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INTRODUCTION

“KHRUSHCHEV'S DUE AT IDLEWILD”

At nine o'clock on the morning of 18 September 1959, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and his wife, Nina, set off in a forty-car motorcade from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.¹ The couple—accompanied by their son, two daughters, and a son-in-law—had arrived by train from Washington the previous morning. Their destination this day was Hyde Park, where Khrushchev was to meet former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and pay respects at the grave of her late husband, the thirty-second president. It was the first American visit by a Soviet head of state, and in the middle of the Cold War no less. Sputnik had ended its three-month spin around the Earth the previous year. The Berlin Crisis had only just been resolved. In January, Fidel Castro took the reins of power in Cuba. The U2 affair was just a few months off; the Bay of Pigs and Berlin Wall on the near horizon. It was a fraught and perilous time in the world.

As the motorcade swung across town to the West Side Highway, the combative Soviet hammered away in Russian to his beleaguered Brahmin host—UN ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. The group sped north past Riverside Park on the Henry Hudson Parkway into the Bronx. At the Westchester line, where the road becomes the Saw Mill River Parkway, the city's motorcycle patrolmen were replaced by state troopers. The big tail-finned Cadillacs roared north along Tibbetts Brook Park, around Hawthorne Circle and on to the Taconic State Parkway. The road had been fully cleared of traffic, of course, allowing the mile-long motorcade to clip along at over 70 miles an hour. Time was short; Khrushchev was due to speak at the United Nations that very afternoon.² After laying a wreath at Roosevelt's grave—and grabbing a roll of bread (“one for the road,” he quipped)—Khrushchev was rushed back to the city just in time for his speech.

Afterward the premier was launched on a whirlwind tour of New York City. His motorcade made its way downtown on the East River (FDR) Drive. “The cars passed under three of the great East River bridges,” reported the *New York Times*; “on the land side, several of the city's largest housing projects reared on the site of old slums.” The motorcade made its way around the Battery and onto Broadway, past Bowling Green to Trinity Church and Wall Street; they sped by the Stock Exchange and Fraunces Tavern. With the sky now ambered by the setting sun, Khrushchev was hurried back north again along the East River to 34th Street and the Empire State Building, where he was taken up to the observation deck. The tour continued the next morning, through Central Park and up Seventh Avenue for a drive-by of Harlem and 125th Street. From there the motorcade crossed the Triborough Bridge onto the Grand Central Parkway; it passed the greenswards of Flushing Meadow Park—soon to host the 1964 New York World's Fair—and then turned south for the Van Wyck Expressway and Idlewild Airport, where Khrushchev's big Tupolev-114 was idling on the tarmac.³

Nikita Khrushchev's visit took place at the very apogee of American power and prestige in the world. The US economy was soaring, its share of global GDP close to its all-time peak of 40 percent. It was at that time, too, that the subjects of this book—Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano—reached the very apex of their power and influence. On their hectic tour of Washington and New York, the Khrushchev family passed on, along, over, through, or by nearly two dozen places shaped by these extraordinary spatial designers: the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Reflecting Pool, and National Mall, with its hundreds of American elms, in Washington, DC; Riverside Park and the Henry Hudson Parkway; the Saw Mill River Parkway; Tibbetts Brook Park; the Taconic State Parkway; the largest of those “housing projects reared on the site of old



Nikita Khrushchev's limousine and motorcade on the Taconic State Parkway, September 1959. Photograph by Philip Clark. Collection of the author.

slums”—Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village; Battery Park; Central Park's Great Lawn; Thomas Jefferson Play Center and Mount Morris (Marcus Garvey) Park in Harlem; Randall's Island Park; the Grand Central Parkway and Van Wyck Expressway; Flushing Meadow Park; the UN Headquarters; Idlewild Airport.

Clarke and Rapuano were among the foremost shapers of the postwar metropolitan landscape in America. Landscape architects, site planners, urban designers, and civil engineers—they were vernal weavers of the modern motorway, master craftsmen of public parks and parkways for nearly fifty years. If influence be measured simply by the number of human lives touched by one's work, then that of Clarke and Rapuano is unparalleled in the twentieth century. Their

vast body of public landscapes is matched only by the succession of firms founded by Central Park's celebrated creators—Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.⁴ If anything, the legacy of Clarke and Rapuano is more extensive—and certainly more complex. Though it may be comparing apples and asphalt, nearly twice as many people come to know the Henry Hudson Parkway each year than Central Park, however reluctantly or traffic-jammed.⁵ Effective inventors of the blacktop web that binds us still, Clarke and Rapuano helped make ours a nation of roads and motoring—for better and worse. They perfected the modern grade-separated, limited-access highway, an infrastructure that has made its way to nearly every continent on Earth. There is not a highway in the world today without the DNA of their trailblazing New York parkways of the



Bronx River Parkway, looking north to Fenimore Road overpass (demolished), ca. 1939. Westchester County Historical Society.

1920s—the Bronx River, Saw Mill River, Hutchinson River, and Taconic—scenic arterials that carried the Romantic ideal of the Olmsted park into the motor age. These were Central Park drawn out in long green tendrils across the land, “a kind of romantic bower,” as Marshall Berman put it, “in which modernism and pastoralism could intertwine.”⁶ Clarke even tutored Frederick Law Olmsted’s son on the finer points of parkway design. The latter’s May 1928 inquiry about super-elevated (banked) turns, pavement types, and surface finishing reveals just how novel high-speed motorway design was at the time. As Clarke explained to Olmsted Jr., super-elevation had been the subject of “considerable study on the part of our engineers” but no hard and fast rules had been established. He included in his letter a “table of banking” used on the Hutchinson River Parkway, then under construction, and confessed that resolving many such design details was a matter of trial and error in the field. “Naturally,” he allowed, “after we

have tried out this stretch of parkway we may alter our standard for banking.”⁷

The legacy of Clarke and Rapuano is epic in scale, breadth, and complexity. The men helped create some of the most scenic roads in America—the Henry Hudson Parkway, Taconic State Parkway, Skyline Drive, the Palisades Interstate and Garden State parkways; the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway and Colonial Parkway in Virginia. They designed scores of parks and playgrounds, planned botanical gardens and zoos, and laid out two world’s fairs, an Olympic sports complex in Montreal, the UN Headquarters, Shea Stadium, and John F. Kennedy Airport. They planned civic centers for downtown Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan, for Flint, Milwaukee, and Portland, Oregon. They improved Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park, were consultants on Jones Beach State Park, chose the sites of the Pentagon and CIA

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TABLE OF BANKING

RADIUS	CROSS GRADE	AMOUNT OF BANKING FOR WIDTH						
		20'	24'	27'	30'	36'	40'	54'
400	9.55	1.91	2.29	2.58	2.86	3.44	3.82	5.16
440	8.70	1.74	2.09	2.35	2.61	3.13	3.48	4.70
480	7.98	1.60	1.92	2.15	2.39	2.87	3.19	4.31
520	7.35	1.47	1.76	1.98	2.20	2.65	2.94	3.97
560	6.84	1.37	1.64	1.85	2.05	2.46	2.74	3.69
600	6.38	1.28	1.53	1.72	1.91	2.30	2.55	3.45
640	5.98	1.20	1.44	1.61	1.79	2.15	2.39	3.23
680	5.62	1.12	1.35	1.52	1.69	2.02	2.25	3.03
720	5.31	1.06	1.28	1.43	1.59	1.91	2.12	2.87
760	5.03	1.01	1.21	1.36	1.51	1.81	2.01	2.72
800	4.78	0.96	1.15	1.29	1.43	1.72	1.91	2.58
840	4.55	0.91	1.09	1.23	1.36	1.64	1.82	2.46
880	4.35	0.87	1.04	1.17	1.30	1.57	1.74	2.35
920	4.15	0.83	1.00	1.12	1.24	1.49	1.66	2.24
960	3.98	0.80	0.96	1.07	1.19	1.43	1.59	2.15
1000	3.82	0.76	0.92	1.03	1.15	1.38	1.53	2.06
1040	3.68	0.74	0.88	0.99	1.10	1.32	1.47	1.98
1080	3.53	0.71	0.85	0.95	1.06	1.27	1.41	1.91
1120	3.41	0.68	0.82	0.92	1.02	1.23	1.36	1.84
1200	3.19	0.64	0.77	0.86	0.96	1.15	1.28	1.72
1280	2.99	0.60	0.72	0.81	0.90	1.08	1.20	1.61
1360	2.81	0.56	0.67	0.76	0.84	1.01	1.12	1.52
1400	2.73	0.55	0.66	0.74	0.82	0.98	1.09	1.47
1440	2.65	0.53	0.64	0.72	0.79	0.95	1.06	1.43
1520	2.51	0.50	0.60	0.68	0.75	0.90	1.00	1.36
1600	2.39	0.48	0.57	0.65	0.72	0.86	0.96	1.29

Table of Banking used on the Hutchinson River Parkway, 1928. US Department of the Interior, National Park Service—Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

Headquarters, laid out Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, planned the National Institutes of Health complex in Bethesda, Maryland, expanded the grounds of West Point and the US Naval Academy, and master-planned a dozen parks and parkways for the Niagara Frontier State Park Commission. But Clarke and Rapuano also helped direct some of the first, largest, and most destructive Title I urban renewal projects in the United States—in Nashville, Brooklyn, Lower Manhattan, Cleveland, Bethlehem, and Scranton. The housing estates they site-planned in New York changed the very fabric of the city—Parkchester, Stuyvesant Town, Riverton, and Peter Cooper Village for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company; the Harlem River Houses in Manhattan, first modern housing in the city for African Americans; the Vladeck and Ten Eyck (Williamsburg) houses, first of some sixty public housing projects Clarke and Rapuano planned for the New York City Housing Authority.

