmsted created places for people to escape from city life. He wanted visitors to his parks to feel welcomed and safe and one way he provided for safety was to create green spaces with systems of roads that allowed for the separation of different modes of transportation. He realized that a pleasant stroll in the park was a different activity from a carriage ride.

In Boston and Brookline's Emerald Necklace, Olmsted created walking paths, bridle paths and roads for automobiles. On the Boston side of the Emerald Necklace Parks, the Parkways came under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan District Commission (now DCR); in Brookline Riverdale Parkway was kept under Brookline control. Over the years it was allowed to deteriorate. A metal guardrail blocked views of, and access to, Willow Pond. Despite this, people often chose to walk in the middle of Riverdale Parkway instead of walking within the more secluded park. Car maintenance was a common occurrence on the Road. Cars and cyclists and pedestrians were sharing potholed, broken pavement. Meanwhile, cars also traveled a parallel Brookline Street—Pond Avenue.

In 1987 as part of a resurgence of interest in Olmsted, the most significant early American landscape designer, and in response to deferred maintenance that left the Emerald Necklace almost derelict, a community process was begun to write a Master Plan for the restoration of this important park system.

Realizing the opportunity to follow Olmsted's principle of separation of modes of transportation, park advocates suggested that Riverdale Road be converted into two paths—one for bicycles and one for pedestrians and that Pond Avenue be left to carry the car traffic. This restored 5 acres of land to green space.

The decision to separate pedestrian, bicycle and car traffic was bold and perhaps a forerunner of the current trend to create bike lanes and provide safer streets for all users. It was challenging to put all the pieces in place in order for this significant change to be made, but it may be Olmsted having guided us to fulfill his vision of safe, green places for city dwellers.



New bike path and adjacent walking path (not seen in this photo) have replaced Riverdale Parkway

## Threespine Sticklebacks in the Emerald Necklace

Threespine Sticklebacks are found across colder waters in the northern hemisphere, most living in salt water, migrating to fresh-water to spawn. The Sticklebacks in the Emerald Necklace, in pools upstream and in Willow Pond stay in the same pool all year. This is the only place in Massachusetts and the southernmost place on the East Coast to find freshwater Threespine Sticklebacks. The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program lists this as a threatened species.

Threespine Sticklebacks are carnivorous, eating worms, insect larvae, fish eggs and fry, including their own. Mature specimen can be up to two inches long. Like other male sticklebacks, after fertilizing eggs laid by females attracted to their underwater "nest," the males guard their brood, fanning them to ensure they get enough oxygen, until they hatch and mature. The fish become sexually mature in a year and may live up to three years.

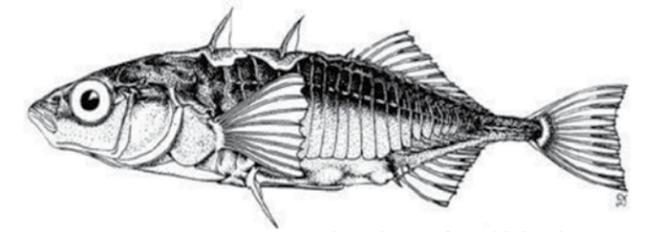
It is unknown how the fish wound up in these ponds. Although the Muddy River flows into the Charles, which was once a tidal estuary, it has been cut off from the ocean since creation of the Emerald Necklace and the damming of the Charles River.



Coir logs provide soil stabilization to control erosion into the pond

This year, Willow Pond will be dredged by the Town as called for in the environmental improvement portion of the Muddy River Restoration Project. Dredging will remove oil-soaked contaminated sediment and contribute to improved water quality — good for the environment, flood control, and the Threespine Stickleback.

The fish will need to be protected during the dredging. The Town is considering construction of a cofferdam at the location where the stream connects from the smaller pond to Willow Pond. The fish primarily live in the upstream pond, but can migrate down into the stream and sometimes venture into Willow Pond where the stream enters the pond. The cofferdam will act as a barrier so that the fish cannot enter Willow Pond.



From R.J. Wootton, *A Functional Biology of Sticklebacks*, 1984



Willow Pond  
Photo by Hugh Mattison



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## Support for Friends Groups

One of the primary objectives of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is to support and foster volunteer groups who help care for our parks. Park Friends groups' contribution to the quality of life in Brookline is invaluable and BGSA acts as their backup system.

The Umbrella functions of the Alliance include acting as fiscal agent; promoting activities throughout the year through email announcements, Facebook and Twitter; holding informational meetings with the Park & Recreation Commissioner; and hosting gatherings to exchange ideas.

By supplying a strong network of park volunteers, BGSA enables individual groups to raise funds for special projects, attract more people to their parks, and foster a sense of stewardship throughout Brookline.

Register for the BrooklineGreenspace Annual meeting (on Zoom). Write to [info@brooklinegreenspace.org](mailto:info@brooklinegreenspace.org)

## Save the Date for **Spring Fest 2022**

*A Celebration of Trees and Fredrick Law Olmsted's Bicentennial*

**Presented by the Brookline DPW**



**Saturday May 7th, 2022 from 11am-2pm**  
**at Olmsted Park Allerton Overlook (rain date May 14th)**

\*Lawn Games \*Food Trucks \*Live Music  
\*Educational Booths \*Sidewalk Art

**BGSA is a sponsor of Spring Fest 2022**