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Indeed, nowhere is the legacy of Clarke and Rapuano more deeply inscribed than in the Big Apple. Throw a stone anywhere in this great metropolis and it will likely strike one of their works. If nothing else, it might come to rest on the paint-encrusted slats of the city's ubiquitous concrete-and-wood park benches, designed by Clarke for Playland in 1928; or hit the mottled bark of a London plane—a tree that Rapuano, like Xerxes of yore, fell in love with and helped make a New York City icon (its leaf has been the Parks Department's logo for ninety years). Much of this legacy was due to Clarke and Rapuano's extraordinary, half-century association with Gotham's divisive titan of public works, Robert Moses—theirs, writes Laurie Olin, was “one of the most fruitful collaborations in American design history.”⁷⁸ Clarke and Moses met serendipitously on the banks of the Bronx River in 1917; their bond was immediate and lasting. In Clarke, Moses found his Alphonse—the brilliant landscape engineer who brought such beauty and

“KHRUSHCHEV'S DUE AT IDLEWILD”



Gilmore D. Clarke (I) and Robert Moses at Ocho Rios, Jamaica, February 1957.
Collection of the author.

function to Paris under Prefect of the Seine Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Clarke was among the capable enablers who turned Moses's dreams into reality—"dreams of public works," writes Robert Caro, "on a scale that would dwarf any yet built in the cities of America."⁹ It was Clarke who gave Moses the asphalt yarn to achieve his "cherished ambition . . . to weave together the loose strands and frayed edges of New York's arterial and metropolitan tapestry."¹⁰ Moses regarded Clarke as "one of the foremost designers in the United States," as he put it to Governor Herbert H. Lehman, "if not in the world."¹¹ Decades later, in recommending Clarke to advise an effort to build a park on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, Moses described his old associate as simply "the best man we have in this field."¹²

X

This was not idle flattery. Moses modeled his celebrated Long Island parks and parkways on those that Clarke created earlier in Westchester County—a public works triumph of the Jazz Age that was emulated as far afield as China and Australia. A decade later, in one of his first acts as Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's park commissioner, Moses recruited Clarke to head the design division of the newly consolidated Department of Parks. Clarke in turn brought on Rapuano, his talented young aide-de-camp at the Westchester County Park Commission. Between 1934 and 1939, Clarke and Rapuano—assisted by several former Bronxville colleagues and gifted young men and women recruited from Cornell, Harvard, and the American Academy in Rome—helped Moses carry out a park renewal

INTRODUCTION

campaign unprecedented in American history. Along the way, Rapuano's studies of Renaissance and Baroque spatial design at the American Academy in Rome yielded a fresh aesthetic for the city—an Italianate idiom as well-suited for intensively used urban parks and playgrounds as Olmsted's Anglo-Romantic naturalism was for the city's larger open spaces. The two traditions often came together in splendid union—at Riverside Park, for example, where Olmsted's wooded slopes glide effortlessly down to Rapuano and Clinton Loyd's Romanesque terraces, ramped staircases, and ball courts lined with London planes. By 1939, the founding year of their partnership, Clarke and Rapuano had directed the planning, design, or major alteration of dozens of city parks—Bryant, Battery, City Hall, Carl Schurz, Sara Roosevelt, Marcus Garvey, Randall's Island, and the Conservatory Garden and Central Park Zoo; Pelham Bay and Orchard Beach parks in the Bronx; Jacob Riis Park and Forest Park in Queens; Staten Island's Silver Lake and Highland parks; Leif Ericson, Fort Greene, Dyker Beach, and Marine parks in Brooklyn. They helped lace great "ribbon parks with landscaped edges," as Moses called them, about the city in the 1930s—the Belt, Grand Central, and Henry Hudson parkways. It was Rapuano's brainchild to tuck the Brooklyn–Queens Expressway beneath Brooklyn Heights on a stacked array of cantilevered decks, topped by the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, still among the city's most breathtaking public spaces.

By the time of Khrushchev's American tour, Clarke and Rapuano were a force in several fields—landscape architecture, city planning, and civil engineering. Like their architectural contemporaries Skidmore Owings and Merrill—co-founded by Rapuano's college classmate and lifelong friend, Nat Owings—they were handmaidens to American power. They advised governors and presidents, addressed senators and congressional committees. They were prized consultants to America's largest corporations; to the Defense Department, CIA, and National Institutes of Health; to the Bureau of Public Roads, National Park Service, American Battle Monuments Commission; to more than sixty elite colleges and universities; to urban redevelopment authorities and state agencies from coast to coast—including nearly all those chaired by Moses in the Empire State. And they were power brokers themselves. Clarke was tapped to be the first professor of city planning at Cornell University, where he taught a generation of students and later served as dean of the College of Architecture for over a decade. He played key roles advancing planning education at Harvard and MIT. He was granted an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Yale in 1940, was elected to the exclusive American

Academy of Arts and Letters, and was recognized for "notable public service" by the Municipal Art Society of New York—the first citation it ever awarded to an individual. Rapuano, who married into wealth, served as a trustee of the American Academy in Rome for many years. In 1958, he was named its sixth president (the first, ironically, of Italian ethnicity), a position he held for more than a decade. Clarke and Rapuano were both members of the Municipal Art Commission, the Century Association, the National Academy of Design. Both served on the US Fine Arts Commission, the instrumental body that considers all aesthetic matters related to Washington's monumental core. As commission chair for thirteen years, Clarke wielded near-veto authority over the very form and character of the nation's capital. He stood up even to presidents, rejecting Harry S. Truman's proposal to add a balcony to the White House.

Destiny tagged Clarke and Rapuano for careers in landscape architecture. Both spent their youths surrounded by green growing things, osmotically tutored in trees, plants, and flowers long before their formal educations. Though hardly manor-born, Clarke enjoyed a comfortable childhood in a family that helped found New York City's floral industry. And though Rapuano's family struggled when he was a child, he too benefited from a stable upbringing and often worked alongside his father—a landscape foreman with the city of Syracuse—as a teenager. Theirs are classic American success stories. Both Clarke and Rapuano were the first in their families to attend college—"first-gen" students in today's parlance; and both worked hard to make good on that privilege. They excelled at university, maturing as men and developing traits that made each the complement of the other. Like a good marriage, a successful professional partnership requires—among many other things—a certain complementarity of character, personality, and temperament. In this, Clarke and Rapuano were an ideal match. Clarke was formal and phlegmatic and somewhat wooden, but a gifted leader with a knack for management. Rapuano was a brilliant designer whose intuitive grasp of form and space made him one of the most respected landscape architects of his generation. He loved few things more than the scrum of the drafting room. If Clarke's chosen roost was the club or corner office, Rapuano preferred the studio, sleeves rolled up and pencil in hand, where he would sit at the drafting boards of junior staff to critique their work. Clarke was reserved and soft-spoken, tall and lean with a darkly handsome face; Rapuano was shorter, but—a college football player—well-built with film-star looks and a personality that could light up a room. Theirs calls to mind

one of the great partnerships of an earlier generation, of McKim, Mead, and White—especially the relationship between Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White. McKim was the cool academic classicist; White the creative dynamo who brought freshness and vitality to the relics of antiquity. Rapuano was no mean manager himself and oversaw much of the day-to-day operation of the firm; but he also found running things exhausting and turned down several opportunities for that reason (including chairing Harvard's landscape architecture department). While both men were longtime Centurions—as members of New York's prestigious Century Association are known—Rapuano considered it more a business expedience, while for Clarke club life was essential to his identity. He dined at the Century almost nightly and relished the company of its distinguished members. Rapuano preferred puttering about his Buck's County farm, swapping the Brooks Brothers suit for matching khaki shirt and pants to walk his fields and check on his prize-winning herd of Ayrshire cows. Clarke, consummate Manhattanite with an Upper East Side apartment, hardly owned a toolbox. The men differed and converged in other ways as well. Beyond his love of Rome's great churches, Rapuano was not especially religious. Clarke, on the other hand, was devout all his life, teaching Sunday school and serving as an elder and clerk of session at the Brick Presbyterian Church on Park Avenue, his place of worship for thirty years.¹³ They differed in their aesthetic inclinations as well, especially after World War II. The younger Rapuano was eager to explore abstract-expressionist design—best illustrated in his Ford Motor Company garden at the 1939 New York World's Fair and the Voorhees Memorial Garden for Princeton University. Clarke was a dyed-in-the-wool classicist whose antipathy toward modern art and architecture grew increasingly extreme as he aged. He excoriated Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, hated the several proposed additions to the Boston Public Library, called Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture building at Yale a monstrosity, Le Corbusier's recycled Carpenter Center at Harvard an "intrusive contraption" and the World Trade Center towers by Minoru Yamasaki—whom Clarke supervised as a fledgling architect in the 1930s—"ugly pieces of engineering."¹⁴ His attacks on the avant-garde could be ruthless and searing. He accused Eero Saarinen of plagiarizing his Gateway Arch from a fascist monument that Mussolini planned to erect for the 1942 *Exposizione Universale*—a claim that critic Douglas Haskell called "the filthiest smear that has been attempted by a man highly placed in the architectural profession in our generation"—and claimed that William Pederson and Bradford Tilney filched their 1960 scheme for the Franklin

D. Roosevelt memorial from Mathias Goeritz's *Torres de Satélite* in Mexico City.¹⁵

These railings were often peevish, and occasionally backfired. He wrote letters of protest to Cornell when a jukebox was installed in the student union (lamenting that "such instruments" were not yet "outlawed in a normal, well-ordered society,") and voted repeatedly to deny Century Association membership to abstract expressionists.¹⁶ After complaining that he was forced to see Louise Nevelson's *Night Presence IV* across Fifth Avenue from his table at the Metropolitan Club dining room—an "insult to every citizen forced to gaze upon it"—the Parks Department had the big COR-TEN sculpture moved. Clarke had cynically suggested the piece might do well in the monkey house at the Bronx Zoo, where the animals would endow it with a "handsome patina . . . given time."¹⁷ But Clarke's gloating was doused a few Sundays later, when he discovered that *Night Presence IV* had been placed—quite deliberately—on the Park Avenue Mall across from his Brick Church.¹⁸ Then there was Gordon Bunshaft's circular museum to house Joseph H. Hirshhorn's donated collection of contemporary art in Washington, DC. Clarke considered Hirshhorn, a self-made Latvian immigrant, a swindler and charlatan and his museum's placement on the National Mall a sacrilege—a position, one suspects, more than a little colored by antisemitism. Clarke was complex, however, and his biases inconsistent. This was, after all, a man who helped usher in the motor age, who created infrastructure for that most epoch-making of modern affordances—the automobile. He seconded a proposal by Philip Johnson to admit Louis Kahn, a modernist and a Jew, to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and became lifelong friends with legendary Cornell classicist Harry Caplan, a man he initially called "a Jew, but charming." A true bigot would likely not have chosen to partner with the son of Southern Italian immigrants, however talented; nor remain lifelong friends with Japanese designer Takuma Tono, the first Asian graduate of Cornell's landscape architecture program; nor repeatedly defend in the press Robert Moses, a Jew; nor come to the aid of a gay former classmate, Edward G. Lawson, who was forced to quit the Cornell faculty in 1943 after receiving "obscene" material in the mail.¹⁹ And while Clarke's opposition to the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell led him to say harsh things about its architect, I. M. Pei, he was a close friend of Hu Shih, the great Chinese diplomat and philosopher whom Clarke befriended as an undergraduate (and sponsored for Century membership). And while Clarke was a Republican, he was against the Vietnam War and so loathed Richard Nixon that he penned a sonnet to his crimes.

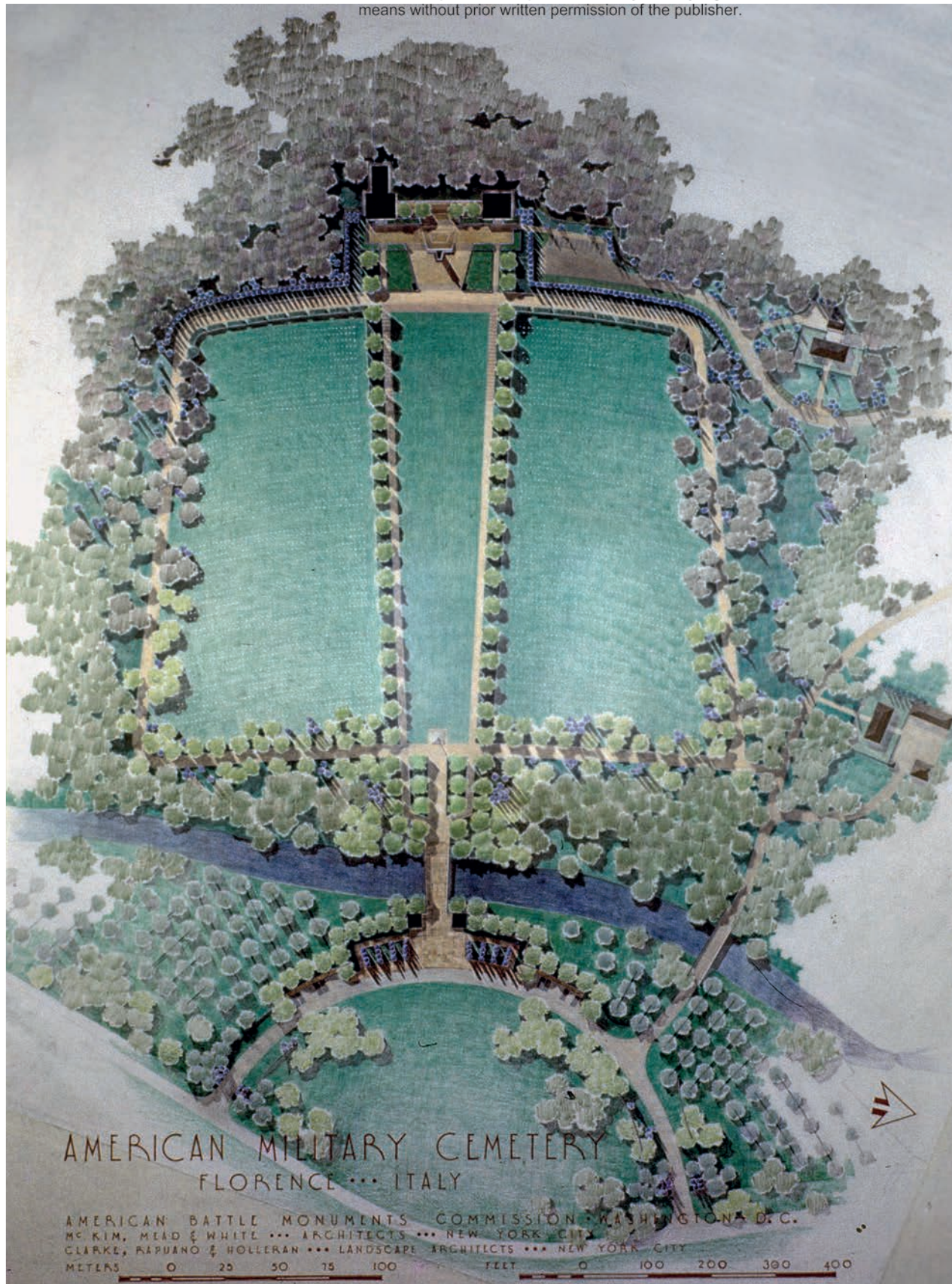
A riddle sits at the heart of the Clarke and Rapuano story: if these men were so important, if they were such monumental figures in the fields of landscape architecture and urban planning for much of the twentieth century, how is it that they are almost wholly forgotten today? Why have these extraordinarily prolific shapers of the civic realm, whose works are known to millions, so obscure—even to scholars and practitioners in the very fields they dominated? Clarke and Rapuano were heirs to the Olmsted legacy; yet while there are a dozen books on the designer of Central Park, very little has been written about these men. It is a colossal gap in the historiography of twentieth-century American urbanism and landscape architecture. Of course, Birnbaum and Karson's compendium, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (2000), includes entries on both Clarke and Rapuano.²⁰ Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe's *Landscape of Man* (1975) highlights their major contributions, as does Norman T. Newton's *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (1971). Robert Caro's monumental biography of Robert Moses, *The Power Broker*, gives Clarke something of his due, even if in passing. The author conducted several interviews with Clarke, then an octogenarian, and refers to him in one passage as "the most famous landscape architect in the United States."²¹ Ballon and Jackson's anthology on New York in the twentieth century—*Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (2007)—is the only text that brings the work of Clarke and Rapuano into sufficient light. Elsewhere we come across Clarke and Rapuano only incidentally, in books about various projects they were part of: John F. Kennedy Airport; the Bronx River Parkway; urban renewal and housing projects like Parkchester and Stuyvesant Town; the UN Headquarters complex; New York's world's fairs; the Pentagon and CIA headquarters; planning for a new Dodger stadium in Brooklyn.²² And while a handful of older works cover well the design theory of the early motor parkways—most notably Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) and Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev's 1963 classic *Man-Made America: Chaos or Control?*—the men who pioneered the first modern highways are hardly named.

There are several explanations for this. First, Clarke and Rapuano specialized in public works projects of great scale and complexity, collaborative efforts that involved dozens of other planning, design, and engineering professionals. Assigning "authorship" for a major infrastructure project—identifying the germinal agents, according precise creative attribution—is a challenge, especially when a colossal figure like Moses is in the frame. It was easy for a harried reporter

or journalist to be drawn into the gravitational field of a top executive—Moses in New York, Ed Bacon in Philadelphia, Le Corbusier on the UN Headquarters—rather than dig down and dissect the contributions of numerous consultants. Even *design* credit for a particular park or housing estate would often be simply attributed to the man at the top of the flowchart. Thus are the New York City parks and parkways Clarke and Rapuano were largely responsible for designing often regarded as Moses's works alone. And while it is not inaccurate to describe Riverside Park or the Henry Hudson Parkway as "Moses projects," doing so encourages a Great Man mindset that strips history of its nuance, richness, and diversity. Moses understood well that a top-flight design and engineering corps was essential to getting things done. "[W]ithout the experts and engineers we would not get anywhere," he said in a 1936 speech; "They do most of the work and they get very little of the credit."²³ Of course, it was Moses himself—a man of enormous ego—who often failed in this. As Clarke's widow Dolores related to me, Clarke would be quietly enraged at dinner parties or other functions as Moses began boasting of having designed this park or that parkway.

Clarke and Rapuano's contributions have also been obscured by the fact that their own expertise spanned several professional fields. The catholic nature of the Clarke and Rapuano practice makes categorizing its prodigious output a challenge. On any given project the firm could be responsible for the overall master plan, site grading, utility and planting plans, siting and orientation of buildings, engineering roads and bridges, and managing construction and the project as a whole. Clarke and Rapuano considered themselves landscape architects first and foremost, but theirs was an interdisciplinary practice from the start and became more so with time—tackling in-house multiple facets of planning, design, engineering, construction, and project management. The fifty-four men and women on payroll in 1954 included nineteen draftsmen, ten civil engineers, six architects, five site planners, and a clerical pool of nine. In a 1957 letter to Philip N. Youtz at the University of Michigan, Clarke explained the "nature of our professional practice":

We found that the engineering part of the work that we undertake is so closely interwoven with landscape and planning . . . that the two must be developed together. For example, we have been engaged in the design of parkways and expressways for many years and we find that the aesthetic requirements of these large projects are so closely related to the engineering requirements that . . . both phases of these projects are best undertaken in a single office.



Clarke, Rapuano & Holleran and McKim, Mead & White for the American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Military Cemetery—Florence, Italy*, 1948. Collection of Domenico Annese.

Projects were generally initiated within the firm's "design group," he continued, then "sent to the engineer for the development of the plans into contract documents, including estimates of cost and specifications. In this . . . the designers keep in close touch with the engineers so as to be assured that nothing is sacrificed in design unless it is essential for good and sufficient reasons." That said, the firm's roots were clear and firmly planted; "we like to have people," Clarke stressed, "think of us first as landscape architects."²⁴

But as the world grew increasingly specialized in the postwar era, the comprehensive, jack-of-all-trades nature of the Clarke and Rapuano practice—the key to its enormous success (the firm billed close to \$900,000 in 1953, about \$10 million today)—reduced its presence in any one area. This had the ironic effect of dissociating Clarke and Rapuano from their field of first allegiance, especially as the scope of landscape architecture itself contracted in midcentury—as emerging professions like urban design, highway engineering, and city and regional planning absorbed areas of practice once within its ambit. To engineers, Clarke and Rapuano were "landscapers"; to architects, they were planners; to landscape architects, they were engineers. It was as if the ambition of an entire profession had shrunk to the scale of a backyard. Not until the environmental revolution led by Ian McHarg would its scope of vision open in scale and ambition again. This attenuation of the profession is evident in books on landscape architecture published in the postwar era. American work featured in Peter Shepheard's 1953 global survey, *Modern Gardens*, is limited to a handful of West Coast gardens and a small walled garden in Newport by Tunnard. Needless to say, Clarke and Rapuano make no appearance. Nor are they mentioned in Elizabeth B. Kassler's more comprehensive *Modern Gardens and the Landscape* (1964), though the Taconic State Parkway—its "concrete ribbons . . . less an interruption of the landscape than an affirmation of its topography"—is well praised in passing. In the expansive scope of their practice, Clarke and Rapuano were far ahead of their time, setting precedent for land-planning megafirms like SWA Group, Sasaki, Gensler, and the late EDAW—a corporate behemoth ("the Starbucks of landscape architecture") that was eaten in turn by an even bigger fish, AECOM.²⁵

A related parallel factor in the "disappearing" of Clarke and Rapuano was the extraordinary rise of modernism in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Clarke and Rapuano were educated in the hoary Beaux-Arts tradition; and Clarke, especially, remained committed to the classical

ideal all his life. They were, in a sense, last of a breed; for by the end of World War II most leading schools of architecture and city planning in the United States had turned to modernism and away from the design pedagogy of the past. The so-called "Country Place" generation was especially out of fashion, their work dismissed as ossified and elitist. But the public works baby was tossed out with the classical bathwater. Clarke and Rapuano indeed looked to the past for inspiration—the Anglo-Olmstedian picturesque tradition in Clarke's case, evident in his early parkways; the Italian Renaissance in Rapuano's. But they were only superficially conservative, only tangentially part of the *ancien régime*. Nonetheless, cultural winds were shifting, and not in Clarke and Rapuano's direction; for it hardly helped that these men were politically conservative and voted Republican all their lives. Hard as it is to imagine now, the creative worlds Clarke and Rapuano moved in—academia and the Ivy League, the design and planning professions, learned and philanthropic societies, the New York art establishment—were not the liberal-progressive bastions they are today. Columbia University was led by a former Army general and future Republican president, after all. But the tectonic shifts of the 1960s changed everything, toppling the status quo in nearly every corner of society. By decade's end Clarke and Rapuano were men out of favor and out of time, estranged from a world they shaped. Neither would likely feel very welcome today at Cornell or the American Academy in Rome—institutions they once led.

These shifting cultural winds help explain a yawning lacuna in the scholarship on twentieth-century American landscape architecture into which Clarke and Rapuano have fallen. Until recently, most serious books on the subject have focused on one of two areas: the Country Place era of the century's first decades, and the modernism born in opposition to that legacy, led initially by a trio of Harvard landscape architecture students in the 1930s—Garrett Eckbo, James Rose, and Dan Kiley. The young men rejected the program's old curricular binary of Olmsted pastoralism and Beaux-Arts axiality, both of which seemed especially stale against the modernist thrust of the newly formed Graduate School of Design. "How could landscape architecture relate to the exciting developments in modern art?" they wondered; "What was the relationship of their design efforts to society? And what was the appropriate aesthetic for the pressing needs of the day?"²⁶ They were not alone. Thomas D. Church and Fletcher Steele drew upon their exposure to European modernism and cubism to generate new garden forms. Christopher Tunnard was inspired by the Constructivist Movement. "We are faced," he wrote in a 1938 treatise, "with the task of creating a new landscape



Brooklyn-Queens Expressway at Brooklyn Heights, ca. 1968. Clarke & Rapuano Landscape Architecture Collection, New-York Historical Society.

for the twentieth century.”²⁷ Landscape modernism appealed to that yearning to reinvent the world that every generation undergoes (or should), imbued with modernism’s implicit promise to create a more just and equitable future out of the ashes of history—a seductive thing indeed for a world that had endured two wars, a global depression, and the Holocaust. “The production of a modernist sensibility in American landscape architecture,” writes Marc Treib, “depended to a great degree on the belief that like the other arts, it should develop in accord with the social and technological conditions of contemporary life.”²⁸

But all this played out rather differently on the ground; for despite the freshness and innovation the early landscape modernists brought to the field, most of its practitioners (Kiley excepted) spent their careers creating private sanctuaries for a privileged elite. Their gardens may have drawn upon the progressive aesthetics of cubism and abstract expressionism, but the result was just as exclusive, just as shorn of social mission as the formal gardens of their Gilded Age forebears. The irony here is that while Clarke and Rapuano resisted modernism per se, their work was thoroughly modern in a deeper, more vital sense. These were men who embraced the paramount technological innovation of their generation, who created the first major landscapes of the motor age. This, it seems, was a more authentically progressive engagement of the zeitgeist than crafting cubist gardens for California sybarites. The essential modernity of such infrastructure was not lost on Giedion. As he put it in *Space, Time and Architecture*, “The American parkways as they have developed since the nineteen twenties—coincident, by the way, with the flowering of contemporary architecture in Europe—reveal in their whole treatment the fact that they are already one of the elements of the contemporary town, one of those born out of the vision of our period.”²⁹ Moreover, Clarke and Rapuano’s lifelong dedication to civic work helped restore the founding values of the American landscape architectural profession—that commitment to progressive social reform, to making places for the people, that drove the Olmsted era but was greatly diminished in the Gilded Age.

Between these well-studied poles—there are over a dozen published works on the Country Place era and landscape architectural modernism—was the watershed of the Great Depression.³⁰ The years between about 1925 and World War II witnessed a heroic and extraordinary flowering of public-spirited placemaking. Sustained by the New Deal—the “silver lining of the Great Depression,” as Moses called it—this largely forgotten generation of designers forged a legacy of public works that touched the lives of millions

and continues to do so today. And yet it remains almost virgin scholarly terrain; the number of books on the subject can literally be counted on one hand.³¹

In the planning academy, the vast “slum clearance” and urban expressway work that Clarke and Rapuano were so deeply involved with in the postwar era hardly endeared them to a generation of equity-minded advocacy planners. After World War II, American cities—especially older industrial cities in the Northeast and Midwest—struggled to replace their horrendously substandard housing stock. Title I of the 1949 Housing Act made it economically feasible to do so, enabling cities to condemn “blighted” properties for redevelopment, with Washington, DC, paying up to two-thirds of costs. In city after city, well-intentioned but fatally flawed redevelopment schemes were drafted to upgrade America’s aging urban fabric—to eliminate, especially, those slums adjacent to downtown that one official called the “dirty collar” around the central business district.³² The “federal bulldozer” unleashed a juggernaut of destruction that gutted neighborhoods and displaced tens of thousands of families—so many of whom were African American that urban renewal became known as “Negro removal.” The grimmest sort of modernist superblock architecture replaced what was razed, if anything was built at all (many cities—Buffalo, Syracuse, Newark, Detroit, Durham—were left with acres of empty lots after renewal plans fell through). Then came the backlash, spurred by Jane Jacobs’s 1961 shot across the bow, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; in city after city, protests led to the cancellation of dozens of urban renewal and expressway projects. The American planning profession itself underwent a transformation, now distancing itself from the fields from which it hatched—architecture, landscape architecture, and physical planning—and turning instead to the social sciences. This brought about an almost Oedipal rejection of the muscular “Make No Little Plans” sort of planning that defined the profession since the days of Daniel Burnham. Planners had found plentiful and lucrative work with urban redevelopment authorities; Clarke and Rapuano were no exception. They were pioneers who not only planned the first and largest Title I slum clearance projects in the United States, but snaked miles of asphalt through crowded, hardscrabble neighborhoods that were nonetheless vital communities with traditions and cultures all their own.

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Marga Rogers and Michael Reid Rapuano in October 2009 unpacking their father's drawings, stored for decades in a Newtown, Pennsylvania, attic. Photograph by the author.

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Upper West Side of Manhattan and Central Park. From Matthew Dripps, *Plan of New York City*, 1867. New York Public Library.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN SONS

Gilmore David Clarke was a child of the city he was destined to shape. He was born on 12 July 1892 to a thriving middle-class family on Manhattan's Upper West Side. He was named after the popular bandleader Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore, a friend of his grandfather's who gained fame for turning an old Irish folksong into a celebrated tune of the Civil War era—"When Johnny Comes Marching Home."¹ Clarke's mother, Johanna F. Knubel, daughter of an immigrant from Bremerhaven, Germany, had been raised at the corner of 59th Street and Seventh Avenue, where her father ran a hotel. Construction of Central Park across the street was ongoing throughout her youth, accounts of which she often related to her son.² On his father's side, Clarke descended from a long line of Irish plantmen. His grandfather, David Clarke, was born in 1825 in Coleraine, Northern Ireland, apprenticing as a gardener in his teens before emigrating to New York in the 1840s. Within a decade he had established himself as a nurseryman and florist in rural Manhattan, one of a number of growers in a section of upper Broadway then known as Bloomingdale (from the Dutch *bloemendaal* or "Vale of Flowers"). An April 1853 classified in the *Daily Herald* claimed stock of 1,000 heliotropes, 3,000 verbenas, and "5,000 roses of the finest sort, set for bloom" at Clarke's greenhouse on Broadway at 78th Street.³

Clarke was an able tradesman, and his business grew apace with the burgeoning city and its surging demand for fresh flowers. This was an era when sending bouquets—memorably evoked in Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*—was a popular custom in New York society. The floral trade was highly localized at the time; sluggish transportation and the lack of refrigeration made it difficult to move cut flowers very far. Raising one's own stock was land, labor, and capital intensive, but those who did it well

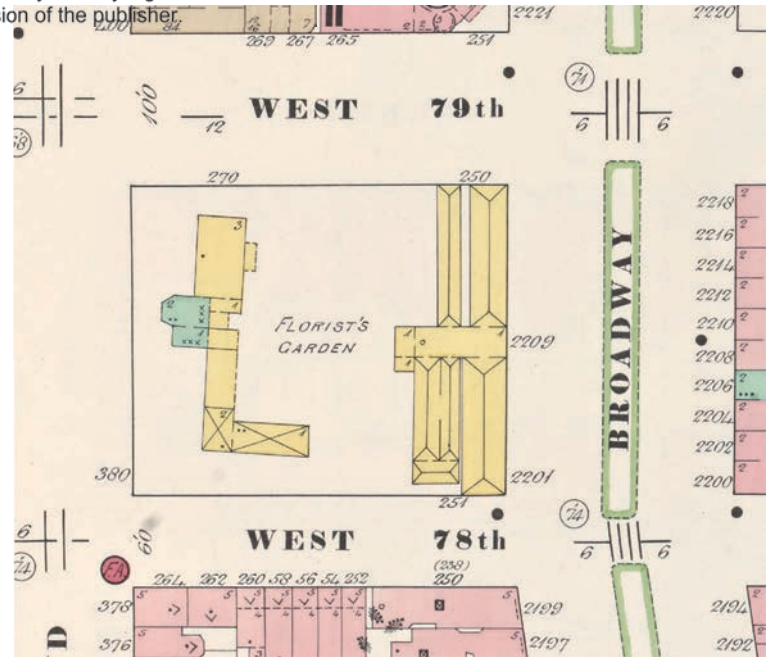
gained a huge competitive edge. Clarke, among the "very few of the bouquet-dealers . . . [who] cultivate their own flowers," was among the best.⁴ He had opened a combined flower and dry goods shop on Broadway at Bleecker Street that stocked "Rich Embroideries, Laces, Fringes, Trimmings" along with "Goods of our own manufacture" including "a splendid assortment of Dress Caps, Head Dresses, Coiffures, Barbes, Capes, Berthas, Sleeves, &c."⁵ Orchids that Clarke imported from the West Indies were displayed in a "Tropical Grotto" within the shop.⁶ The floral trade could be lucrative; a simple bunch "of variegated flowers" sold for two dollars in the 1860s, while a bouquet "entirely round, about seven inches in diameter, composed of fragrant tea rosebuds and tuberose, with white fuchsias drooping from all parts of the floral ball" sold for five dollars in February. Ornate arrangements for weddings or funerals—"made on stands of painted and gilded framework, upholding baskets from various branches"—could run as high as \$400 (at least \$13,000 today). "Canopies and arches of flowers for bridal ceremonies are extravagances admired by fashionables," extolled the *Herald Tribune*. This was more than just flower arrangement; it was landscape architecture in miniature.

A wealthy bride might have her ball-room cornice dressed with roses, and have passion vines, and ivy, and nasturtiums twine about her chandeliers; her staircase and hall may be appropriately lined with four-foot ferns, oleanders, and camelia trees, with vines running down the handrail, while silver baskets of rare blossoms may swing on every side in the dressing-rooms, and the windows be curtained with shrouds of ivy or trellises.⁷

Around 1880, Clarke erected a larger conservatory and greenhouse complex across Broadway from 78th to 79th Streets, on a full city block he leased from William Waldorf Astor. He moved his family into the old manor house on



Burnham's Hotel, ca. 1845, constructed in 1759 as the Charles Apthorp house. Smithsonian American Art Museum.



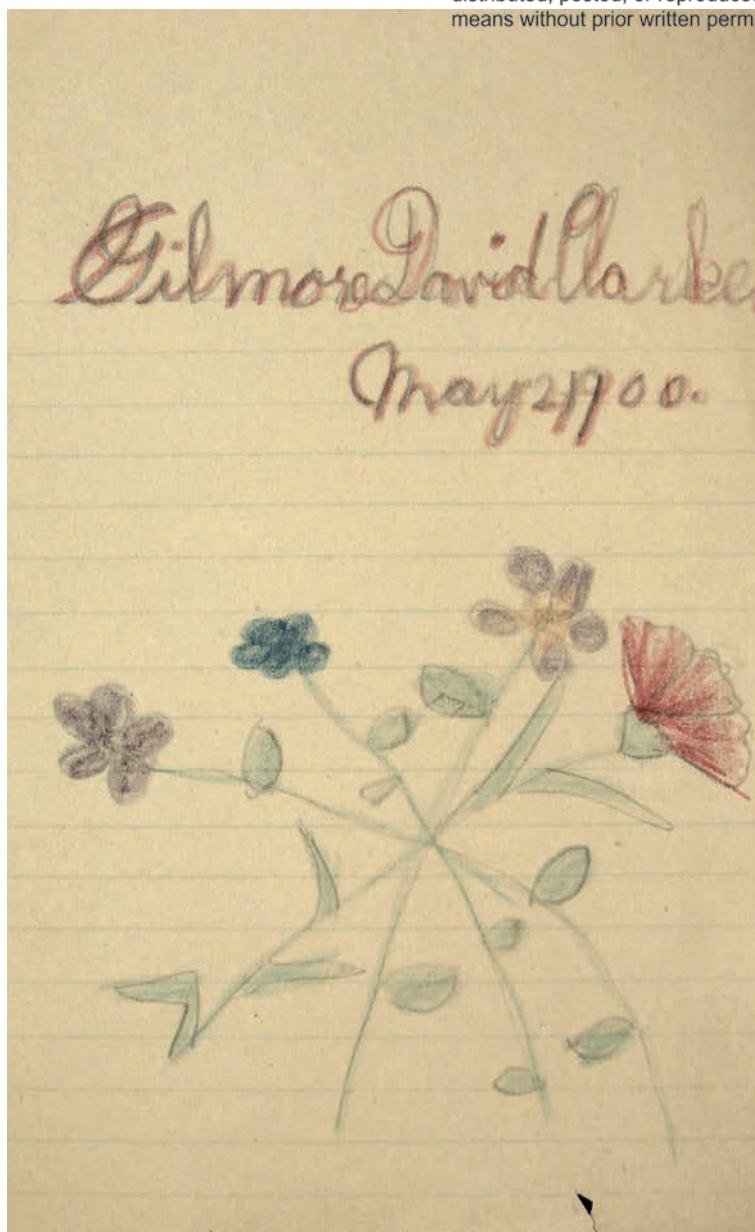
The David Clarke greenhouse complex and Apthorp house (in green), ca. 1900. The Apthorp apartment building, completed in 1908, occupies the entire block today. From Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of the City of New York, vol. 7 (1902). New York Public Library.

the property, until then a popular roadhouse known as Burnham's Hotel. Built by Charles Apthorp in 1759 using bricks imported from Holland, it was later the country home of Jan Cornelius van den Heuvel, a planter and former governor of Demerara, an outpost of the Dutch West India Company (part of Guyana today). Washington was said to have occupied the home for a single night during the Revolutionary War; in the attic the Clarks discovered a moldering British army coat.⁸ Commissioned to supply many of the city's churches with Lenten palm and Easter bouquets, Clarke was honored by the New-York Horticultural Society as one of "the oldest and best known florists in the city."⁹ But the city was moving uptown fast, and in 1905 Astor revealed plans to develop the property into the largest and most palatial residential complex in the city—a "Skyscraper Apartment House" he named the Apthorp. By now David Clarke and Sons was in the hands of the young boy's father (also named Gilmore) and his uncle Marshall. The brothers hired architect Louis Falk to design a new greenhouse complex on a 10-acre site in the Bronx, keeping only a retail shop in town on Broadway at 75th Street.

Except for summers at the family cabin on Raquette Lake, Clarke's boyhood until now was an exclusively urban one. He was born in a brownstone on West 83rd and West End Avenue, raised at the family's subsequent home at 275 West 84th Street—neither of which have survived.¹⁰ Clarke

attended then-new Grammar School No. 9 at West End Avenue and 82nd Street, today's Mickey Mantle School (PSM 811) and the city's oldest extant public-school building. An only son, his childhood was a sheltered and lonely one—"closely guarded," he recalled, "by an over-diligent mother" (and with good reason: Johanna had already lost two infant daughters). The move to the Bronx annealed this city boyhood with adolescent years in one of the few remaining rural sections of New York City. The Clarke property, at Kingsbridge Road and University Avenue—where the apartment building at 2685 University Avenue now stands—was surrounded by farms and open fields. Construction on the neighborhood's major landmark—the cavernous Kingsbridge Armory—would not begin until 1910, and the housing boom that eventually urbanized the area, set off by the extension of the subway, was still more than a decade off. The greenhouses were razed when University Avenue was extended north across Kingsbridge Road and through the middle of the Clarke property. Clarke's father kept his son busy with a variety of chores—managing stock, watering plants, glazing and painting the greenhouse window sashes. The boy also had a horse and garden of his own and tended a flock of chickens and geese. This exposure to nature and the rustic life rounded out Clarke's urban youth, fusing *rus* and *urbe* to the betterment of both.

In the Bronx, Clarke attended Public School 33 and Morris High School before disciplinary problems forced his father



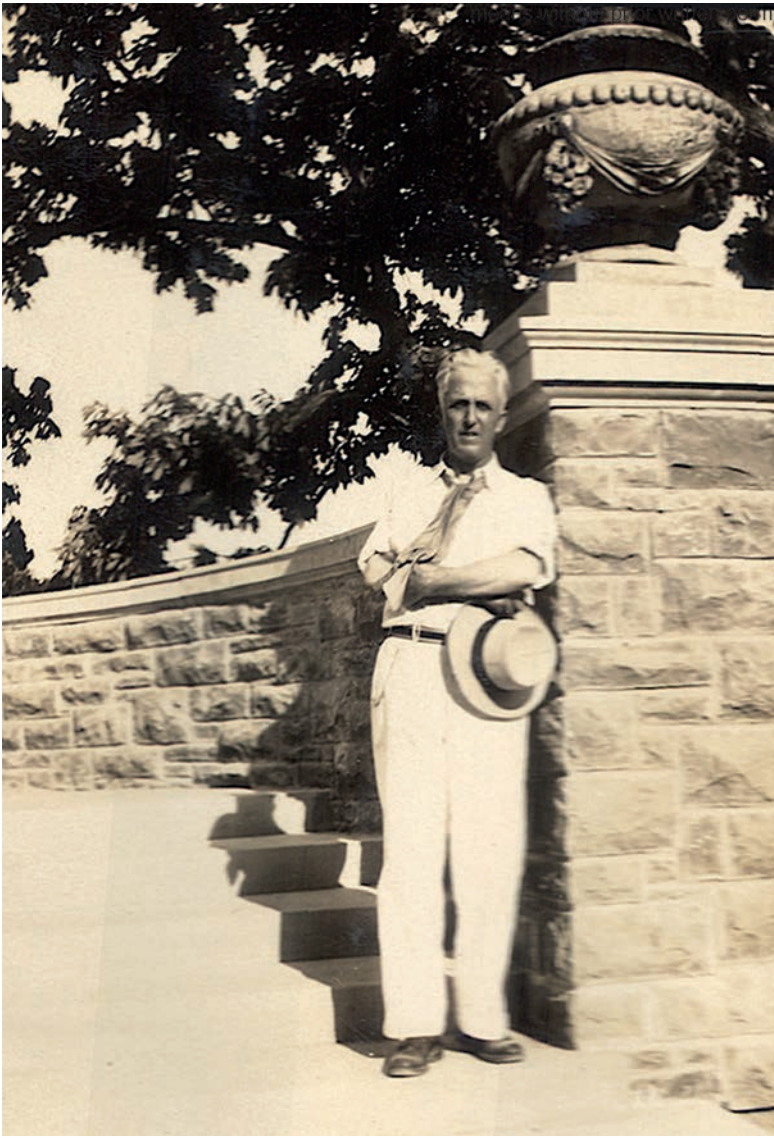
Drawing of flowers by seven-year-old Gilmore Clarke, May 1900. Gilmore D. Clarke Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.



Public School #9 (Mickey Mantle School), West End Avenue and 82nd Street. Photograph by Board of Education, New York City, 1920. New York Public Library.

to enroll him at the private Dwight School in Manhattan. The move had the desired effect; Clarke buckled down and ultimately graduated second in his class in 1909. The Dwight School was well known then as a feeder for Yale; many of its graduates—including Robert Moses, who preceded Clarke by four years—went on to study in New Haven. Clarke, too, considered applying to Yale, but was weak in Latin and Greek and knew his chances of being admitted were remote. It was, rather, a serendipitous encounter that charted the course of Clarke's collegiate

years—and his career. On a lunch-hour stroll one day, Clarke noticed that the doors of the old Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue at 43rd Street were open. Drawn inside, he wandered the aisles in awe of the great synagogue's Moorish Revival decor. As he was about to leave, an elderly gentleman in the last pew spoke up: "Young man, you're interested in architecture I notice," he said. "Yes, sir, I am," Clarke said. They talked for a few minutes, and Clarke then walked the gentleman to his destination—the Century Association just around the corner. Along the way the elder



Bryant Fleming at Cheekwood, ca. 1932. Courtesy Cheekwood Estate and Gardens, Nashville, Tennessee.

spoke glowingly of Cornell University and urged Clarke to consider studying there. As they parted, he extended his hand to introduced himself—he was Andrew Dickson White, the erudite confidant of Ezra Cornell and co-founder of the university that bears his name.

This meant little to Clarke at the time. But upon graduating from high school a year later, Clarke traveled upstate to visit several colleges—including Syracuse University and Hamilton College, where one of his best friends was studying. He didn't care for the Syracuse campus, and learned he would not meet Hamilton's stiff Latin requirement. Recalling his brief encounter with A. D. White, Clarke decided to visit Cornell. Ascending East Hill above

Ithaca, he found himself so smitten by Cornell's elm-embowered campus—"far above Cayuga's waters," as its alma mater hails—that he decided right then and there to enroll. "Sir, I'd like to enter Cornell University," he announced to the registrar, a campus legend named "Davy" Hoy—the subject of the Cornell fight song still used today. Hoy looked the young man once over and asked, "Well, what college?"¹¹ Clarke had no idea; but perusing the catalog that evening, he learned that a New York State resident could attend the College of Agriculture free of tuition—something he knew would appeal to his father. Hoy enrolled him the next day.

Clarke's first year was filled with university-wide required courses; he had not yet selected a field of study. It was only by chance, as a sophomore in 1910, that he stumbled upon what became his life's calling. The matchmaker was a classmate named Edward G. Lawson, whom Clarke met while waiting in line to register for classes that fall. Lawson—who would go on to win the first fellowship in landscape architecture at the American Academy in Rome and eventually return to Cornell as a professor—must have been passionate about his field of study even as a student in 1910; for by the time Clarke reached the head of the queue Lawson had convinced him to switch from his default choice of ornamental horticulture to landscape architecture—a field Clarke had never even heard of before. Landscape architecture at Cornell was still in its infancy then. It had begun in 1903 as an experimental course on "Outdoor Art" by Bryant Fleming and his elderly mentor, the pioneering naturalist and educator Liberty Hyde Bailey. The program, lodged at first in a ramshackle outbuilding known as the Lazy Club, was little more than a cluster of courses meant to "train students for the profession of landscape gardening or landscape architecture in the broadest sense." Among the required "corollary subjects" were soil science, horticulture, surveying, "tree-growing . . . topography and charting, road making, architectural styles" and "applications of sanitary engineering." In 1906 the program was granted status as the Department of Rural Art, with Fleming as chair. Its mission was firmly deterministic: "During the past few years," Fleming noted in his first annual report, "it has come to be recognized that better surroundings, either civic or domestic, urban or suburban, help make for a better, healthier and happy people."¹²

By the time Clarke and Lawson were on campus, the department had a full-time instructor in plant materials and had just hired its first professor of design, Eugene D. Montillon. Two more full-time faculty—Ralph W. Curtis

and E. Gorton Davis—would come on board while Clarke was still a student.¹³ Only twelve students had graduated by then, the first of whom—A. F. Brinkerhoff and Albert D. Taylor—would become leaders of the profession's principal body, the American Society of Landscape Architects. As part of the College of Agriculture, Rural Art was given office space in Roberts Hall. But the College of Architecture was just as keen to have the new program and offered Fleming the use of studio and lecture space in White Hall on the Arts Quadrangle. In 1912 the landscape studios were moved back to Roberts Hall and the College of Agriculture, but not before Clarke had the benefit of two critical years surrounded by architects and artists—the creative professionals he would work with throughout his career. The landscape studio was tucked in a corner of a drafting room under the rafters of White Hall's mansard roof—the same room Michael Rapuano would study in a decade later.¹⁴ As described in the *University Register*, the four-year Rural Art program was intended to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of “rural and civic improvement problems.” The first-year curriculum included English, biology, drawing, and two courses each in botany and chemistry. Second-year subjects ranged from a suite of drawing classes—Perspective, Water Color, and Shades and Shadows—to Physiology of Domestic Animals and a three-course sequence in physics. The third and fourth years were dominated by the Rural Art core, which included Theory and Aesthetics of Rural Art and Landscape Design, and a year-long Landscape Design studio intended to “familiarize the student with the various types of plans . . . applied to different problems.” The class included a field trip to the Hudson River valley or Philadelphia and Washington, DC. Among the other courses in the Rural Art core were History of Landscape Design (“a study of the chronological development of the art of landscape gardening”), Landscape Engineering and Details of Construction, Plant Materials of Landscape Gardening, and Advanced Problems and Research in Landscape Design.¹⁵

Rural Art was an intensive course of study, but it did not keep Clarke from exploring other parts of Cornell. He took classes with renowned paleontologist Gilbert D. Harris, pioneering statistician and demographer Walter Wilcox, and the distinguished entomologists John Henry Comstock and James Needham. Clarke so excelled in a human physiology course that his teacher, Sutherland Simpson, suggested he consider a career in medicine. He began writing sonnets, an avocation he maintained all his life (he wrote hundreds, two of which were later set to music by Samuel Adler and performed by Metropolitan Opera tenor Douglas

Ahlstedt).¹⁶ He befriended students across campus with interests far from his, including the great Chinese literary scholar, diplomat, and political philosopher Hu Shih, who Clarke would remain close to all his life.¹⁷ And there was always the campus itself, among the most beautiful in America—especially in an era before Dutch elm disease stripped it of its hundreds of mature American elms. “One cannot help wondering,” wrote Gertrude S. Martin of Cornell in 1907, “whether some Wordsworthian notion of the educative power of beautiful natural surroundings influenced the mind of the founder in selecting this site for his great university.”

One lifts tired eyes from book or drafting board and they rest almost of necessity upon the eternal quiet of the distant hills, now lying in full sunlight, every detail distinct, or again dimly seen through the veiling mists of an approaching storm; now mottled with the shadows of flying clouds; now bathed in the unspeakable glory of the setting sun, a short lived splendor of crimson and gold; now sinking into the purple indistinctness of approaching night.¹⁸

Of Clarke's professors in the Department of Rural Art, Bryant Fleming and George Burnap had the most influence. Fleming had studied horticulture with Liberty Hyde Bailey on the advice of Frederick Law Olmsted. He graduated in 1901 and worked briefly with Warren H. Manning in Boston before returning to Ithaca to teach. A year later, Fleming formed a partnership with architect Frederic dePeyster Townsend of Buffalo, planner of the 1901 Pan American Exposition. Working from an office in Louis Sullivan's Prudential Building, Townsend and Fleming took on a variety of public and private work in western New York and Ohio. They designed parks and cemeteries, helped plan the College of Agriculture campus at Cornell, and advised the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society on the improvement of Finger Lakes gorges—including Watkins Glen and Cascadilla Glen at Cornell. But Townsend and Fleming were best known for the resplendent “Country Place” estates they designed for clients throughout the Northeast and upper Midwest. Their commissions included the V. Everit Macy estate in Scarborough, New York, and the grounds of the Avery Coonley residence in Riverside, Illinois, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Fleming later set up a solo practice in Wyoming, New York, where many Cornell students would work as interns.¹⁹

Fleming was a gifted educator whom Clarke admired, despite an aversion to the private estate work that was the focus of his practice. Burnap, on the other hand, had a



Front cover of George Burnap, *Parks: Their Design, Equipment and Use* (1916).

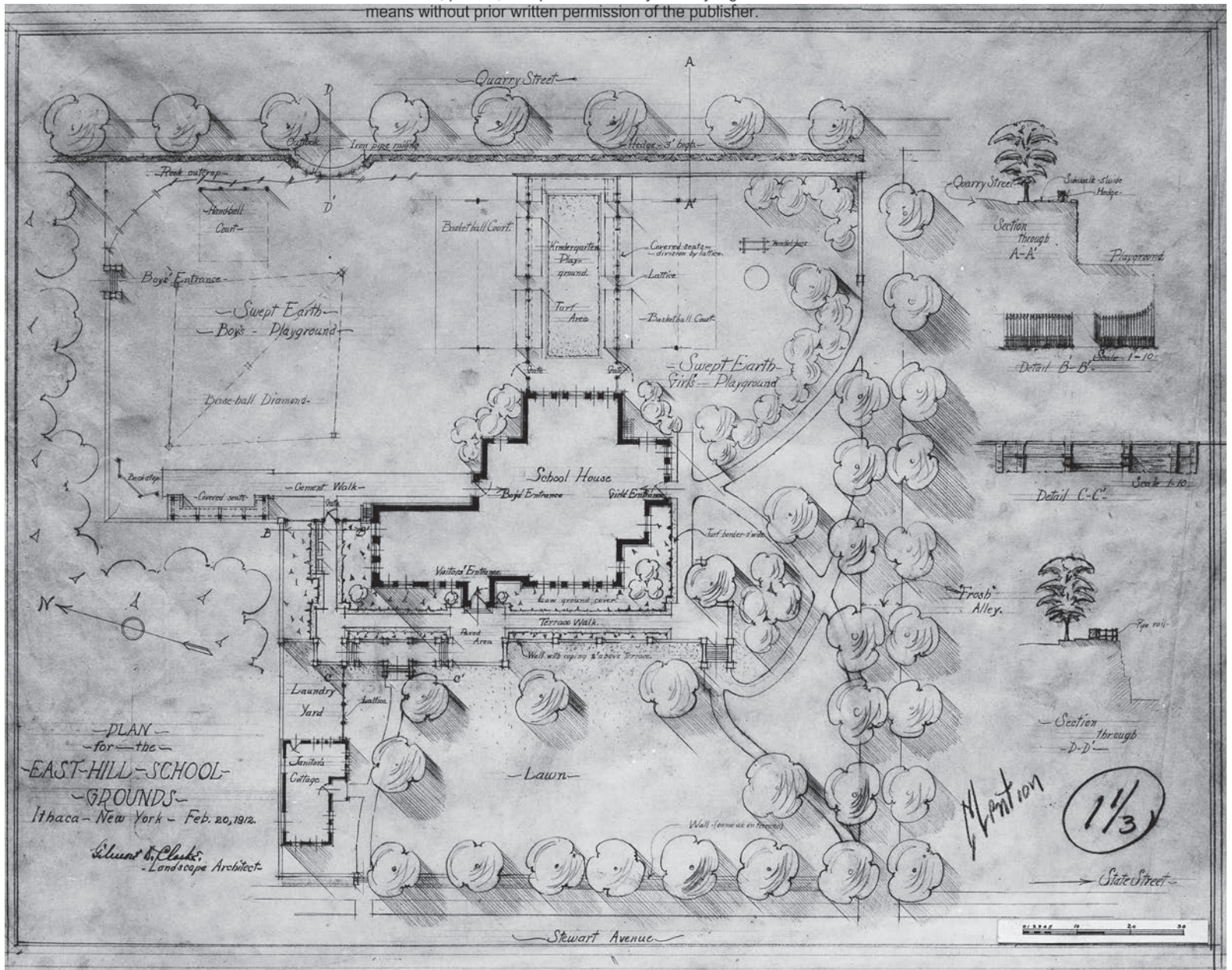


Burnap in Washington, DC, 1914. Photograph by Harris & Ewing. Library of Congress.

prevailing interest in civic design. Trained as an architect at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he graduated in 1906 with an option in “landscape gardening” from the school’s short-lived landscape program.²⁰ He spent the next two years studying parks and gardens in Europe on an Austin traveling fellowship, which afforded a brief residency at the American Academy in Rome. Though the Rome Prize fellowship in landscape architecture would not be established until 1915, Burnap was the very first student to undertake landscape studies at the academy, then located at the Villa Mirafiore. Upon returning to the United States in 1908, he accepted an instructorship in the Department of Rural Art, where he also took graduate courses with Bryant Fleming. His teaching load at Cornell was heavy, with courses on site engineering, landscape design theory, and plant materials. Burnap was also

responsible for a six-lecture extension-style course on rural improvement, meant to “enable the farm boy to get a point of view in rural art in general, together with specific hints for working out some of his home problems.”²¹

Clarke’s contact with Burnap at Cornell was brief but formative. Burnap’s expertise lay in precisely that area of practice—the planning and design of parks and public works—that Clarke was most keen on. As Clarke himself would later argue, Burnap believed that park development “should be regarded not as incidental to, but commensurate with, city planning.”²² In early 1911, Burnap left Cornell to accept a plum appointment in Washington, DC, as landscape architect for the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (he was also being recruited to succeed Samuel Parsons Jr. as New York City’s chief landscape architect).²³



Gilmore D. Clarke, *Plan for the East Hill School Grounds*, February 1912. College of Architecture, Art, and Planning Student Projects (15-5-1416), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

Though only twenty-seven years old, Burnap found himself in charge of all public spaces in the District of Columbia, where he sought to implement “landscape gardening on a scale commensurate with the growth and importance of the capital of the United States.”²⁴ Though he held the position only five years, Burnap left a lasting mark on the city. One of his first and most visible jobs was planting the 3,020 flowering cherry trees sent by Japan to the United States as a token of friendship in the spring of 1912. Though some of the trees were set out at the White House, most

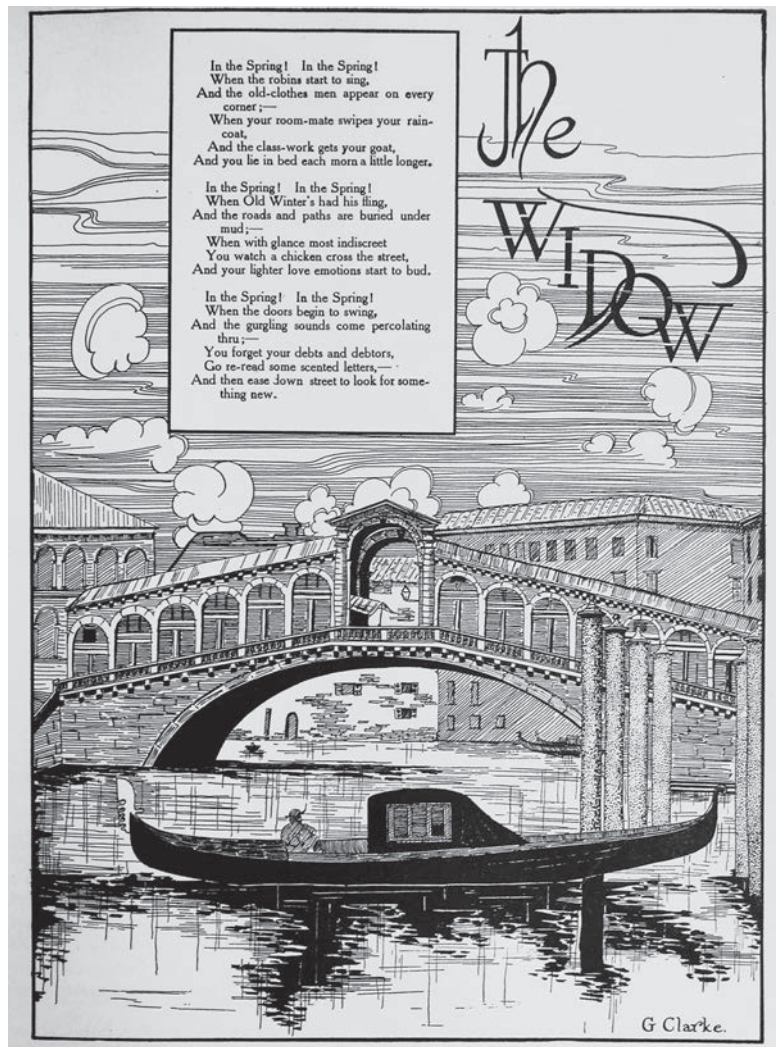
were planted along the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park—site of the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival. Burnap also prepared plans for Meridian Hill Park in Washington’s Columbia Heights neighborhood, aided by his former Cornell student (and eventual successor in Washington, DC), Horace W. Peaslee. Though plans for this Renaissance revival masterpiece were further refined by Ferruccio Vitale, it remains largely Burnap’s design. Burnap’s stock rose further with the 1916 release of his first book, *Parks: Their Design, Equipment and Use*. He



Artwork by Gilmore D. Clarke for the February 1913 number of *The Widow*. Cornell University Library.

dedicated the book to the American Academy in Rome, a sanctuary of “intimate companionship,” he wrote, where students of the placemaking arts could learn together “before being thrust into the chaos and violence of the modern world.” The book led to so much consulting work that Burnap soon gave up his federal job.²⁵ *Parks* was one of the few American books on public works landscape design at the time, an era dominated by private estate commissions. As such it was invaluable in cultivating Clarke’s interest in what had become a largely neglected area of professional practice.

By his own admission, Clarke was not a particularly good student, and his drafting skills were middling at best.

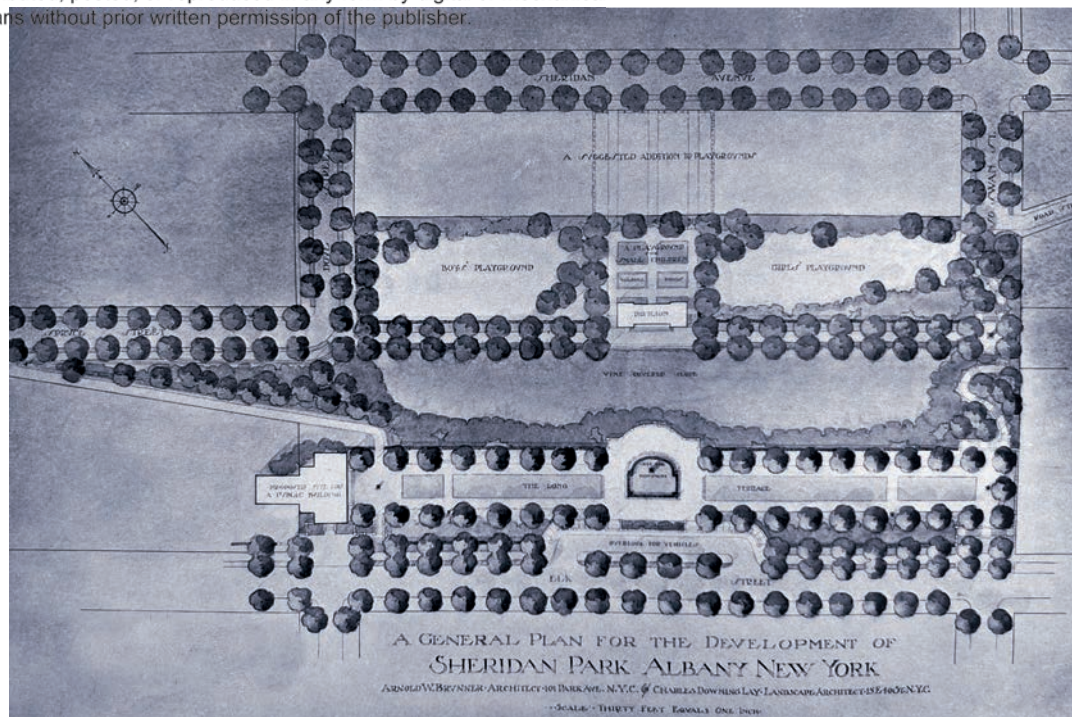


Artwork by Gilmore D. Clarke for the March 1913 number of *The Widow*. Cornell University Library.

Among his earliest surviving works, aside from a charming childhood doodle of flowers, is a site plan for the old East Hill Elementary School on Stewart Avenue in Ithaca, just south of the Cornell campus. A studio exercise in the spring of 1912, Clarke's junior year, it features terraced walkways, staircases, and separated play areas for girls and boys. Most of the drawing is precise and measured; only the cartoonish trees in his section elevations betray the work as that of a pupil, and one who clearly lacked the "hand" of his gifted classmate, Edward Lawson. Nonetheless, Clarke's whimsical artwork for *The Widow*, an erstwhile campus humor magazine, shows that his drawing skills had improved measurably by senior year. Despite his own modest assessment of his abilities, Fleming apparently thought highly



Charles Downing Lay, ca. 1930. Photograph by Kaiden Kazajian Studios, New York. Charles D. Lay Papers (4477), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

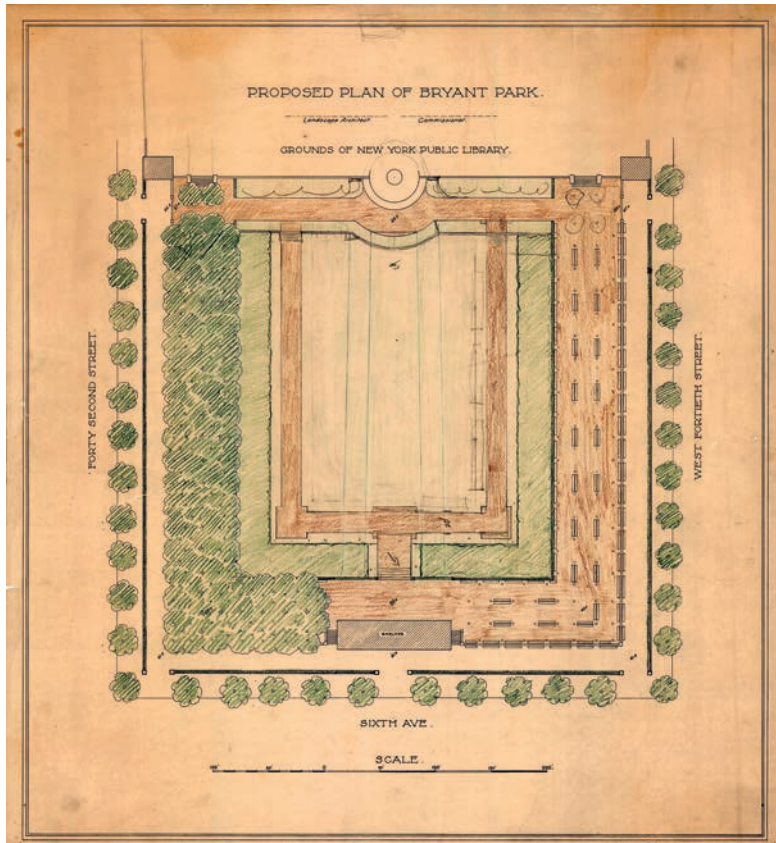


A General Plan for the Development of Sheridan Park. Wash rendering by Gilmore D. Clarke. From Brunner and Lay, *Studies for Albany* (1914).

enough of Clarke to offer him a job after graduation. It was a sought-after opportunity that students competed for, and that often led to bigger things. Lawson was a Fleming intern when he prepared his winning entry for the Rome Prize competition in 1915; so were the two Cornellians who followed him to the American Academy—Ralph E. Griswold and Norman T. Newton. But Clarke turned down Fleming's offer. This irritated E. Gorton Davis, who had pressed Fleming to take on his student. He reproved Clarke for not jumping at the opportunity.²⁶

But Davis misjudged Clarke. What he interpreted as lethargy or a lack of focus was simply an aversion to the type of work Davis and Fleming were pushing Clarke toward. Clarke had no interest in designing gardens for posh clients. His ambition, even as a student, was public works. This yearning was at least partially rooted in the progressive movement in the New York City of Clarke's youth, sensitizing him to the poverty and suffering in his midst. "When I was a young man," he later recalled, "I was much impressed by Jacob A. Riis's book *How the Other Half Lives*, although I must confess I didn't know too much about how they lived because I was brought up under comfortable circumstances. However, as I grew older I learned more about slum conditions first hand,

and I made up my mind that one of the things I wanted to do was to get into the kind of work that would improve these conditions." Clarke's faith in the capacity of city planning to effect real change was stoked, too, by a project of the Russell Sage Foundation begun during his freshman year at Cornell—Forest Hills Gardens in Queens.²⁷ Inspired by the work of English reformer Ebenezer Howard, father of the "Garden City" movement, Forest Hills was laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and provided a range of housing types—from apartments and townhouses to commodious villas—built using innovative concrete construction technology. Enthused by the potential of such work, Clarke visited Lee Henner at the Sage Foundation seeking advice on a career in public service. "I am interested in getting into something," Clarke professed, "that will tear slums down and build parks and playgrounds." Henner wasn't much help: "You can't do that," he said; "there are too many obstacles in the way. I don't believe you'd get anywhere. . . . You can't be an idealist; you've got to make a living." Clarke persisted: "Well, I suppose I have to," he said, "but I'd like, in some way during my life, to contribute something towards changing conditions that are so deplorable in our great cities." He would remain true to that goal throughout his career.²⁸



Charles Downing Lay, *Proposed Plan of Bryant Park*, 1914. New York City Municipal Archives.



General Plan for the Eastern Section of Beaver Park. Wash rendering by Gilmore D. Clarke. From Brunner and Lay, *Studies for Albany* (1914).

After graduating from Cornell in June 1913, Clarke spent two months working at a wilderness boys' camp in Ontario before returning to New York and taking a job with Wheelwright and Lay at 15 East 40th Street. The firm's founder, Charles Downing Lay, was among the senior landscape architects in the city, with an abiding interest in public works.²⁹ He was born in Newburgh, New York, to an old Connecticut family that included Victorian aesthete and horticulturalist Andrew Jackson Downing. Lay had trained briefly as an architect at Columbia University before transferring to Harvard's new program in landscape design, where he studied under Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and received an S.B. in *Arte Topiaria* in 1902. In New York, Lay balanced a busy practice with professional and public service. He helped found *Landscape Architecture* magazine in 1910 with Robert Wheelwright and Henry Vincent Hubbard. The following year, he won an appointment as

consulting landscape architect to the city Parks Department—besting, among others, Clarke's former teacher George Burnap for the post.³⁰ But the ill-managed agency, deeply mired in Tammany graft, was more than the patrician, soft-spoken Lay could handle. He clashed over park policy with the eccentric commissioner, Charles B. Stover, and failed to receive the staff or even the topographic drawings necessary to implement basic improvements. Lay resigned his city post in May 1913, retreating to the relative peace of private practice.³¹ By the time Clarke joined Lay's firm, its mainstay work was "Country Place" commissions. One of the big jobs in the office was a convoluted driveway for the C.K.G. Billings estate in northern Manhattan, on the site of Fort Tryon Park today. The driveway alone cost \$250,000 (\$6 million today), an extravagance that outraged many New Yorkers. The project may well have helped turn Clarke from Lay, with whom he would clash



Clarke's certificate of appointment as Deputy Scout Commissioner for Manhattan and the Bronx, May 1915. Collection of the author.

years later over various Moses projects. But Lay also continued taking on public works projects. He drafted plans for long-neglected Bryant Park—a project Clarke very likely played a hand in, as it bears a strong resemblance to what was built when he was park design czar under Moses in the 1930s—and collaborated on a major study of parks and open space for the city of Albany with Arnold W. Brunner. If Clarke contributed to the former, he certainly worked on the latter, preparing several plan renderings for the report—*Studies for Albany* (1914).³² Clarke was given a variety of other assignments in the office, one of which involved generating a plan of the fifteenth-century Villa Cicogna in Bisuschio using Wheelwright's field measurements. The drawing was used to illustrate an article on the villa in the October 1914 issue of *Landscape Architecture*.

Clarke remained in the employ of Wheelwright and Lay for about a year. He then worked briefly for civil engineer Thatcher T. P. Luquer before taking up an engineering post with Charles Nassau Lowrie of the Hudson County Park Commission in New Jersey. In Lowrie, Clarke found

his first professional mentor, a man whose interests and ambitions lay very close to his own; his two-year apprenticeship in Lowrie's office marked the real start of his public works career. Lowrie moved fluidly between the fields of landscape architecture and engineering, providing Clarke a model of interdisciplinary cross-pollination that would define his career. A native of Pennsylvania, Lowrie trained as an engineer at Yale College but identified as a landscape architect. As president of the American Society of Landscape Architects from 1910 to 1912, he led several high-profile battles to keep Tammany Hall from usurping park land for building sites, and later helped defeat a proposed National Academy of Design gallery in Bryant Park.³³ Lowrie's private practice was almost wholly focused on large-scale site planning and public works. He prepared a plan for the Cornell campus in 1906 and was commissioned two years later by the New York State legislature to design a 125-acre state park on Fire Island—"the most complete seaside resort in the country," reported the *New York Times*, with "handsome walks, pavilions, and public bathing establishments."³⁴ Though never

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